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Space Beyond Place:

Welsh Settings in European Fiction, 1900–2010

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Welsh Settings in European Fiction, 1900–2010

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PhD Modern Languages

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Abstract

This thesis examines the way Wales has been portrayed in European fiction between 1900 and 2010. The research process has revealed that, within seemingly disparate texts, Welsh space appears to be more important than Welsh people, and Wales's physical presence more prominent than its language, history and culture. There is also duality of place and space in these Welsh settings. Wales as a named, known, bordered entity is superficially present, but through this the protagonists gain access to very different, even otherworldly, surroundings. Wales the *place* therefore seems to be a portal to a certain kind of *space*, characterised by otherness, liminality and distance. The protagonists, all mainland Europeans, travel there at a troubled point in their lives, and find their own fears and foreignness reflected and intensified in this strange new environment.

   The corpus comprises four novels, from Germany (*Weder Ebbe noch Flut* by Jörg Bernig and *Austerlitz* by W. G. Sebald), Hungary (*A Pendragon Legenda*, Antal Szerb) and the Netherlands (*De Omweg*, Gerbrand Bakker), as well as a short story from Germany ('Nicht morgen, nicht gestern', Uwe Timm). The first was published in 1934 (Szerb) and the last in 2010 (Bakker). Welsh settings are used here to access and explore creative space for the imagination, transcendental space above and beyond the familiar, and intimate interior space such as houses and the body. The corpus is therefore approached from a geographical angle, using spatial theories such as psychogeography, Kenneth White's geopoetics, Gaston Bachelard's *Poetics of Space* and Juhani Pallasmaa's architectural theory. As part of the 'European Travellers to Wales' project, which has highlighted an often-overlooked destination in travel writing studies, this thesis aims to show that Wales has unique appeal for European fiction writers, offering an endlessly malleable setting which is right on the edge and ripe for personalisation.

I hereby declare that this thesis is the results of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. All other sources are acknowledged by bibliographic references. This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree unless, as agreed by the University, for approved dual awards.

Yr wyf drwy hyn yn datgan mai canlyniad fy ymchwil fy hun yw'r thesis hwn, ac eithrio lle nodir yn wahanol. Caiff ffynonellau eraill eu cydnabod gan droednodiadau yn rhoi cyfeiriadau eglur. Nid yw sylwedd y gwaith hwn wedi cael ei dderbyn o'r blaen ar gyfer unrhyw radd, ac nid yw'n cael ei gyflwyno ar yr un pryd mewn ymgeisiaeth am unrhyw radd oni bai ei fod, fel y cytunwyd gan y Brifysgol, am gymwysterau deuol cymeradwy.

Contents

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This thesis is for my son, George.

Introduction

This thesis examines the way Wales has been portrayed in European literature, focusing on twentieth- and twenty-first-century fiction. Its aim is to uncover impressions of a previously overlooked and often marginalised nation, and the specific focus on Wales as a setting has sprung from an unexpected common theme in the European corpus: the fact that the physical geography of Wales seems to be more prominent than Welsh people, history or culture. To reflect this, the corpus texts are therefore approached from a geographical angle, using theories of space and place.

The corpus of five texts comprises novels from Germany, Hungary and the Netherlands, and a short story from Germany; the earliest text was published in 1934 and the last in 2010. All the protagonists in the five chosen texts, just like the authors, come from continental Europe (Germany, Hungary and the Netherlands). Travelling to Wales from elsewhere, whether as refugees, self-imposed exiles, social misfits or a combination of all three, they are therefore all outsiders in more ways than one. The physical landscape is a stronger presence, and described more often, than the Welsh language, or Welsh culture. Lastly, there is very little interaction between the European characters and local people in the parts of Wales described. The effect of this is that human activity and its importance seem diminished, while non-human aspects of the setting, such as topography, the weather, plants and animals, become more prominent. The result is a curious duality of place and space: Wales as a named, known, bordered entity is superficially present, but through this the protagonists then gain access to very different and even otherworldly surroundings. Wales the *place* could therefore be seen as a portal to a certain kind of *space*, characterised by otherness, liminality and distance from all that was previously known and familiar. For the displaced European protagonists, such external strangeness reflects and intensifies their own fears and foreignness.

The five works to be discussed, in the following order and with the country and year of first publication, are *A Pendragon Legenda* [*The Pendragon Legend*], a novel by Antal Szerb (Hungary, 1934); 'Nicht morgen, nicht gestern' ['Not tomorrow, not yesterday'], a short story by

Uwe Timm (Germany, 1999); *Weder Ebbe noch Flut* [*Neither High nor Low Tide*], a novel by Jörg Bernig (Germany, 2007); *Austerlitz*, a novel by W.G. Sebald (Germany, 2001); and *De Omweg* [*The Detour*], a novel by Gerbrand Bakker (The Netherlands, 2010).[1] Highly-regarded translations into English exist for Szerb's, Sebald's and Bakker's texts, all of which have been used in this thesis.[2] Two of the translators in question worked very closely with their authors, as was the case for Anthea Bell with Sebald and David Colmer with Bakker, while Len Rix is considered an authority on Szerb's fiction in both Hungary and the English-speaking world. The considerable scholarship of Colmer and Rix has brought access to interpretations of Wales from cultures and countries which would otherwise have been beyond my language abilities. The range of the corpus seems particularly valuable in the wider context of the European Travellers to Wales project, because the source texts found to date are overwhelmingly written in either French or German.[3] There seems to have been little critical interest in the corpus authors' Welsh connections to date, so this thesis offers new insight in this respect and prepares the ground for further investigations into European literary engagement with Wales.

Choosing the Corpus

'Literary Conceptions of Wales in Europe' was the original brief for this doctoral project, and the starting point for initial literature searches. This was quickly narrowed down to Welsh settings in twentieth- and twenty-first-century fiction. Fiction was judged likely to yield more examples of Welsh settings than, say, poetry or drama, being more frequently and widely published. More recent texts were also likely to have a bigger online presence than texts from earlier centuries,

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[1] Antal Szerb, *A Pendragon legenda* (Budapest: Magvető Könyvkiadó, 1962); Uwe Timm, 'Nicht morgen, nicht gestern' in *Nicht morgen, nicht gestern* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2001), pp. 25-46; Jörg Bernig, *Weder Ebbe noch Flut* (Halle (Saale): Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 2012); W. G. Sebald, *Austerlitz* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2003; repr. 2013); Gerbrand Bakker, *De omweg* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Cossee, 2010; repr. 2011).

[2] In the same order, these are: *The Pendragon Legend*, trans. by Len Rix (London: Pushkin Press, 2007, repr. 2010), *Austerlitz*, trans. by Anthea Bell (London: Penguin, 2011) and *The Detour*, trans. by David Colmer (London: Vintage, 2013). All other translated text, unless otherwise stated, is my own work.

[3] See chart at European Travellers to Wales, 1750–2015, 'Countries of origin and reasons for travel' (Bangor, Gwynedd: Bangor University) <http://etw.bangor.ac.uk/about-database> [Accessed 30 July 2017].

and thus be more readily traceable using digital searching tools. While this thesis was never intended to be a comprehensive survey, it seemed appropriate to cast the net as widely as possible during the research process in the hope of providing a varied yet meaningful sample of texts. The presence of a Welsh setting, rather than any particular theme, genre, source language or place of origin, was therefore the main selection criterion when building the corpus.

The search process has presented considerable challenges, as it has for the European Travellers to Wales project overall. Under-researched and often overshadowed by or conflated with its neighbours, the presence of Wales in travel writing is frequently 'concealed by unpromising titles such as "Voyage en Grande Bretagne" or more often "Voyage en Angleterre"', as Heather Williams has pointed out, and has only been brought to light by 'patient and systematic trawling' through archives and databases.[4] The project has found such 'obfuscation' to be especially prevalent in travel accounts written in European languages, which have tended to overuse the labels 'England' and 'English' when describing different parts of Britain.[5] One advantage of researching travellers' texts, however, is precisely that a destination is very often named in the title. Thanks to increasing digitalization of sources, this means that keyword searches in various search engines can be very fruitful for the researcher. Even if the title of such a text is misleading or incomplete (such as a 'Voyage en Angleterre' which includes Wales), it marks the start of a trail which at least points to a geographical region and could plausibly lead to the destination being sought. By contrast, it is by no means common to name the setting in the title of a fictional work. Searching therefore has to rely on existing classification by theme or subject within, say, a library catalogue, and such categorisation can be limited for a variety of reasons. The texts which are most widely read tend to have the most detailed catalogue entries, presumably because more people search for them and from a wider variety of thematic angles. The setting of a fictional text may not be obvious — or easily categorised — even after reading, and tends only to be noted if it is a well-known place and a

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[4] Heather Williams, 'What Did They See in Wales? The Travellers' Tales', *Wales Arts Review*, 23 June 2015 <https://www.walesartsreview.org/what-did-they-see-in-wales-the-travellers-tales/>[Accessed 7 January 2019].
[5] Kathryn N. Jones, Carol Tully and Heather Williams, 'Introduction. Travel Writing and Wales', *Studies in Travel Writing*, 18 (2014), 101-106 (p. 102) <DOI: 10.1080/13645145.2014.908503> [Accessed 9 January 2019].

subject in itself (such as London). Many texts, including those in the corpus for this thesis, also present a further cataloguing challenge by having multiple settings.

Wales is not mentioned in any of the titles of the corpus texts for this thesis, and only one — *The Detour* by Gerbrand Bakker — is listed in the British Library catalogue with 'Wales' as a subject (Szerb's *The Pendragon Legend*, for example, has 'England' and 'Hungary', although the latter is never used as a setting, but not Wales). The most famous of the corpus texts, W. G. Sebald's *Austerlitz*, is listed in the catalogue of the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek [German National Library] with 'Großbritannien' [Great Britain] as a subject — a not unreasonable choice, because London is one of the prominent settings alongside North Wales. Curiously, though, this is the only one of the novel's many locations (such as Antwerp, Paris and Prague) to be mentioned, demonstrating the inconsistencies within the cataloguing of setting suggested in the previous paragraph, even when the settings concerned are major European cities i.e. a lot more visible and studied than a marginal place like Wales. It is also interesting to note that the most comprehensive listings of fiction set in Wales are to be found on popular, informal and non-scholarly platforms, such as Wikipedia (which has a category entitled 'Novels set in Wales'), the review site Goodreads ('Books Set in Wales') and the websites of national newspapers (*The Guardian*, for example, has 'The top ten books of rural Wales').[6] This seems to vindicate the choice of mostly popular fiction for the corpus, suggesting a receptive general readership for narratives relating to Wales, and also reinforces the rationale behind the thesis: that academic study of such texts is currently lagging behind. With hindsight, given the challenges of trying to locate an often-overlooked setting (Wales) in the broad field of European fiction in the last one hundred or so years, a narrower focus — whether on Welsh settings within

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[6] 'Category: Novels set in Wales', *Wikipedia*, created 17 June 2011 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Novels_set_in_Wales> [Accessed 13 November 2013]; 'Books Set in Wales', *Goodreads*, created 18 October 2010 <https://www.goodreads.com/list/show/7335.Books_Set_in_Wales> [Accessed 3 March 2016]; Cynan Jones, 'The Top 10 Books of Rural Wales', *The Guardian*, 26 November 2014 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/nov/26/top-10-books-rural-wales-alan-garner-dylan-thomas> [Accessed 3 March 2016].

a specific genre or literature movement, or in fiction from a specific country or linguistic region — might well have led to easier searching and, within the chosen category at least, more comprehensive results. However, maintaining as wide a focus as possible seemed most fitting for this initial investigation into literary portrayals of Wales by writers from continental Europe.

Another challenge in the search for European fictional texts set in Wales is that, frequently, by the very marginal nature of their setting, they are located outside of any canon. This is an ongoing problem for literature with a Welsh connection, with Wales being described as a 'genuine blind-spot' by Mary-Ann Constantine and a 'missing place' by Damian Walford Davies and Lynda Pratt in literary criticism to date.[7] The fact that these (fairly recent) comments refer in particular to the study of Wales in the Romantic period gives some idea of the ground still to be covered. Tony Bianchi and Kirsti Bohata, for example, have both shown that more recent native literature has also suffered from neglect, with Bianchi in 1995 lamenting the contemporary lack of a 'comprehensive taxonomy of Welsh fiction even in the most basic bibliographical and cataloguing senses, let alone a developed critical context', and Bohata able to state ten years later that '[e]ven within Wales itself, the status of Welsh writing in English is generally very low.'[8] Bohata cites the lack of Welsh material in English studied in schools and universities, as well as poor coverage in the media and the publishing world, concluding that 'Welsh writing in English remains in a precarious and persistently marginal position within Wales and beyond.'[9] Against this inhospitable backdrop, teasing out European portrayals of Wales seems even more daunting.

Bohata argues that Wales's invisibility can be viewed in clearly postcolonial terms. Although, she acknowledges, Wales does not fit easily into the field of *post-colonial* studies, there are nonetheless several ways in which its experiences are not entirely dissimilar to those of former colonies, particularly in cultural terms:

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[7] Mary-Ann Constantine, 'Beauty Spot, Blind Spot', *Literature Compass* 5 (2008), 577-590 (p. 585) < DOI: 10.1111/j.1741-4113.2008.00546.x> [Accessed 10 January 2019]; Damian Walford Davies and Lynda Pratt, eds, *Wales and the Romantic Imagination* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007), p. 2.
[8] Tony Bianchi, 'Aztecs in Troedrhiwgwair: Recent Fictions in Wales' in *Peripheral Visions. Images of Nationhood in Contemporary British Fiction*, ed. by Ian A. Bell (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1995), pp. 44-76 (p. 46); Kirsti Bohata, *Postcolonialism Revisited* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2004), p. 12.
[9] Bohata, pp. 12-13.

> Wales, as already observed, does not fit neatly into a linear-progressive model of colonization, anti-colonialism and decolonization/independence; but, as postcolonialism has the capacity to recognize, structures of influence and subjugation are not necessarily coterminous with formal colonization or decolonization. […] Significantly, Welsh nationalism has focused on resisting the *cultural* imperialism of England, with political autonomy regarded as a means to securing and protecting Welsh cultural difference. It is this cultural imperialism and the resistance to its organizing principles that form the main axes of a postcolonial study of the literature and/or history of the Welsh.[10]

And yet it is some of those very characteristics which, for Bohata, mark Wales as postcolonial, such as hybridity, liminality and being outside of the canon, which seem to enable the Welsh settings in this thesis to challenge the postcolonial label. These settings cannot be pinned down, in many ways becoming less definable the longer the protagonists stay there, and continually defy the characters' often outlandish expectations, refusing to be simply a welcoming embrace in a peaceful haven, with a nice view of the mountains or the sea. Tony Bianchi's description of late twentieth-century Welsh fiction as rejecting 'counter-authenticities' and 'counter-canons', and in their place 'embracing a hybridity that abrogates all centres', is perhaps a more fitting frame of reference for a multicultural corpus in which there is no obvious (least of all English) centre.[11] This extends to the Welsh settings themselves, which are largely rural, rather than conurbations which might be considered more 'central'; tellingly, the capital, Cardiff, does not feature at all. If, as Bianchi tells us, even for Welsh writers 'Wales has become a blind spot which will not let the narrative gaze settle centrally', then it seems hardly surprising if European writers have also been drawn to its marginality, both cultural and geographical, and implied questions of identity.[12] Not only that, but this marginality — that is to say, the Welsh settings' marginal positions in relation to the *protagonists*' 'centres', rather than to England — is the basis

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[10] Bohata, pp. 8-9.
[11] Bianchi, p. 72.
[12] Ibid., p. 45.

of the power of Wales in these narratives: the foreign protagonists are the weak ones in *its* unreadable domain, and it is their personal status (rather than the status of Wales and the Welsh) which is destabilised and challenged as a result. Moreover, this power from the Welsh margins exerts some kind of permanent hold on all of the protagonists, with none of the protagonists able to fully return to their centres and leave Wales behind.

Deciding on the use of a Welsh setting as the main selection criterion for the corpus has had its limitations: the five main texts discussed in this thesis were the only corresponding ones to be found during the research process, and might at first glance seem altogether too 'hybrid' to belong together. However, this chimes with the challenges faced by other attempts to bring Welsh-related literature to the fore, where hybridity can help to widen understanding rather than restrict it. Bianchi, for example, who has also focused on twentieth-century fiction, suggests that a broad-minded corpus is necessary to broaden a critical field hitherto 'driven by ideologies of Welshness' and largely focused on 'discourses of national identity and representational authenticity'. He believes that:

> [i]ronically, a crisis of recognition is manifested most clearly and self-defeatingly in the failure to admit into a Welsh field of vision texts of radical ambiguity which cannot be adduced to reinforce one or other totalizing narrative. In choosing novels for discussion, therefore, I have presumed no sanctioned mode of 'knowing' Wales and no privileged centre of authorship.[13]

Given the disparate nature of the texts and their production circumstances, not to mention their complex responses to Wales, it is unsurprising that there is no obvious 'totalizing narrative' within the corpus for this thesis, either: literary fiction sits alongside popular fiction; Hungarian alongside Dutch; a novel from the 1930s alongside early narratives from the 2000s; and the Holocaust as a narrative theme alongside fantasy and relationship breakdown. As we will see in later chapters, however, the texts' astonishing similarities — such as the prominence of

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[13] Bianchi, p. 47.

landscape, the traveller protagonists, and the engagement with identity and belonging — provide much unexpected common ground. Above all, each author has singled out Wales as a key narrative location. It could even be argued that in a corpus which otherwise questions notions of centrality, orientation and belonging, Wales itself is in fact the only 'centre': not in the postcolonial sense of stability and hegemony, but as the shared geographical and narrative focus in all five texts. Viewed in this light, the selection process for this thesis aligns itself with Bertrand Westphal's 'geocriticism'. Westphal advocates taking place as the starting point for literary criticism, to build a 'pluralistic image' of a given place through its portrayals in literature.[14] This approach, Westphal claims, goes beyond the limits of canons to explore the 'interface between literature and the margins', which can, ultimately, result in spaces and their literary representations being 'recentred (thus, geocentred).'[15] Marginal, under-represented and undoubtedly pluralistic, European fiction set in Wales seems particularly suited to such geocritical exploration.

Terminology: Space or Place?

Having established the principle criterion for corpus selection — the presence of a Welsh setting in a European work of fiction — it is necessary to elaborate on the terminology used to describe how Wales is portrayed in the corpus texts. Both 'place' and 'space' have so far been used to refer to the Welsh settings in the corpus, so clarification of these terms is crucial. Once again, Wales's hybridity affects the spatiality of all the texts, whether the space in question is geographical, cultural or personal, and reinforces the sense of resistance to definition. On the one hand, there exists at times an emphatic distinction between place and space, apparently corresponding to both literary and geographical definitions of these terms. On the other hand, there is frequent and increasing slippage between the two categories as space is invaded, places blur and merge, and the Welsh setting is presented as strongly liminal.

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[14] Robert T. Tally Jr, 'Translator's Preface: The Timely Emergence of Geocriticism' in Bertrand Westphal, *Geocriticism. Real and Fictional Places*, trans. by Robert T. Tally Jr. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. ix-xiii (p. x).
[15] Westphal, p. 114 and p. 117.

A key starting point when establishing terminology for this thesis was Leonard Lutwack's work *The Role of Place in Literature*, in which the author considers the connotations of both terms in order to justify his focus on 'place':

> From the geographer Yi-Fu Tuan we have this fine humanistic distinction: 'Enclosed and humanized space is place. Compared to space, place is a calm centre of established values.' For literary purposes, then, place is inhabitable space, 'lived space' or erlebter Raum.[16]

However, it will be argued that both 'place' *and* 'space', following Lutwack's definitions, are relevant and useful terms to describe how Wales has been portrayed in European fiction. Firstly, 'place' seems to apply because the protagonists do indeed inhabit their Welsh space, whether briefly or over several years; they all dwell in houses while there, for example. And, although sparsely populated in certain areas, Wales itself is bordered and 'inhabitable space' rather than unbounded and uninhabited wilderness. It is notable, too, that all the European protagonists bring personal cultural associations with them, particularly in the form of literary references. These affect the ways in which they interact with their new surroundings, meaning that their responses to Wales are rooted in and measured against the familiar, '[e]nclosed and humanized' framework of their usual daily lives. And yet 'place' certainly does not tell the whole story here. The European protagonists can hardly be described as being 'embedded in the communal and familiar' when in Wales, which is how Jeremy Hooker has defined inhabiting a place.[17] If Hooker's sense of 'place' relies on having recognisable surroundings, and other people in them, then it is an unsatisfactory label for the versions of Wales in the corpus, which invariably lack Tuan's 'calm centre of established values' and seem to contain very few people; what is more, any borders or boundaries are always porous. Indeed, what the protagonists seem to have been looking for is somewhere that, above all, is *not* where they have come from. It will be argued in

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[16] Leonard Lutwack, *The Role of Place in Literature* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1984), p. 27. Lutwack does not italicise the German phrase.
[17] Jeremy Hooker, *Writers in a Landscape* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1996), p. 5.

this thesis that the 'somewhere' being sought is represented less by a place than by a unique, liminal space.

According to the anthropologist Arturo Escobar, '[s]ince Plato, Western philosophy — often times with the help of theology and physics — has enshrined space as the absolute, unlimited and universal, while banning place to the realm of the particular, the limited, the local and the bound.'[18] This thesis has identified the same distinction in the corpus of European texts, whose protagonists are compelled to leave behind 'the particular, the limited, the local and the bound' and set off in search of another kind of space, which they all seem to find in Wales. The Welsh settings in these texts are largely empty of people, associations and indigenous culture, and characterised not by Welshness, or 'particular' or 'local' features, but by the protagonists' experiences of the places they have left behind. And yet we also see the limits of the cultural 'established values' that they bring with them from these other places. Such familiar criteria seem to be redundant in these versions of Wales, which is presented as unique and defies all attempts to be understood in relation to other places. Their defining characteristics tend to be 'absolute, unlimited and universal' rather than man-made and 'bound' to a certain place. The former are heavily represented by environmental features such as weather, tides or topography, while examples of the latter, such as indigenous language and culture, are much less prominent in the narratives. The space accessed in Wales seems equally 'unlimited' for the European authors in terms of imaginative potential, as both they and their protagonists have temporarily distanced themselves from 'the local and the bound'. There is compelling evidence, then, that it is something akin to such space which is sought and found in the texts' Welsh settings, while the more familiar and traditional idea of place provides a crucial spatial contrast, representing the protagonists' pasts or realities elsewhere.

There is also a temporal contrast within this spatial duality, for as Lucy R. Lippard writes, in her 1997 work *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society*, place is 'space

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[18] Quoted in Tim Cresswell, *Place: An Introduction* (Hoboken: Wiley, 2014), p. 34 <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/bangor/detail.action?docID=1780033> [Accessed 13 August 2016].

combined with memory'.[19] Given that the protagonists have no personal connections with Wales prior to their arrival, and are often unable to make sense of it using references from their own pasts, 'place' by itself once again seems insufficient when applied to the Welsh settings in this thesis. The term 'space' therefore seems equally, if not more pertinent when discussing these versions of Wales: certainly the absence of Hooker's 'communal and familiar' criteria, coupled with Lippard's assertion that space requires memory in order to be a place, points away from place and towards Tuan's reading of space. In addition, as has been mentioned above, the human aspects of the Welsh settings in the corpus are often made to appear much smaller than the physical reality of the spaces they occupy. If, as Eric Prieto believes, 'place is a *human* relation', only coming into being 'when a person comes along and enters into a meaning-generating relationship with it', then these versions of Wales contain something other than place which resists being defined by the people in it.[20] There is certainly a striking absence of man-made navigational aids like maps in the protagonists' attempts to orientate themselves in Wales, whereas natural markers of both place and time, such as mountains or tides, play a significant role. Approaching from the opposite direction, this thesis will argue that these Welsh settings are 'spaces that refuse to be mere places'.[21] Again, it will also suggest that the protagonists here are specifically seeking out this other 'space', rather than the 'place' —Wales — which contains it.

Theoretical Framework: Space, Place and the Appeal of Wales

The attraction of Wales spans western literary movements from the early modern to the postmodern. This thesis will suggest that, within fiction, this attraction initially manifests itself in a focus on Welsh people and indigenous culture. Later, following the spatial turn in twentieth-century cultural studies, the focus moves away from people and towards Welsh space. The theoretical framework for this thesis takes the cultural movement Celticism as its starting point.

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[19] Lucy R. Lippard, *The Lure of the Local. Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society* (New York: New Press, 1997), p. 9.
[20] Eric Prieto, *Literature, Geography, and the Postmodern Poetics of Place* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 13.
[21] Elana Gomel, *Narrative Space and Time. Representing Impossible Topologies in Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2014), p. 3.

Inspired by the seductive otherness of the Celtic periphery, encompassing its lands, cultures and people, and based on the 'construction of the Celt' said to have taken place between 1650 and 1850, Celticism was well-established by the time the first corpus text (Szerb's *The Pendragon Legend*) was published in 1934.[22] From here, and in line with the growing interest in space over people in the corpus, individual chapters then call on a variety of theories of space and place, including psychogeography, geocriticism and architectural theory.

Returning to Celticism, Joep Leerssen's summary of the movement offers a fuller picture of the analytical foundations of this thesis. In Leerssen's view:

> [t]he term Celtic has a wide range of connotations for all its lack of precise meaning. Vague and disparate as the 'Celtic' tradition in European culture may be, known almost exclusively from outside reports, its name, by virtue of its very imprecision, can attract all sorts of speculation and prejudice; the Celts can be disparaged as barbarians or praised as Noble Savages; they can fall under the shadow of ethnocentrism or be glorified in the spotlight of primitivism; they can be exoticized or identified with; with different authors at different periods, they can be made to fit any role (the Us or the Them; the Good, the Bad or the Mysterious) in the ethnic pattern of Europe's *dramatis personae*.[23]

As we will see, such vagueness and contradiction is always present in portrayals of Wales in the corpus, leaving a strong impression of a setting that can be moulded at will. Equally, these versions of Wales seem to possess the same 'indelible connotation of "Otherness"' which Leerssen identifies in the adjective 'Celtic'.[24] Discussing essays by Ernest Renan (*La Poésie des races celtiques*, 1854) and Matthew Arnold (*On the Study of Celtic Literature*, 1867), he also identifies some of the central themes and concerns which are still to be found in fiction set in

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[22] Joep Leerssen, 'Celticism' in *Celticism*, ed. by Terence Brown (Amsterdam/Atlanta: Rodopi, 1996), pp. 1-20 (p. 5).
[23] Leerssen, p. 3.
[24] Ibid., p. 4.

Wales over a century later, with both essays being described as 'evocations of a journey outward in which one leaves the present and the quotidian pace of temporal progress, and moves out of time, into the past or into some mythical or primordial timelessness'.[25] In the latter essay, Arnold even hints at the particular attraction of Celtic otherness for Germanic authors, writing that 'I was taught to think of Celt as separated by an impassable gulf from Teuton. My father [...] insisted much oftener on the separation between us and them than on the separation between us and any other race in the world'.[26] Interestingly, the majority of authors in the corpus — Timm, Bernig and Sebald — are German, while the other two have links to Germanic culture: Bakker is Dutch and travels frequently to Germany, and Szerb, born in the Austro-Hungarian empire, was versed in German-language as well as Hungarian culture. At the same time, Leerssen also suggests that, uniquely, the Celts can be seen as both 'an exotic Other' *and* 'not quite alien', meaning that 'they always offer the possibility of identification'.[27] This, too, resonates with the Welsh settings explored in this thesis, where familiarity and strangeness seem to merge, and the protagonists' own foreignness is as significant as, and often intensified by, the foreignness they encounter in Wales. Moreover, they are able to get closer to themselves despite, or perhaps because of, proximity to the foreign and far-away.

Another of Leerssen's observations on Celticism chimes with a sense in the corpus of struggling with the concepts of place and space, and the human role in them. If '[t]o name the world around us means, at least to some extent, and at least intellectually, to control it', then the reluctant or selective naming of places or people in the corpus hints at a deliberate attempt to obscure identities and allegiances, and to question exactly who or what is in control.[28] For all the European authors discussed in this thesis, Wales seems to provide a stage on which a struggle like this can be played out. As suggested above, this could be because it is relatively unfamiliar to them, their protagonists and their readers, and therefore contains more physical and psychological room to explore, imagine and debate. The repeated blurring of real and invented details or features in all the texts certainly implies a greater sense of creative freedom when

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[25] Ibid., p. 7.
[26] Matthew Arnold, *On the Study of Celtic Literature* (London: Dent; New York: Dutton, 1910), p. 19.
[27] Leerssen, p. 16.
[28] Ibid., p. 6.

dealing with Wales, and perhaps an assumption that readers will be more accepting of strangeness in a setting they do not know.

The presence in the corpus texts of intensely introspective protagonists, all of whom are more concerned with exploring their inner selves while in Wales than exploring their surroundings, brings to mind Colin Smethurst's view that '[t]he "private" appropriation of geography in general seeks to define or express the self, and that exercise has no necessary connection at all with colonial and imperial ways'.[29] At the same time, as Bohata has shown (above pp. 11–12), Wales is also a clearly peripheral setting in both geographical and cultural terms, and one which seems to lend itself to postcolonial interpretation. The Welsh settings examined in this thesis appear to fall somewhere between the two positions, on the one hand highlighting characteristics often attributed to postcolonial places, such as 'duality and fracture' or apparent emptiness, and yet to a certain extent 'recentring' Wales, to use Westphal's term, by making it a powerful, physical narrative presence.[30] It is possible that the corpus authors were drawn to a setting which is at once unfamiliar and impartial, symbolised in particular by geographical otherness and elemental forces encountered in Wales (compared to their places of origin), but which also in a wider, socio-political context seems to offer a sympathetic backdrop to outsider protagonists who are themselves experiencing marginalisation, identity struggle and unbelonging. This combination of strangeness *and* potential solidarity echoes Leerssen's suggestion on the previous page that the Celts have long been viewed as other but 'not quite alien'. Another intriguing, more recent model for interpreting portrayals of Wales in the corpus, and a possible direct influence on Szerb's version of Wales (as we will see in chapter two), is the early-twentieth-century fiction of John Cowper Powys, whose often Welsh settings tend towards the spiritual, exploring literal and figurative margins and in particular 'the border between the human and non-human constituents of human nature'.[31] All five of the European corpus authors similarly address the matter of universal human experience through their Welsh settings. Their growing spatial awareness,

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[29] Colin Smethurst, 'Introduction' in *Romantic Geographies: Proceedings of the Glasgow Conference, September 1994*, ed. by Colin Smethurst and A. J. L Busst (Glasgow: University of Glasgow French and German Publications, 1996), pp. vii-xiii (p. xi).
[30] Bohata, p. 24; Westphal, p. 117.
[31] Hooker, *Writers in a Landscape*, pp. 127-28.

coupled with increasing narrative introspection, brings an ever greater focus on physical Welsh space and its ability to both influence and respond to a protagonist's emotional state.

To an extent, the emotional focus reflects broader trends relating to place in fiction, with a shift from eighteenth-century picturesque landscapes to 'the indirect presentation of place through dialogue and the consciousness of characters' common in twentieth-century texts.[32] The latter tendency has been described as a reaction to the nineteenth-century 'naturalistic extreme', spurred on by contemporary developments in science (such as theories of evolution), which 'very nearly pushed fiction into historical and scientific documentation'.[33] The European texts studied in this thesis certainly seem to be part of this reaction. To begin with, as mentioned above, they all place more emphasis on spirituality, psychology and the symbolism of their surroundings than on politics or science. Moreover, although the Welsh settings sometimes contain real places and can be very detailed, they also seem to resist exact definition: there is always something which prevents the protagonists from making sense of their surroundings, whether this takes the form of physical obstacles such as mountains, tides or inclement weather, or psychological barriers such as otherness, mystery and concealment. The emphasis in the corpus, then, is on the unknown and the unknowable, and the effect is more supernatural than scientific. Antal Szerb, whose novel *The Pendragon Legend* is the subject of chapter two in this thesis, seems in particular to have subscribed to a contemporary shift away from science-led 'flat rationalism' and is said to have championed the '"history of the spirit" philosophy', which by the 1930s had spread from Germany to his native Hungary.[34] In terms of place, Szerb's approach 'refuted the dominant evolutionary theories at the time, as he held that nations and cultures were similar to living organisms, inasmuch as they followed nature's circular life-model in their development'.[35] In terms of fiction, meanwhile, he 'regarded a work of art as necessarily representative of the spirit of the age in which it was conceived'.[36] A contextual example is his view of Sir Walter Scott, whose 'central concern for the novel', Szerb believed, 'was not primarily historical but stemmed

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[32] Lutwack, p. 20.

[33] Ibid., p. 20.

[34] Gertrud Szamosi, 'The Canonization of Walter Scott as the Inventor of the Historical Novel in Twentieth-Century Hungarian Reception' in *The Reception of Sir Walter Scott in Europe*, ed. by Murray Pittock (London and New York: Continuum, 2006), pp. 157-72 (p. 162).

[35] Ibid., p. 162.

[36] Ibid., p. 162.

from a more general human interest'.[37] This implies a critical and creative approach which seeks out the unique stories and universal human experience embedded in historical narratives which are tied to place and time. It is an approach which resonates not only with Szerb's own interests in *The Pendragon Legend*, but also with the four other European texts set in Wales: a common desire in all five narratives is to step out of the present and familiar, retreat into the primordial, or simply travel to a point where the usual social, professional and familial rules do not apply.

These later corpus texts were published in the last twenty years, so the championing of the spirit over science, which in turn seems to share some of the timelessness central to Celticism, clearly continues to appeal to authors in the twenty-first century when responding to their surroundings. Equally, the growing importance of place and space in the corpus is supported by postmodern cultural and literary theories. Damian Walford Davies describes 'a distinct and influential "spatial turn" in the humanities and social sciences' during the 1980s and 1990s, reflecting what Fredric Jameson and David Harvey have called the 'inherent spatiality of the postmodern condition'.[38] This in turn has resulted in what Gordon and Klein describe as 'increased interaction between geography and literary theory'.[39] It can be seen in geocriticism, for example, where Westphal's 'postmodern cartography', exhorting us to 'remake the place' and 'restore the imaginary margins', corresponds in particular to the empty Welsh space found in the corpus, with its sense of creative freedom and of being in a distant, primal environment.[40] Westphal's call is a response to the postmodern 'sense of a universal filling-in'.[41] This thesis has found that Wales is not only readily remade by the European authors who use it as a setting, but also seems to be viewed as largely empty to start with. More recently, and inspired by the spatial turn, Jon Anderson has taken a specifically geographical approach to literary criticism in his book *Page and Place: Ongoing Compositions of Plot*.[42] Significantly, his study also focuses on fictional texts set in Wales, and reveals several themes in common with the European texts in this thesis. This includes the particular liminality of modern Wales as a setting, thanks to its

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[37] Szamosi, p. 162.
[38] Damian Walford Davies, *Cartographies of Culture: New Geographies of Welsh Writing in English* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2012), p. 3.
[39] Quoted in Davies, *Cartographies of Cultur*e, p. 5.
[40] Westphal, p. 59.
[41] Ibid., p. 59.
[42] Jon Anderson, *Page and Place: Ongoing Compositions of Plot* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2014).

inherently '"Janus" state': according to Anderson, an inward-looking reverence for indigenous history, storytelling traditions and linguistic heritage, as well as a unique and long-established affinity with the landscape, exists alongside unprecedented levels of change in terms of government, technology and cross-border relations.[43] We are reminded once again of the hybridity which for many critics (such as Bohata) marks Wales as postcolonial.

The crucial difference between Anderson's findings and those of this thesis, however, is that his corpus authors and their protagonists, although not exclusively Welsh, are all British, and therefore not so culturally or physically removed from Wales to start with. By contrast, for the European authors discussed here, literal *and* figurative distance is central to the perceived emptiness and extremity of Wales, and the subsequent malleability of the Welsh settings in their texts. The journey *to* Wales thus takes on an especial significance here, which in some ways is greater than the significance of the destination itself. The need to move away from somewhere else, or simply to move rather than remain still, is a key influence in the moulding and experience of Welsh settings in the corpus: distance and difference from the protagonists' starting points in mainland Europe is what counts most in the way they engage with Welsh space. Once again, this could be seen to reflect contemporary spatial concerns. As the American nature writer Robert Finch has said, '[h]aving increased our individual mobility in both the physical and social sense — the speed and ease with which we can travel from place to place as well as the power to choose our hometowns — we find ourselves less and less sure of where it is we have finally arrived'.[44] Lippard concludes from this that '[t]he journey defines the destination', which certainly resonates with the emphasis on physical space in the European texts, and the downplaying of Wales as a national, cultural and political entity.[45] That the destination in question is presented as remote, extreme and relatively empty suggests that increased modern-day mobility does not always bring one closer to other places or people: in other words, distance remains undiminished. After all, for each European traveller, the Welsh destination is defined rather by what (in their eyes) it lacks, notably an indigenous identity, culture and people, and gaps are filled in by their own, imported cultural references, if they are

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[43] Anderson, p. 30.
[44] Quoted in Lippard, p. 43.
[45] Lippard, p. 43.

filled in at all. What the protagonists do encounter in this emptied environment tends to be a projection of their own inner turmoil, and interpreted with reference to their places of origin and experiences of the past. With this in mind, 'space' is once again a compelling term for what is found in these Welsh settings. As mentioned earlier in this introduction, in the field of geography space 'has been seen in distinction to place as a realm without meaning', while place itself provides definition: 'Spaces have areas and volumes. Places have space between them. Yi-Fu Tuan has likened space to movement and place to pauses — stops along the way.'[46] The Welsh settings examined in this thesis could be seen as space between the other more familiar places mentioned in each text, and it is through these other places that the protagonists try to make sense of what, on a personal level, seems to be a 'realm without meaning'.

Using these foundational concepts as a starting point, this thesis presents close textual analysis of various Welsh settings in fiction, over four further chapters. To provide literary context, chapter one ('Other Welsh Settings in Fiction Since 1750') will look at representations of Wales in fiction from earlier centuries and cultural periods. Starting with English-language fiction from the eighteenth century to the twentieth and going on to examine three nineteenth-century works from Europe, this chapter aims to place the twentieth- and twenty-first-century corpus texts in the wider context of fiction set in Wales. Focusing on portrayals of Welsh space and place, it will therefore reveal contrasts and commonalities between those in anglophone fiction and those in earlier fiction from Europe, and show the beginnings of a shift from people to place, and from engagement with one's surroundings to intense introspection. The second chapter, focusing on the 1934 Hungarian novel *The Pendragon Legend* by Szerb ('A Private Welsh Universe of Personal Obsessions'), will show that the shift continues, as Szerb increasingly highlights the blank spaces in his Welsh setting and explores their creative potential. For Szerb this means intellectual probing beyond the rational and orthodox and entering the realm of mysticism, psychological experience and the occult; this interpretation of Wales therefore seems to value it as a space for the imagination. Chapter three ('The Welsh Edge of the World') then examines the Welsh settings in two German texts: Timm's short story 'Nicht morgen, nicht gestern' (1999) and Bernig's 2007 novel *Weder Ebbe noch Flut*. Here it is argued

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[46] Cresswell, pp. 15-16.

that Welsh space has eclipsed the people in it altogether, with a focus on the physical power of nature and the elements only emphasizing the smallness of human life. This indifferent environment, on the furthest edge of the protagonists' known universe, intensifies their isolation and introspection. As in Szerb's novel, they find in Wales a blank space *beyond*, which in this case enables transcendence, realisation and a reorientation back into the places they had left behind. Finally, the texts in chapter four ('Welsh Space "Beyond the Horizon" and "Beneath the Skin"') seem both to probe deeper than ever into their Welsh settings *and* complete the circle in this discussion of Welsh space, broaching the darkest subjects so far (notably pain, death and terminal illness) while bringing the focus back to concerns first seen in *The Pendragon Legend*, such as psychology, states of consciousness and life after death. Sebald's novel *Austerlitz*, published in 2001, and Bakker's novel *The Detour*, published in 2010, break down all barriers between people and place, the psychological and the physical, and space inside and out. Intimacy in Wales is stronger here than in any of the other texts, but belonging is further away than ever. Bodies and minds become entangled with these Welsh settings and ultimately claimed by Welsh space, whether it invades the protagonists like a parasite (as in *Austerlitz*) or enfolds them in death (as in *The Detour*).

This thesis aims to show that, in the European corpus, moving away from one's stable, original place — represented by the international journeys undertaken to Wales — thus seems to lead to dynamic space on the edge, in which boundaries are blurred or broken down altogether. This Welsh space is portrayed as being beyond everything else, without definition, yet capable of merging with private, intimate spaces such as the body and the mind. However, such extreme distance, perhaps aligned to the speed and ease of mobility in our modern age, does not always bring these European travellers any positive sense of closeness. Instead it often results in unwanted interaction and proximity, as in the invasion of their personal space by their extreme Welsh environments, rather than the desired intimacy of belonging in a *place*.

Chapter 1 — Other Welsh Settings in Fiction Since 1750

This chapter aims to contextualise the European corpus texts, examining previous engagement with Wales in fiction by both British and European authors. The first half of the chapter therefore deals with English-language fiction set in Wales since 1750. Given that the majority of Welsh settings uncovered while researching this thesis occur in texts written in English, anglophone fiction set in Wales seems likely to have been the most widely distributed on an international level. As such, English-language portrayals of Wales represent a point of access for European readers and writers wanting to know more about this marginal country, whether read in the original English or in translation. Coupled with the historically international nature of the European literary scene, with its polyglot intellectual circles and fast translation and dissemination of new works, it is possible that writing in English played a significant early role in inspiring a tradition of fiction set in Wales, and perhaps influenced the European fiction writers who would follow. At any rate, English-language fiction unsurprisingly yields the greatest number of impressions of Wales by authors or characters who are in some way outsiders there, giving it further relevance when used to contextualise Welsh settings by European authors. The second part of the chapter focuses on three such nineteenth-century writers, who are all from Germany. Their versions of Wales are shown to continue English-language trends as well as to pave the way for new themes in the European corpus.

English-language Fiction Set in Wales, 1750–2010

It is striking that even the earliest English-language fiction in this period shares themes with the European fiction in the corpus. Many of the protagonists in eighteenth-century English-language narratives are also travellers to Wales, albeit ones from England. These English travellers tend to be 'city-dwellers', particularly from London, and thence 'retreat[ing] westwards in search of peace and quiet in which to nurse a broken heart or mend a broken fortune'.[47] Such journeys

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[47] Moira Dearnley, *Distant Fields: Eighteenth-Century Fictions of Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2001), p. xvi.

reflect the draw of the Celtic periphery discussed in the introduction to this thesis. Once in Wales, the English protagonists encounter 'peculiar ways of computing time and distance'.[48] These, too, have been identified as a key feature of the Celtic periphery and remain a strong presence in the European corpus texts.[49] The eighteenth-century craving for a 'retreat' to 'peace and quiet', and for 'distant fields' in which to thrash out the texts' moral questions, thus seems to anticipate the soul-searching and self-examination so prominent among the fictional European travellers to Wales in the corpus.[50]

There is one significant difference in the eighteenth-century versions of Wales, however: they are generally full of people. These Welsh settings are defined by their stereotyped 'rustic characters', to use Annette Pritchard and Nigel Morgan's term — a tendency which has generally not been carried over into twentieth- and twenty-first-century European fiction.[51] Neither does the European corpus share the 'two-way traffic' found in eighteenth-century fiction, in which, alongside in-bound English travellers, a 'constant exodus' of Welsh characters means that Wales also 'provides a constant supply of innocents abroad'.[52] Instead the European protagonists play the role of both retreating city-dweller *and* 'innocent abroad' setting forth on a voyage of discovery, and Wales is the main stage for both. Journeys to contrasting metropolitan locations, such as London, are sometimes undertaken, but these too tend to be made by the European protagonists rather than by Welsh characters, while the latter occupy minor roles in the background if they are present at all. Given the shared interest in spiritual journeys, moral quests to the Welsh edge of Britain and remoteness of location and time, it might therefore be argued that a common Celticist thread connects Welsh settings in eighteenth-century English-language fiction with those in the European corpus. However, the diminished focus on Welsh people in the latter texts also suggests that these Celticist features might increasingly be manifested in the non-human aspects of place.

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[48] Dearnley, p. xvi.
[49] Leerssen, p. 7.
[50] Dearnley, p. xvii.
[51] Annette Pritchard and Nigel Morgan, 'Representations of "Ethnographic Knowledge": Early Comic Postcards of Wales' in *Discourse, Communication and Tourism*, ed. by Adam Jaworski and Annette Pritchard (Clevedon: Channel View, 2005), pp. 53-75 (p. 62).
[52] Dearnley, p. xvi.

The concept of place becomes especially important in Romanticism, even before considering any specific locations. Within Romantic literature, for example, Diego Saglia identifies 'a rich archive of geographies traditionally interpreted as exotic "elsewheres" for the tormented soul [...]'[53] This description immediately brings to mind Celticism in general and eighteenth-century Welsh settings in particular, with a central feature of the former being a 'journey outward' to the exotic Celtic fringe,[54] while the latter often inspire a fictional 'retreat' from a troubled urban existence.[55] More specifically, northern European regions (namely Britain, Ireland, Germany and Scandinavia) are said to have held a special attraction and function for Romantic authors, providing 'the locus for a world of the imagination, the supernatural, the indefinable; as a means, too, of promoting that which cannot be encompassed by reason'.[56] For Romantics in both England and Germany, Carol Tully also identifies a particularly Celtic, 'exotic northern ideal, infused with druidic mysticism and an active "Volksgeist"', whose ability to be used as 'both an opposite and an accessory' gave it an important role in 'the Romantic quest for cultural self-definition'.[57] There is also the suggestion here that place is being used to focus inward, on the self, rather than looking outward to indigenous people and features. Returning to Smethurst's '"private" appropriation of geography', quoted in the introduction to this thesis, reveals that place was employed by Romantic writers as 'a means of externalizing the subconscious. For such purpose, landscapes verge on the allegorical or symbolic representation of secret impulses, desires or frustrations'.[58] Moreover, Smethurst's suggestion that place was used to explore the tension between 'reason' and 'a world of the imagination, the supernatural, the indefinable', further narrows the gap between Romantic literature and the European corpus.[59] The imaginary, the supernatural and the indefinable are key characteristics of the latter Welsh settings in particular. These are always presented as being inherently mysterious, and possessing mystic possibility, in contrast to more sober reality elsewhere: worldly concerns such as war and work seem muted and distant in comparison.

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[53] Diego Saglia, '"Harp of the Mountain-Land": Felicia Hemans and the Cultural Geography of Romantic Wales' in Davies and Pratt, pp. 228-42 (p. 228).
[54] Leerssen, p.7.
[55] Dearnley, p. xvi.
[56] Smethurst, p. ix.
[57] Carol Tully, 'The Celtic Misconnection: The German Romantics and Wales', *Angermion*, 2 (2009), 127-41 (p. 127).
[58] Smethurst, p. xi.
[59] Ibid., p. ix.

Wales as a destination and a setting certainly played a prominent role in English Romanticism, with famous appearances in the poetry of Wordsworth and the landscape paintings of Turner. Its 'isolation and topographical ruggedness' attracted all those 'in search of the unkempt and the sublime'.[60] According to Andrew Davies, some scholars have identified an economic motivation for this, which also suggests compelling links with approaches to literary setting in the corpus. Davies cites Saree Makdisi, for example, who takes 'Fernand Braudel's concept of "neutral zones" (that is to say areas "lying outside the world economy")' and 'argues that areas which remained unaffected by these processes [transport improvements and Enclosure] began to occupy a distinct niche in the literary and artistic imagination'.[61] The idea of 'neutral' places, albeit in an economic sense, seems to anticipate the kind of space sought by twentieth- and twenty-first-century European protagonists in the corpus: that is, a space empty of associations and familiar markers, including the vulgar materiality of money and financial transactions, on to which can be projected one's own experiences. Moreover, it is through the prism of the protagonists' own cultures and backgrounds, rather than through indigenous Welsh culture, that they try, and frequently fail, to make sense of their Welsh surroundings. To consider these Welsh settings as 'neutral zones' reinforces this aspect of Wales's appeal, which is unrelated to Welshness; indeed, Davies points out that Romantic writers were equally attracted to other regions with a similarly 'neutral' profile, such as the Lake District.[62] At the same time, as discussed in the introduction to this thesis, Romantic Wales has been neglected in comparison to other countries or regions, being little known beyond poetry and painting. The various reasons suggested for this indicate patterns in the Romantic use of Wales, some of which have their roots in the eighteenth-century Welsh settings described above. In particular, Romantic authors seem keen to exploit and manipulate Wales's unfamiliarity.

It is clear that Wales offers all the expected qualities of the Celtic periphery, and yet cultural engagement with it, a place for so long viewed by outsiders as 'an adjunct to England with an

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[60] Andrew Davies, '"The Reputed Nation of Inspiration". Representations of Wales in Fiction from the Romantic Period, 1780–1829.' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Cardiff University, 2001), p. 69.
[61] Ibid., p. 69.
[62] Ibid., p. 69.

uncertain and undefined status', differs from engagement with the distinct 'cultural entities' of Scotland and Ireland, for example.[63] This becomes more obvious during the Romantic era, in large part because of the success of Sir Walter Scott: although still Celtic, peripheral and different, Scotland becomes familiar, at least in readers' imaginations, in a way that Wales does not.[64] In terms of Romantic fiction set in Wales, this lack of national association with a particular, canonical '"mainstay" author' or 'subgenre' has, according to Davies, contributed to the lack of scholarship, but at the time it gave authors greater creative freedom: 'as national histories went, Wales's was relatively unfamiliar to the reading public, and laid itself open to the excesses of heroic and sentimental writing.'[65] Unlike travellers to Scotland, then, '[t]he [Romantic] traveller to Wales was reliant for the most part on the factual material provided in travelogues' and so lacked both a 'predisposition to focus on the past' and 'sites of cultural pilgrimage'.[66] Among German Romantics, for instance, this led to a focus on the modern in Wales rather than the ancient, as well as 'limited appreciation of the nation's cultural depth' such as 'legend or tradition'.[67] Once again, this would suggest a distinct lack of indigenous appeal in Wales, and no obvious desire to go beyond the surface of the place. Both of these resonate with later Welsh settings in the corpus for this thesis.

One commonality here between Romantic fiction and the European corpus texts is the fact that a Welsh setting offers not just a different place but a different time. For example, one of the key genres identified by Davies in his study of Wales in Romantic fiction is the sentimental novel, which combines English and European influences (Davies describes them as being both 'Goethesque' and 'Rousseauean') and picturesque 'appropriation of the Welsh landscape'.[68] The protagonists in such narratives, who are frequently 'orphans' or 'disenfranchised heirs or heiresses' (sometimes both) and therefore cut off from their roots and living new, parallel lives, find their echoes in the European protagonists, who are similarly uprooted or detached from former lives in mainland Europe.[69] Spatial and temporal duality thus comes to the fore in texts

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[63] Tully, 'The Celtic Misconnection', p. 128. See also Davies, '"The Reputed Nation of Inspiration"', p. 4.
[64] Tully, 'The Celtic Misconnection', p. 140.
[65] Davies, '"The Reputed Nation of Inspiration"', pp. 3-4 and p. 208.
[66] Tully, 'The Celtic Misconnection', pp. 140-41.
[67] Ibid., p. 129 and p. 140.
[68] Davies, '"The Reputed Nation of Inspiration"', p. 60.
[69] Ibid., p. 60.

from both eras, because these former existences nevertheless maintain a constant, contrasting presence in the narratives, whether explicit or implicit, and highlight the otherness the protagonists find in Wales. A similar duality of place and experience in Romantic fiction can be seen in the fact that, according to Davies, 'pre-social faculties such as "feeling" and "natural" imperatives were at this point more closely associated with Wales, while more restrained personal qualities were identified with England'.[70] This implies that a Welsh setting offered both Romantic characters and authors a more free and elemental existence which, as we will see in the corpus texts, has continued to attract fiction writers in more recent times.

In particular, Romantic antiquarian literature set in Wales makes clear use of such duality.[71] In contrast to the Scottian historical novel, which tended to be anchored to real events in the recent past, Davies tells us that texts with Welsh settings:

> […] dealt with a historical period outside the narrated past, a time that was not a component of any received and stable historical narrative. These fictions were mainly set in 'ancient Britain': a historically undefined never-never land where the political preoccupations of the novelist could be played out against a suitably ambiguous historical backdrop. As a result, the Ancient British setting could be adapted and embellished to suit the stylistic conventions of fashionable subgenres (the gothic novel, for example) and literary modes and movements (like primitivism). It could also be imbued with current ideological and cultural values. That is to say, these fictions often flourished as fictions through the chronological and contextual instability of their chosen historical period or milieu, using the pliability of their setting or subject in

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[70] Davies, '"The Reputed Nation of Inspiration"', pp. 73-74.
[71] A poetic example is Thomas Gray's 1757 pindaric ode *The Bard*. A century later it inspired a famous Hungarian ballad, *A walesi bárdok* (The Bards of Wales) by János Arany, which is still taught in Hungarian schools today and which Szerb knew well.

order to subvert the constraints of 'veracity' and 'verisimilitude'
imposed by received narrative or dynastic history.[72]

Here, then, Wales is able to provide the temporal and spatial unfamiliarity which is crucial to these antiquarian narratives, because a setting in which the author can plausibly tap into different, distant times not only affords him or her creative freedom but also historical licence. And, as we have already seen, Wales's importance in the narratives is still not usually defined by Welshness and what people know about Wales; Davies points out, for example, that there is none of the conflict between native and Anglicised cultural identity which can be found in Scott's Highland-Lowland opposition.[73] Rather, it is a lack of knowledge, i.e. Wales's unfamiliarity, which provides crucial distance and creative space. At the same time, however, England is often present, especially in novels which, post-Scott, sought a more recent 'viable historical vehicle' for their protagonists: a 'limited choice of recent historical struggles with a stable historical narrative [...] within which Wales had claimed some form of distinct involvement and influence' meant that often the only 'viable' option for the Romantic author was the English Civil War.[74] It could therefore be said that duality of place frequently goes hand-in-hand with temporal otherness in Romantic fiction set in Wales, as can be seen in titles such as the anonymous *Maurice Powell: An Historical Welsh Tale of England's Troubles*, and that both features distance their Welsh settings even further from specific ideas of Welshness.[75]

In Romantic fiction, then, there seems to have been a shift away from the familiar Welsh character stereotypes of the eighteenth century in favour of exploiting the unfamiliarity of Wales. Journeys in and to Wales are increasingly important in Romantic narratives, emphasizing distance from more familiar territory, while access to ancient times and a more primal existence brings with it the constant possibility of mystery and otherness. These tendencies correspond to general Romantic attitudes to place, reflecting the contemporary desire to transcend

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[72] Davies, '"Redirecting the Attention of History": Antiquarian and Historical Fictions of Wales from the Romantic Period' in Davies and Pratt, pp. 104-21 (pp. 108-09).
[73] Davies, '"The Reputed Nation of Inspiration"', p. 119.
[74] Davies, '"Redirecting the Attention of History"', p. 118.
[75] *Maurice Powell: An Historical Welsh Tale of England's Troubles in Three Volumes* (London: Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy, 1821).

Enlightenment reason and (re)discover the exotic and supernatural offerings of northern European and its Celtic edges. Wales in particular, however, had the strategic advantage of being relatively unknown yet so close to familiar England, which most likely intensified Welsh otherness and boosted its artistic appeal. It certainly seems to have inspired Romantic authors to pursue Welsh otherness as far as possible, extending it to time as well as place, in order to maximise the contrast between Wales and elsewhere. All in all, these trends suggest further common ground between Romantic depictions of Wales and those in later European fiction.

Wirt Sykes, a nineteenth-century American writer known for his work on Welsh folklore, once declared that:

> [t]here is in Wales something so peculiarly fascinating in that old belief that 'once upon a time' the world was less practical in its facts than now, less commonplace and humdrum, less subject to the inexorable laws of gravitation, optics and the like. What dramas it has yielded! What fantasy, what legends, what delights![76]

Sykes lived from 1836 to 1883, including seven years in Cardiff as U.S. Consul to Wales, so his description of Wales suggests that the Romantic interest in places beyond the reach of scientific reason, and particularly Wales, extended into the second half of the nineteenth century. Unfortunately there does not yet seem to be an overview of nineteenth-century fiction set in Wales, as exists for eighteenth-century and Romantic texts. Relevant works tend to have been gathered in collections and anthologies according to genre and subject, rather than location alone, and these sometimes span several centuries. Some examples are Jane Aaron's *Welsh Gothic* with material from the 1780s to the 1990s, Peter Haining's selection of *Great Welsh Fantasy Fiction* with stories from the twelfth century to the twentieth, and Stephen Knight's *A Hundred Years of Fiction*.[77] As in the surveys of eighteenth-century and Romantic fiction

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[76] Quoted in Peter Haining, ed., *Great Welsh Fantasy Stories* (Llanrwst: Gwasg Carreg Gwalch, 2000), front matter.
[77] Jane Aaron, *Welsh Gothic* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2013); Stephen Knight, *A Hundred Years of Fiction* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2004).

already referred to in this chapter, they are often the first collections of their kind to relate specifically to Wales.

Two of the three examples above suggest that fantasy was a theme in later nineteenth-century fiction set in Wales. Knight, too, writes that a recognisable novel type by 1900 depicted a Wales in which 'visiting characters and readers alike could be excited by beauty and strangeness', such as the 'quaint, even mysterious, habits of the natives'.[78] The prevailing theme in Knight's study, however, is of Wales as a destination for the English armchair traveller. In such a scenario a Welsh setting offered a controlled encounter with otherness, whether that meant allowing readers to access 'beauty and strangeness' without having to 'surrender their English values', or providing a 'safe past' for historical novels.[79] This would seem to indicate the particular Celticist appeal, identified by Leerssen, of an encounter with both 'an exotic Other' and something which is 'not quite alien'.[80] As Knight puts it, Wales is strange but also safe.[81]

Knight makes two further observations about nineteenth-century novels set in Wales which bring to mind the findings in this thesis. The first, that 'this is not writing about Wales so much as using Wales as context for English self-development', resonates with a European corpus in which the reality of Wales is less important than its role as a narrative device, and it can be difficult to tell whether the place being described actually exists.[82] The dramatic nature of the Welsh landscape, for example, with its mountains, coasts and unpredictable weather, readily lends itself to pathetic fallacy or facilitating plot progression, but can seem hazy and intangible when only selectively described. This has the effect of amplifying the protagonists' own, imported concerns, turning the narrative focus inward rather than out to the place in which they find themselves. The second of Knight's observations is that a nineteenth-century Welsh setting 'offered a mild variant to the exotic highlandery of Scott and his followers'.[83] In fact this seems to contradict patterns in European fiction, which suggest that Wales was chosen precisely

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[78] Knight, p. xi.
[79] Ibid., p. xi.
[80] See 'Introduction' to this thesis, p. 13
[81] Knight, p. xi.
[82] Ibid., p. 3.
[83] Ibid., p. 3.

because it retains an otherness that has perhaps been lost elsewhere. In the second part of this chapter, for example, I will argue that a nineteenth-century German novel purporting to be a translation of a new work by Scott, but which was in reality a hoax, may well have been set in Wales for this very reason: because the 'exotic highlandery' of what many jocularly call 'Scottland' had become altogether too familiar, even to readers outside of Britain. For European authors, the strange in Wales appears to loom larger than the safe and, curiously, this relationship seems to endure from one century to the next.

  Nevertheless, Knight's characterisation of Wales as a strange yet safe setting in fiction before 1900 certainly strikes a chord with the works we have already seen, and the fantasy fiction of Arthur Machen in particular seems to perfectly encompass these qualities. Wales, and specifically Machen's home county of Gwent, features in most of his works, and represented both the author's beloved childhood home and a place of 'awe and mystery and terror'.[84] In his narratives, this Welsh border country became in turn a 'borderland between this world and another world of wonder and strangeness'.[85] It is a setting which has also been described as 'lying somewhere between Dreams and Death'.[86] Machen himself has been called 'a novelist of the soul',[87] as well as 'the finest of all Welsh fantasy fiction writers'; he was also 'intrigued and fascinated by the Black Arts' and the occult, and briefly a member of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn.[88] Machen knew and socialised with W. B. Yeats, and his work has been associated with Symbolism and decadence.[89] Such links and interests leave little doubt as to the importance of Machen frequently choosing Wales as a setting for his fiction: it seems an obvious place in which to explore the Celtic and the mystical, and to leave behind or even rebuff what he saw as a contemporary obsession with 'scientific basis'.[90] In the context of European fiction set in Wales, however, Machen's associations with psychogeography are perhaps the most intriguing aspect of his work. Psychogeography was first named and defined in the 1950s by Guy Debord, who called it 'the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical

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[84] Arthur Machen, *Far Off Things* (London: Martin Secker, 1922), p. 20.
[85] Mark Valentine, *Arthur Machen* (Bridgend: Seren, 1995), p. 7.
[86] Vincent Starrett, *Arthur Machen. A Novelist of Ecstasy and Sin* (Chicago: Walter M. Hill, 1918), p. 11.
[87] Ibid., p. 11.
[88] Haining, p. 153.
[89] Valentine, p. 75 and p. 52.
[90] Quoted in ibid., p. 26.

environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals'.[91] However, Merlin Coverley identifies earlier psychogeographic traits in English literature, in texts where the 'topography' of a setting is 'refashioned by the imaginative force of the writer', and he places Machen firmly within this tradition, along with other 'unacknowledged forebears' of twentieth-century and contemporary psychogeography such as Daniel Defoe, William Blake and Thomas de Quincey.[92]

Coverley's focus here is on writing relating to London, which for him is 'the most resonant of all psychogeographical locations'.[93] However, many of his observations seem equally applicable to the way Machen writes about rural Wales. Like psychogeographical London, Machen's Wales is often 'present[ed] as a dreamscape in which nothing is as it seems and which can only be navigated by those possessing secret knowledge', and it was without doubt also somewhere he could find:

> […] the strange and otherworldly within our midst — a single
> street, event or object capable of transforming the most mundane
> surroundings into something strange or sinister, revealing that
> point of access, called the Northwest Passage by de Quincey,
> which provides an unexpected shortcut to the magical realm
> beyond our own.[94]

A psychological approach to setting resonates in particular with European depictions of Wales in the corpus texts, and the way Welsh settings affect their traveller protagonists. These depictions, too, suggest a dreamscape in Wales, because, being mostly emptied of other people, the space encountered seems to facilitate and reflect the protagonists' introspection. The otherness of the landscape also thwarts the protagonists' attempts to navigate both reality and their physical surroundings, with an added layer of strangeness: being from elsewhere and therefore 'other'

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[91] Quoted in Merlin Coverley, *Psychogeography* (Harpenden: Pocket Essentials, 2010), p. 10.
[92] Coverley, p. 11 and p. 16.
[93] Ibid., p. 15.
[94] Ibid., pp. 17-18.

themselves, the ability to overcome this difference remains beyond their reach. Machen's psychogeographical use of Wales as a setting therefore seems to link to the later European authors in two ways. Firstly, his work contains echoes of Celticism similar to those found in all the fiction discussed previously in this chapter, such as the desire to access a parallel 'magical realm' via the 'Northwest Passage'. Secondly, there is the psychogeographical consideration of relationships between topography and psychology, and the implications this carries for parallel journeys of the mind. Moving into the twentieth century, this would seem to add a new element to the narrative potential of Wales, and a further connection between English-language and European Welsh settings.

Wales's otherness persists in twentieth-century fiction, in which early Welsh settings are said to be 'invested with "Celtic Magic"'.[95] Authors such as John Cowper Powys, Dylan Thomas and Arthur Machen again tapped into a 'sense of enchantment' in their Welsh setting, and Powys in particular made use of what he called the 'mythology of escape' in the Welsh landscape.[96] A further attraction lies in language difference, which made 'Welsh-speaking Wales [...] a potent and mysterious "other" for English-language writers'.[97] Neither Celtic nor Welsh-language elements can be as readily identified in the European corpus texts, where characters are at best dismissive of the native language and culture, and at worst never mention it at all. However, othering sentiments and effects present in English-language fiction, such as enchantment and escape, can also be found in the European narratives.

Another link between the European corpus texts and English-language fiction, which could shed light on Wales's enduring otherness, is the use of a Welsh setting in opposition to somewhere else. The comparison can be either explicit or implicit, but in English-language fiction the other place is nearly always England, and therefore very close to home. The primary role of many of the Welsh settings here is to function as 'a Wales which is not England', and the

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[95] Jeremy Hooker, *Imagining Wales. A View of Modern Welsh Writing in English* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2001), p. 15.
[96] Both phrases are taken from Powys's 1941 novel *Owen Glendower* and quoted in Hooker, *Imagining Wales*, pp. 16-17.
[97] Hooker, *Imagining Wales*, p. 15.

roots of this approach can be seen in fiction from earlier periods.[98] For Romantic authors, as we have seen, Wales was associated with 'feeling' and England with restraint,[99] while the nineteenth-century writing of Matthew Arnold, for example, demonstrates a 'compensatory' attitude to Wales which 'had more to do with what he felt England was not'.[100] More recently, Welsh author Raymond Williams stated that 'you cannot write a fully realist novel about Wales without writing about England'.[101] For an author such as Williams, who was a Welsh nationalist but nevertheless wrote in English and spent most of his adult life outside of Wales, this opposition embodies the postcolonial notion of hybridity and is played out in common themes of twentieth-century Anglo-Welsh fiction such as 'origins and connections', nationality and identity and the lot of 'the unsettled exile'.[102] Variations on these themes resurface in the European corpus texts, which often feature characters exiled from familiarity and grappling with identity. These characters, however, do not have the same inescapable personal and historical ties to their Welsh settings as those in Anglo-Welsh fiction, since the former are arriving in Wales for the first time with no previous links to it, and few or no contacts there for the present. Rather than providing a concrete contrast in the form of a different language, culture and political outlook, a Welsh setting seems to offer something more general, abstract and verging on the supernatural. However, this too could be seen to echo what Tony Bianchi has called the 'essential inscrutability' of Welsh settings in English-language fiction, and resistance to 'counter-authenticities'.[103] Trends like these seem to anticipate the lack of engagement in the corpus with Wales on a human scale, and perhaps even a desire to transcend it altogether. Instead there appears to be an interest in higher powers and universal existential questions, both natural and spiritual, as well as in the nature of reality.

Such opposition ultimately comes across as much stronger in the corpus for this thesis than in English-language fiction, because there is greater distance between the European texts' Welsh settings and 'elsewhere'. Firstly, this distance is literal, because 'elsewhere' tends to be a

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[98] Hooker, *Imagining Wales*, p. 15.
[99] Davies, '"The Reputed Nation of Inspiration"', pp. 73-74.
[100] Hooker, *Imagining Wales*, p. 15.
[101] Quoted in Bianchi, p. 69.
[102] Bianchi, p. 51.
[103] Ibid., p. 48 and p. 72.

location in mainland Europe, and therefore physically further away from Wales than England. Interestingly, the only author who uses an English 'elsewhere' — the Hungarian Szerb, whose novel *The Pendragon Legend* is also partly set in London — is also the only one of the five corpus authors whose work could be categorised as fantasy, and the supernatural elements in the text lift the narrative above and beyond socio-political commentary. Then there is figurative distance, manifested in the lack of engagement with Welsh people, language and culture in the corpus texts and the resulting emptiness of their Welsh settings. This in turn demands a bigger mental leap from characters and readers in terms of making sense of Welsh place, and perhaps defies any attempts to makes sense of it at all. For the authors and readers of English-language fiction, on the other hand, Welsh settings could at least be seen as a known phenomenon: strangeness and mystery, perhaps with a Celtic flavour, are only to be expected on the margins, and can be found in bestselling, mainstream English literature for all ages.[104] Meanwhile the corpus authors, characters and readership appear to have few preconceptions or expectations of Wales. Consequently, the difference encountered there seems to be starker and more immediate, pushing an already distant other even further from the familiar and the everyday, and strengthening Wales's otherworldly effects.

Two other themes common to both English-language and European fiction set in Wales are boundaries and belonging. In the former, Bianchi has observed 'preoccupations with boundaries of time, space and identity in a period of profound change; with the signs by which these boundaries are less and less adequately recognized, and with the dislocated subject seeking, through these uncertainties, a stable habitation'.[105] Emyr Humphreys, meanwhile, claimed that 'the great choice of the twentieth century' was 'to be an exile or a native'.[106] In the European corpus texts, the outsider protagonists also seem to be grappling with this question, with Wales serving as a liminal no-man's land which seems to draw them in when they are repelled by other places, but in which they are never able fully to belong. We are reminded of the 'essential inscrutability', in Bianchi's view, of English-language depictions of Wales, which perhaps helps

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[104] Wales has after all featured in or inspired lots of well-known fantasy fiction, from J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* (3 vols, 1954–55) to children's novels of the 1960s and 1970s by Alan Garner and Susan Cooper.
[105] Bianchi, pp. 44-45.
[106] Quoted in Hooker, *Imagining Wales*, p. 13.

to make plausible the distance in the corpus between Wales and the characters' origins, as well as the extreme difference encountered there. Such resistance to interpretation in a setting could be seen as ownership of its marginality — or perhaps 'embrac[ing] a hybridity that abrogates all centres' — and a reluctance to facilitate a sense of belonging.[107] Certainly none of the European protagonists ever really stops being an outsider in Wales, whether they are drawn to the very edge of their Welsh settings or become entangled in its obscure and labyrinthine interior, and in fact the setting itself, being both topographically challenging and conveniently empty, seems to collude in sustaining their foreignness and preventing them from settling in. Most of the European protagonists ultimately leave Wales again, and in all cases this turns out to be a necessary escape, despite the fact that they were often escaping *to* Wales to start with. Wales initially seems to promise space in which to work on questions of identity and belonging, but when the protagonists leave under a cloud, and in a hurry, it is difficult to tell whether they have found what they were looking for, or feel more lost than ever.

This brings us back to the idea of unique Welsh space, which is able to operate in a narrative independently of the people in it. It draws those people in but also drives them away, and continually resists being what they want it to be. The European versions of Wales certainly seem to exercise greater control over people than the other way around, exuding a presence which transcends fleeting human appearances and which at times differs dramatically from English-language portrayals of Wales, despite similar narrative themes. One such portrayal, in the 1991 novel *Glass Shot* by Duncan Bush, while also concerned with 'empty space and its open possibilities' in a setting 'at the borders of the unknown', is nevertheless said to represent a world 'in which, like that of Baudrillard, "the territory no longer precedes the map, nor survives it... it is the map that precedes the territory" [...]'[108] The implication that the Welsh setting here is a human construction, with the protagonist a 'child cartographer', is at first glance not so far removed from the European corpus texts, in which Wales is moulded by and to the characters' experiences rather than representing what is really there.[109] And yet Wales as imagined by the European authors is anything but mapped-out and readable, being always beyond full

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[107] Bianchi, p. 72.
[108] Ibid., p. 61.
[109] Ibid., p. 61.

comprehension and generally resisting any human intervention or attempts to make sense of it. Movement and orientation are often impeded by forces or features beyond human control, such as weather or topography, while four of the five European travellers to Wales never use any kind of navigational tool, least of all a map. As a result, all five protagonists in the corpus struggle to navigate their Welsh space, bringing a sense of disorientation to the narratives which never really goes away.

This chapter has suggested so far that there are significant similarities between English-language fiction set in Wales, from the eighteenth century to the twentieth, and Welsh settings between 1900 and 2010 in the European corpus. The fact that fiction relating to Wales has remained outside both British and European literary canons seems to have contributed to this, producing common patterns such as a Celticist thread throughout, particularly relating to journeys westward and the exotic nature of the destination; otherness in Wales, which is often established through distance and opposition, such as contrasts with 'elsewhere'; and an interest in the physical reality of the Welsh setting, i.e. space and place. The narrative focus increasingly turns inward and the relationship between place and psychology gradually becomes more prominent, manifesting itself most clearly in early examples of psychogeography. By the twentieth century, the nature of the Welsh settings is therefore more closely linked to the behaviour of individuals and their relationships with place than in early literary depictions of Wales, which were arguably defined by the simple, stereotyped natives who lived there. We could thus detect a certain shift from a focus on Welsh people to an emphasis on Welsh space and place, in line with the postmodern 'spatial turn'.[110] The next section, focusing on Welsh settings in nineteenth-century literature from Europe, will look for more evidence of these tendencies and provide further context for analysis of the corpus texts.

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[110] Davies, *Cartographies of Culture,* p. 3.

Wales in Nineteenth-Century European Literature

Most European accounts of Wales from the nineteenth century occur in the genre of travel writing, while fictional and literary portrayals appear to be more rare.[111] Nonetheless, three German texts from the period have come to light. The prominence of German-language writing on Wales in both fiction and non-fiction is striking and continues into the twenty-first century, with three of the five corpus texts having being written by German authors. Analysis of nineteenth-century works in this section will therefore be attentive to any patterns which might shed more light on this interest from German-speaking regions.

The three texts to be discussed comprise a short story, a novel and an elaborate travelogue interwoven with poetry and folklore. In that order, they are: 'Owen Tudor. Eine Reisegeschichte' ['Owen Tudor. A travel story'] (1821) by Ludwig Achim von Arnim, *Walladmor* (1824) by Willibald Alexis and *Ein Herbst in Wales. Land und Leute, Märchen und Lieder* [*An Autumn in Wales. Country and people, tales and songs*] (1858) by Julius Rodenberg.[112] It soon becomes clear that the fictional European traveller to Wales comes into existence well before he or she appears in the earliest corpus text (Szerb's *The Pendragon Legend*, 1934), for the common denominator in the nineteenth-century texts is an educated, young, male protagonist who has travelled to Wales from mainland Europe. In Rodenberg's autobiographical narrative, this protagonist is the author himself. Both he and Ludwig Achim von Arnim wrote their narratives in the first person, while Willibald Alexis's novel is narrated in the third person. A second link between these texts is that Wales has been singled out not just as a setting but as a destination: the protagonists all want specifically to travel to Wales over anywhere else. Arnim's anonymous narrator is attracted by 'die uralten ungeheuern Bauwerke' ['the ancient, enormous

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[111] See chart at European Travellers to Wales, 1750-2015, 'Reasons for travel over time' (Bangor, Gwynedd: Bangor University) <http://etw.bangor.ac.uk/about-database> [Accessed 30 July 2017] Overwhelmingly, the ETW project has found that the majority of authors came from Germany or France.

[112] The editions used are: Arnim, 'Owen Tudor, Eine Reisegeschichte' in *Werke*, ed. by Renate Moering, 6 vols (Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1992), IV: *Sämtliche Erzählungen 1818–1830*, pp. 148-88; Alexis, *Walladmor. Frei nach dem Englischen des Walter Scott*, 3 vols (Berlin: Friedrich August Herbig, 1824); and Rodenberg, *Ein Herbst in Wales. Land und Leute, Märchen und Lieder* (Hannover: Carl Rümpler, 1858). Abridged translations exist for *Walladmor* and *Ein Herbst in Wales* (see 'Bibliography' to this thesis). However, given the highly selective nature of these, I have chosen to quote directly from the original texts and translate all quotations myself to ensure closest correspondence to the source texts.

buildings'].[113] The young Rodenberg, more generally, comes to explore the Welsh 'country and people, tales and songs' mentioned in the title of his travel account. Meanwhile Edmund Bertram, Alexis's protagonist in *Walladmor*, is 'compelled' by a mysterious 'yearning' to travel to Wales,[114] 'um alle die Merkwürdigkeiten aufzusuchen, welche dieses Land aus seine Geschichte uns überliefert' ['in order to seek out all the curiosities this country passes down to us from its history'].[115] These nineteenth-century narratives already share some common ground with the five corpus texts. Each one features an educated European traveller as protagonist and Wales as a specific destination. In the corpus texts, however, although Wales has clearly been singled out by the authors, the protagonists themselves do not always travel there intentionally or by choice. They are also less likely than the nineteenth-century protagonists to articulate what it is they are looking for in Wales, and when they do it tends to be something abstract and internal, such as perspective or identity, rather than tangible features of their physical surroundings in the form of people or specific places.

Ludwig Achim von Arnim, 'Owen Tudor. Eine Reisegeschichte', 1821

Ludwig Achim von Arnim (1781–1831) was a key figure in German Romanticism, writing poems, plays, novels and short stories as well as journalistic articles. He knew Goethe and the Brothers Grimm, and is perhaps best known for *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*, a three-volume collection of old German folk songs and poems co-edited with Clemens Brentano and published between 1805 and 1808.[116] Arnim's short story set in Wales, entitled 'Owen Tudor. Eine Reisegeschichte', takes place in a mail coach from London to Holyhead and is narrated by an anonymous young man. His fellow passengers are a Presbyterian minister, a young Welsh woman with a child and 'two squabbling travel writers'.[117] The narrative combines myth and

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[113] Arnim, p. 148.
[114] 'Schon von frühe auf hatte ihn eine *Sehnsucht*, deren Grund er sich nicht zu erklären wusste, nach dieser Insel *getrieben*' — Alexis, I, 182; my italics. ['Even from an early age he had been *compelled* to this island by a *yearning*, the reason for which he could not explain.'] The reference to an island here does suggest that this comment might apply to Britain in general. However, the quotation has been used because Bertram repeatedly specifies elsewhere that his destination is Wales (e.g. ibid., p. 53, p. 69 and p. 114).
[115] Alexis, I, 114.
[116] Brentano was another important German Romantic, who was also close to Goethe and Herder.
[117] Tully, 'The Celtic Misconnection', p. 137.

history with contemporary concerns: there is heated debate about Methodism and particular interest in the 'Jumpers' of the Welsh Revival, interspersed with the story of Owen Tudor as told by the Welsh woman (who turns out to be one of his descendants). The Welsh woman's own story adds to the narrative suspense, for she is on the run from the police and hoping to escape Wales via Holyhead. There is also lighthearted tension between the two bickering travel writers. According to editorial notes in Arnim's collected works, these characters are parodies of William Hutton and Thomas Pennant, both of whom had written well-known and influential travel accounts of Wales in the late eighteenth and very early nineteenth centuries.[118]

   Despite being drawn to Wales by its 'ancient' architecture, Arnim's narrator admits in the opening paragraph of 'Owen Tudor' that he is less interested in his surroundings than in his own thoughts (of the wonderful ballet he watched the night before) and then in the interaction with and between his fellow passengers. Tellingly, it is never revealed exactly which architectural structures he is interested in, because as Tully points out, 'the entire narrative takes place not so much in Wales but inside a mail coach in Wales, glimpses of the landscape gleaned occasionally through the window.'[119] Tully goes on to suggest that this could explain why contemporary reviewers seem not to place much importance on the Welsh setting. Only one of the reviews included in Arnim's annotated *Sämtliche Erzählungen 1818–1830*, for example, mentions Wales at all. The choice of setting is nevertheless intriguing. It is thought that Arnim had himself travelled to Wales and Scotland in 1803, and 'wurde dadurch zu mehreren Erzählungen und Übersetzungen inspiriert' ['was through this inspired to [write/create] several short stories and translations'].[120] This suggests that the Welsh setting in 'Owen Tudor' is more important than reviews at the time seemed to indicate. After all, the setting provides several culturally-specific plot details, with background colour in the form of the Welsh Methodist Revival, narrative tension from the history of the Tudor family as well as local myth and legend, and a key character in the form of the mysterious Welsh woman, whose storytelling is central to the plot.[121]

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[118] Arnim, p. 1071.
[119] Tully, 'The Celtic Misconnection', p. 138.
[120] Editorial notes in Arnim, p. 1058.
[121] An example of local legend is the mention of a holy well at 'Clynag'. The editorial notes refer to 'die Figur des lokalen Heiligen Beuno' ['the figure of the local St Beuno'] (Arnim, p. 1072) which indicates that the well is in fact Ffynnon Beuno in Clynnog Fawr, a village on the Llŷn Peninsula.

By choosing a Welsh character 'aus dem Volk' ['of the people'] to tell Owen Tudor's story, and therefore play a part in steering the narrative, Arnim is seen generally to be championing *Volkspoesie*, as might be expected from a collector of folk verse.[122] It could also be argued, however, that this shows a special interest in folk literature from Wales: Owen Tudor's legendary story, for example, is given particular weight and authority because it is narrated by someone related to Tudor himself. While contemporary German tastes for *Volkspoesie* in general may have led Arnim to Celtic culture, in 'Owen Tudor' he appears to have singled out Wales from any broader interest in the Celtic regions.[123] At the same time, Tully claims that any 'sense of allegiance' to Wales is superficial, pointing out that Welsh culture is often portrayed negatively, or else appropriated by the author. Methodism is shown to be 'primitive and extreme' and used by Arnim for 'farcical' ends; the Welsh language is described as 'schrecklich' ['awful']; poems and songs presented as original Welsh compositions are actually the author's own; and the story of Owen Tudor has been moulded into a Grimm-style German *Märchen*.[124] Moreover, Tully reveals that all Arnim's 'Welsh themes' have actually been taken from William Hutton's *Remarks upon North Wales*, published in 1803, on which Arnim was 'wholly dependent' for Wales-related material.[125] This is perhaps less surprising than it might seem, firstly given that Arnim himself, when responding to critics concerned about historical accuracy, wrote that '[s]chon die Einkleidung als Postwagen-Geschichte hätten ihnen andeuten können, daß eben nicht viel Wahrheit darin zu suchen' ['Dressing it up as a mail-coach story should by itself have indicated to them not to look for too much truth in it'].[126] Secondly, it is reflective of Wales's aforementioned marginal cultural status, which has greatly hindered access to writing about Wales in general.

Ultimately, 'Owen Tudor' does not reveal as much about Wales as it does about the way in which authors use Wales. As Tully writes, 'what matters here is the nature of [Arnim's]

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[122] Arnim, p. 1072. The editorial notes state that 'Arnim adelt damit sozusagen die Volkspoesie' ['In doing so Arnim ennobles folk literature, in a manner of speaking'].

[123] A notable example of contemporary German interest in *Volkspoesie* is Herder's promotion of supposedly ancient national poets like Ossian.

[124] Tully, 'The Celtic Misconnection', p. 137.

[125] Ibid., p. 137.

[126] Arnim, p. 1067.

engagement with and exploitation of Wales, ancient and modern alike.'[127] We learn more about Wales as a literary device — that is, 'as a canvas for Arnim's imaginative weaving of ancient and modern narratives' — than we do about actual Welsh culture or the people who live there.[128] This becomes especially obvious when considering 'Owen Tudor' alongside the other two German texts in this section, for Arnim's *Reisegeschichte* arguably sets the tone for these with three key features provided by the Welsh setting. The first feature is distance, whether temporal or physical, which places the narrative and action at a remove from more familiar times and places. Journeys and travel to and within Wales, important in all the texts mentioned in this thesis, play a crucial part here. This helps to create the second element, a destination full of dramatic possibility, because the lack of familiarity allows Wales to be a 'canvas' for the author's imagination while Welsh history contributes a dramatic backdrop of its own. The third element, an extension of this dramatic possibility, is mystery. Once again, indigenous features, such as Welsh myth and legend, provide ready-made narrative suspense, which in turn accentuates any sense of unfamiliarity and gives the author yet more opportunity to mould Wales at will. An example from 'Owen Tudor' which demonstrates all three elements is the inclusion of poetry and song, which, as noted above, is presented as indigenous to Wales but has in fact all been composed by the author. The result is a blurring of authorship and identity, which is also present in the narrative's identity puzzles: the characters in the main narrative are anonymous throughout, for example, while disguise is important for both the fugitive Welsh woman in the present and the legend of Owen Tudor in the past. The whole feeds a sense of mystery and unfamiliarity and shows just how malleable the Welsh setting, and everything it contains, is able to be.

There is to some extent a clearer sense of place in Arnim's Wales than in later European fiction, because it contains aspects of Welshness, such as history, politics and folklore, which generally feature less prominently in the latter. Arnim's Welsh setting could therefore be said to possess the features which distinguish place from space, such as memory, other people and human touches and 'the local and the bound'.[129] Compared to the corpus texts there is also very

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[127] Tully, 'The Celtic Misconnection', p. 138.
[128] Ibid., p. 138.
[129] Escobar quoted in Cresswell, p. 34. See also Lippard, Fuan, Hooker and Prieto in the 'Introduction' to this thesis.

little reference to *other* places, especially the protagonists' places of origin, although there is always an implied duality because it is known that they have travelled to Wales from somewhere else. On the other hand, in common with the later texts, there is undisputed otherness and malleability in Arnim's Welsh setting. The mail coach in which nearly all the action takes place is a key device here, providing a space to be filled and moved around as the author pleases, and evoking Tuan's theory of space as movement, and places as stops in between.[130] Given that much of Arnim's Welsh distance and difference is created using the past, in the form of Welsh legend and history, then the main appeal of a Welsh setting may well have been *temporal* otherness, with the closed, artificial space of the mail coach enabling transportation between past and present without having to engage with the physical reality of place outside. By contrast, the twentieth- and twenty-first-century corpus authors appear to be more concerned with spatial otherness, and with putting physical distance between them and the places they have come from, hence the sharp distinction in their texts between space and place. We will see that Rodenberg, like Arnim, also manipulates time, place and identity in order to conjure up otherness and mystery in his Welsh settings, making particular use of Wales's past, especially old folklore. However, the next text in this section, the novel *Walladmor* by Willibald Alexis, takes this strategy to a new level.

Willibald Alexis, Walladmor. Frei nach dem Englischen des Walter Scott, *3 vols, 1824*

The novel *Walladmor* calls identity and authorship into question before the main narrative even begins. It is presented as an anonymous German translation of a new work by Sir Walter Scott, and uses an elaborate paratext, including an address by the translator to Scott himself, to support the pretence. The fact that it is actually an original novel by a German author, Willibald Alexis, was only revealed once the third and final volume had been published, but not before it had sparked 'a violent literary dispute' among his contemporaries as to whether or not it was a real work by Scott.[131] Fittingly for a writer with a 'love of mystification' there are yet more layers of

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[130] Cresswell, p. 15.

[131] L. H. C. Thomas, '*Walladmor*: A Pseudo-Translation of Sir Walter Scott', *The Modern Language Review,* 46 (1951), 218-31 (p. 218) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3718564> [accessed 1 April 2016].

identity involved, for Willibald Alexis is the pen-name of Georg Wilhelm Heinrich Häring and his surname in turn had mutated from the French 'Harenc' (his father had been a Huguenot refugee).[132] Alexis, a successful novelist, has been credited as the 'Begründer des historischen Romans' ['Father of the historical novel'] in German Realism and as the 'märkische Walter Scott' ['Walter Scott of the March [of Brandenburg]'].[133] He is best known for his eight Scott-inspired *Vaterländische Romane* [patriotic novels] dealing with the history of Prussia and Brandenburg from the fourteenth century, but also wrote literary reviews of Scott's work and translated some of his poetry.

In *Walladmor,* identity is arguably the central theme. The narrative follows Bertram, a young German protagonist, who is shipwrecked off the Welsh coast while travelling to Wales. His original Welsh destination is never revealed, but after a mysterious rescue, and last-minute passage on another ship, he ultimately finds himself somewhere in the north near the dramatic Walladmor Castle, home of local worthy and Justice of the Peace Sir Morgan Walladmor. Bertram, driven by intellectual curiosity and an inexplicable desire to see Wales for himself, is constantly swept up in the action happening around him, from public-house debates and St David's Day parades to fights and funeral processions. Identity puzzles proliferate along the way, manifesting themselves in particular in the wild and notorious character of Niklas or Nichols. Bertram first meets Niklas/Nichols when they are both clinging to the same barrel after the shipwreck, and from that point on the latter turns up repeatedly like a bad penny, and very often in disguise. Needless to say, after much mistaken identity and dramatic revelation, Bertram and Niklas/Nichols turn out to be Sir Walladmor's twin sons, kidnapped and separated as babies. This narrative is interspersed with local legend, which may have been invented by the author, as well as real contemporary issues in Britain such as Radicalism and the very recent Cato Street Conspiracy.[134]

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[132] Thomas, '*Walladmor*: A Pseudo-Translation of Sir Walter Scott', p. 219.

[133] Gerhard Fischer, 'Der "märkische Walter Scott"', *Berlinische Monatsschrift*, 6 (1998), 12-16 (pp. 12-13) <http://www.luise-berlin.de/bms/bmstext/9806proc.htm> [accessed 9 August 2016].

[134] The local legend referred to in the text revolves around the ruined Snowdonian monastery of Griffith ap Gauvon, for which I have not been able to find any other sources. The Cato Street Conspiracy was an actual plot by radicals to assassinate the entire cabinet and the Prime Minister, Lord Liverpool, in 1820.

The landscape, people and culture of Wales seem to be more prominent in *Walladmor* than in 'Owen Tudor'. In both texts the protagonists travel to Wales with great anticipation and expectations, but only Bertram engages with these once he is there — even if he initially finds that the reality of Wales does not measure up to what he has read in travel accounts, forcing him to rely instead on 'die Fantasie'.[135] The Welsh landscape in *Walladmor* nevertheless contains numerous picturesque features, such as Walladmor Castle, 'ein luftig buntes Schauspiel' ['an airily colourful sight'] clinging improbably to a cliff edge, and the ruined mountain monastery of Griffith ap Gauvon.[136] Bertram also finds himself face to face with the elements in Wales, especially the sea, and frequently needs guiding over rough and inhospitable terrain. There are hints here of the imaginative depths to be plumbed later by the corpus authors, who make use of Wales's particular topography and proximity to the elemental. Elsewhere in *Walladmor,* however, there is a lack of explicit Welshness. The literary quotations at the start of each chapter, for example, are taken from canonical works (such as Goethe's, or German translations of Shakespeare) as well as uncredited songs and rhymes, but there is little explicit reference to Wales or Welsh literature.[137] Whether intentional or incidental, this contributes greatly to the blurring of identities and authorship which is central to both the narrative, and to Alexis's hoax.

Alexis had never been to Wales, or indeed anywhere in Britain, and certain moments in the novel seem to indicate limited knowledge of his chosen setting.[138] During a church service in Welsh, for example, the few words Bertram can make out are 'Cadwallor [sic], Arthur, Kymmerian, Walladmor', although his inability to understand the sermon does leave him free to observe the congregation and ponder the fierce and pluralistic nature of Welsh religion.[139] An apparently shaky grasp of geography also suggests unfamiliarity with Wales. For example, the 'author's' preface, which is in fact Alexis writing as Scott, fondly remembers a journey from Chester to the Isle of Man and Anglesey which also included walks by the Severn. It is of course

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[135] Alexis, I, 182-83.

[136] Ibid., 82.

[137] A possible exception is the *Volkspruch* ['folk saying'] quoted at the start of Chapter 5, Vol. I., which compares national characteristics of the Welsh, the Scottish and (possibly) the Spanish with those of the English. The origin of the saying is not given but it could well be English, given that the humble English farmer comes out best of all four characters.

[138] L. H. C. Thomas, 'Willibald Alexis's Knowledge of English', *The Modern Language Review,* 49 (1954), 216-18 (p. 216) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3718909> [accessed 4 April 2016].

[139] Alexis, I, 249. 'Cadwallor' may be an incorrect reference to either Cadwallon or Cadwaladr, or a hybrid of the two.

the link to Scott which dictates many of the authorial decisions in *Walladmor*. Alexis parodies Scott's characterisation,[140] for instance, as well as imitating his 'ironic narrative, authorial and paratextual play'.[141] On the one hand, the setting therefore reflects the need for an authentically Scottian, i.e. British, location, and Alexis may well have viewed the various British nations as interchangeable; Bertram certainly conflates Wales and England in the narrative on several occasions.[142] Equally, some German critics still seem to confuse the British nations when writing about both Alexis and Scott.[143] If Alexis did indeed think of Britain in this way, it is curious that he did not choose England as a setting for his Scottian work, or more pertinently Scotland, given that the latter was the setting for the vast majority of Scott novels that had been published prior to *Walladmor*.[144] As Scott had not yet used Wales as a setting, nor would he again after his 1825 novel *The Betrothed*, Alexis's references to Wales seem to be his own.[145] This in turn suggests that Wales held a particular, personal attraction for him when writing *Walladmor*.

Despite some apparent geographical confusion in the narrative, Bertram is certainly drawn to the very fringes of Britain, and the edges of Wales in particular. Most of the action happens on or near the Welsh coast or its various islands, such as Anglesey. Meanwhile other, more central locations tend to be in England rather than Wales (Manchester and London being the key examples) and described from a distance, usually as the backdrop for political events, rather than personally experienced by Bertram. It is also revealed that Sir Walladmor, the local Welsh landowner and Justice of the Peace, never travels to London any more, which further suggests

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[140] Thomas, '*Walladmor*: A Pseudo-Translation of Sir Walter Scott', p. 222.
[141] Lucy Linforth, *Tom Toremans on 'The Ghostly Afterlives of Walter Scott'* [online blog] <http://www.blogs.hss.ed.ac.uk/history-of-the-book/tom-toremans-on-the-ghostly-afterlives-of-walter-scott/> [accessed 29 August 2016]. See also Thomas, '*Walladmor*: A Pseudo-Translation of Sir Walter Scott', p. 223.
[142] For example, when expressing his desire to travel 'Nach England, nach der Küste von Wales' ['To England, to the coast of Wales'] (Alexis, I, 53).
[143] e.g. Michael Niehaus, 'Vaterländische Probleme: Willibald Alexis', *Zeitschrift für Germanistik.* 10 (2000), 521-35 (p. 522 and p. 524) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23975635> [accessed 20 August 2016].
[144] According to Lucy Linforth, *Walladmor* was also only one of sixteen Scott pseudo-translations in Germany between 1822 and 1827, although it is unclear whether any of the others were set in Wales. *Tom Toremans on 'The Ghostly Afterlives of Walter Scott'*.
[145] *The Betrothed* was unfinished when *Walladmor* appeared but in the process of being printed, leading to suspicions that details had been leaked or pages stolen (Ernest Rhys, 'Editor's Introduction' in Walter Scott, *The Betrothed, The Highland Widow and Other Tales* (London: Dent, 1907), pp. vii-x (p. viii)). Thomas acknowledges that 'Alexis may have heard that Scott was composing a novel staged in Wales' but anything more is 'extremely unlikely'; besides, the Welsh setting is ultimately the only detail the two novels have in common ('*Walladmor*: A Pseudo-Translation of Sir Walter Scott', p. 224). The suggestion that Alexis was drawn to a Welsh setting of his own accord does not therefore seem unreasonable.

that Wales is at a remove from the worldly reality embodied by the capital.[146] This sense of the otherworldly in Wales is reinforced by the mysterious characters, identities and events there, and by Sir Walladmor himself, who at one point states that 'ich will das Fremde nicht in Wales dulden, sintemal die Wälischen die älteste, adlichste und reinste Nation sind seit Erschaffung der Welt' ['I do not want to tolerate the foreign in Wales, since the Welsh are the oldest, noblest and purest nation since the creation of the world'].[147] As a result, it could be argued that the features previously seen in Arnim's Wales — namely distance, dramatic possibility and mystery — can also be seen in *Walladmor*, concerned as it is with journeys, edges, identity and intrigue. Again, the choice of a Welsh setting, when the author potentially had the rest of Britain at his creative disposal, seems to anticipate the ways in which the corpus authors also view and use Wales in their fiction.

Some critics seem to downplay the importance of a specific setting in *Walladmor*, however. In an article on the subject of German nationalism in nineteenth-century historical novels, Michael Niehaus implies that the success of these texts among contemporary German readers relied on the action merely taking place *elsewhere*, as demonstrated by Alexis; Niehaus describes *Walladmor*'s setting as being 'naturgemäß nicht in Deutschland' ['naturally not in Germany'].[148] Niehaus also quotes Wilhelm Hauff, a contemporary of Alexis (they reviewed each other's work at various times), according to whom 'Die Deutschen hätten es sich einfach angewöhnt, das Fremde und Ausländische zu bewundern, "nicht, weil es groß und erhaben, sondern weil es nicht in unseren Tälern gewachsen ist"' ['The Germans had simply got used to venerating the unfamiliar and the foreign, "not because it is great or exalted, but because it has not grown in our valleys"'].[149] And yet Alexis's 'literary hoax' would arguably have been less successful had it been set elsewhere in Britain, as the whole conceit surely relied on its Welsh, and therefore less familiar, setting.[150] While its German readers may have been equally, personally unfamiliar with Scotland or even parts of England, they would no doubt have known Scott's literary depictions of them, and may not have been so easily fooled by imitation. It seems less likely, however, that

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[146] Alexis, I, 233-34.
[147] Ibid., 255.
[148] Niehaus, p. 524.
[149] Ibid., p. 523.
[150] Thomas, '*Walladmor*: A Pseudo-Translation of Sir Walter Scott', p. 218.

this could be said of their knowledge of Wales, literary or otherwise: Wales and Welsh culture were 'peripheral' even for contemporary scholars of the Celtic such as the Brothers Grimm.[151] Moreover, despite the availability of German travel accounts of Wales, there was very little Welsh literature accessible to German-speaking audiences in the early nineteenth century. Welsh texts 'did not enjoy the widespread dissemination of Burns, Scott or Macpherson' in Germany, nor were there any such 'advocates for the Welsh voice'.[152] Even the *Mabinogion*, for example, had not yet been translated into English at this point: the first English edition, by Lady Charlotte Guest, was published in several volumes between 1838 and 1849, and sections would not become available in German until 1842. These factors meant that Scotland in the 1820s was already a site of Scottian 'cultural pilgrimage' for Germans, while Wales, it seems, was only just being discovered.[153] A particularly extensive contemporary account of Wales is Julius Rodenberg's *Ein Herbst in Wales. Land und Leute, Märchen und Lieder*, which will be the final text discussed in this chapter. Although not published until 1858, even some modern German scholars treat this as 'the first German travelogue to deal with Wales'.[154]

It thus seems fair to assume that there was initially no strongly-defined image of Wales in the nineteenth-century German imagination, suggesting that its role as a setting was nearer to creative *space* than to a distinct and recognisable *place*. In *Walladmor*, as we have just seen, the frequent use of closed spaces, such as boats, coaches, caves and towers, also seems to point to Wales as space to be manipulated, rather than a place already defined. As in Arnim's Wales, however, Alexis focuses more closely on people and the past than the corpus authors do, and he only makes limited reference to Bertrand's home country of Germany (as it is initially believed to be), so the duality of physical space and place does not yet seem to have achieved the prominence it will have in the corpus. Time is a much more obvious theme than place, especially given that *Walladmor* was marketed as a historical novel. Scott himself seemed to appreciate

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[151] Tully, 'The Celtic Misconnection', p. 131.
[152] Ibid., p. 140.
[153] Ibid., p. 141.
[154] Ibid., p. 132. Tully gives the example of Stephan Zimmer in his essay 'Julius Rodenberg und Ferdinand Walter — deutsche Annäherungen an Wales im 19. Jahrhundert' in *150 Jahre Mabinogion — Deutsch-Walisische Kulturbeziehungen*, ed. by Bernhard Maier und Stephan Zimmer (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2001). In her own article she identifies two travelogues, as well as Arnim's 'Owen Tudor', which were set in Wales and published decades before Rodenberg's text. The European Travellers to Wales project has since uncovered many more.

Alexis's choice of setting. Responding to *Walladmor* in the introduction to *The Betrothed*, presented as the minutes of a board meeting between the author and various characters in the novel, he writes the following exchange:

> 'For shame, Mr. Templeton,' said the Preses; 'there are good things in *Walladmor*, I assure you, had the writer known anything about the country in which he laid the scene.'
> 'Or had he the wit, like some of ourselves, to lay the scene in such a remote or distant country that nobody should be able to back-speer him,' said Mr. Oldbuck.
> 'Why, as to that,' said the Preses, 'you must consider the thing was got up for the German market, where folks are no better judges of Welsh manners than of Welsh *crw* [sic].'[155]

This supports both the suggestions in this chapter regarding Alexis's Welsh setting: firstly, that Wales was sufficiently 'remote or distant' for contemporary German readers to be unfamiliar to them, and, secondly, that such an unfamiliar setting might have been expressly sought out by the author for the creative freedom it would afford. In the case of Wales, this can be seen to manifest itself particularly in a desire to maintain its unfamiliarity, and thus emphasize its foreignness, in order to cultivate an air of mystery in the narrative and make strange events possible. There is certainly very little emphasis here on getting the reader acquainted with the Welsh setting — quite the opposite, perhaps — and anything we do learn is often filtered through the ultra-subjective gaze of the protagonist, who, it is known, is preoccupied with his own inner struggles. The vague and mysterious nature of Wales in the text therefore implies, once again, that its appeal as a setting lies in its ability to offer a creative *space* to be moulded at will, while *place* is geographically somewhere else. In the case of *Walladmor* it is England which mostly provides the contrast, and perhaps makes for a stronger spatial duality than was seen in 'Owen Tudor'. As well as otherness arising from the fact that the protagonist is a foreigner in Britain, as in Arnim's

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[155] Scott, p. 14. *Crw* is presumably meant to be *cwrw* [beer].

narrative, the unfamiliarity of Wales in *Walladmor* is juxtaposed with well-known English locations such as Bristol, London and Manchester, and with notorious contemporary events such as the 1820 Cato Street Conspiracy. The next chapter will show that this particular duality is carried over into the first of the corpus texts, with the juxtaposition of England (specifically London) and Wales being crucial to Szerb's narrative in *The Pendragon Legend*. Like Arnim, Alexis engages with Welshness to an extent, but the defining characteristic of Wales and the Welsh, rather than relating to some innate quality, seems to be that it, and they, are not like anywhere or anyone else. This leaves the author to fill in the blanks, and results in a narrative which leaves a much clearer impression of the *effects* of a Welsh setting on the characters and the plot than of what Wales might actually be like. By contrast, the next text to be discussed, Rodenberg's *Ein Herbst in Wales. Land und Leute, Märchen und Lieder* seems ostensibly to have the opposite aim.

Julius Rodenberg, Ein Herbst in Wales. Land und Leute, Märchen und Lieder*, 1858*

Julius Rodenberg was a German journalist and writer. He published novels, poetry and accounts of his extensive travels in Europe and edited several influential periodicals of the time (including the *Deutsche Rundschau*, which he also founded). *Ein Herbst in Wales* immediately seems to differ from Arnim's and Alexis's Welsh texts in two ways. Firstly, it is presented as a non-fictional account of the author's own autumn sojourn in Wales. Secondly, Rodenberg's Welsh setting is more thoroughly explored, and appears to have been laid out in much greater detail for the reader, rather than being used to underline narrative obscurity, intrigue and deception as it seems to in the two earlier texts. Rodenberg's reader is invited to share his journey and experiences, seeing and learning what he sees and learns, and is left with the impression of knowing more about Wales than he or she did before reading the text. This is not something which would necessarily strike the reader on reaching the end of 'Owen Tudor' or *Walladmor,* where Wales acts as a creative space at the author's disposal rather than a well-defined place and the main object of study. Despite these differences, *Ein Herbst in Wales* also has features in common with the earlier nineteenth-century fiction discussed above. Certainly Rodenberg sets out to educate his reader about Wales, rather than simply using his setting to create an effective

and entertaining narrative. However, his version of Wales is by no means immune to literary exploitation, and to being used not just as a subject but as a narrative device. Here, too, the Welsh setting provides a particular distance, dramatic possibility and sense of mystery that the author might not have found, or been able to use so freely, anywhere else. Rodenberg also includes a selection of translated Welsh poetry, songs and folk tales in his narrative, as well as essays on topics such as Welsh poetry and music. The positioning of these as an 'Intermezzo' in the main travel account, as well as the use of Wales as a narrative device, could be seen to justify the text's inclusion in this chapter and in the thesis as a whole, because the juxtaposition of the author's own experiences and Welsh myth and legend both underlines and blurs the distinction between fact and fiction, and earthly and otherworldly, in a way that makes the label 'travelogue' seem inadequate. Had the material in the 'Intermezzo' been placed at the end of the main narrative, the effect might not have been so disorientating. However, Rodenberg's decision to place it in the middle, thus interrupting the journey and his telling of it, suggests that he is deliberately drawing attention to the contrast between the different sections, styles and worlds, and perhaps hoping to disorientate the reader.

Distance in *Ein Herbst in Wales* is immediately obvious, even before Rodenberg begins to describe his actual travels. In an opening dedication to 'Baroness Lionel von Rothschild auf Gunersbury bei London', the contrast between his Welsh 'Hochlandstraum' ['upland dream'] and subsequent return to a London which is foggy, 'ernst und verschlossen' ['sober and shuttered'] implies that Wales is far from this urban reality and not quite like anywhere else.[156] This distance persists in a physical sense as the author travels to Wales, from bustling Liverpool via progressively smaller settlements (Chester, followed by the village of Aber), until he reaches his destination, Wern Farm (just outside Aber).[157] An awkward exchange with a ticket clerk at Chester station, who cannot understand Rodenberg's pronunciation of 'Aber', may well have been embellished for the narrative, but whether real or not it serves to reinforce the foreignness of both traveller and destination, and hints at the strange encounters to come.[158] Certainly, as the

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[156] Rodenberg, no pagination. The author is referring to German-born Charlotte von Rothschild (1819–1884), wife of Baron Lionel Nathan de Rothschild, and Gunnersbury Park, the Rothschilds' estate in West London.
[157] 'Aber' is now known as Abergwyngregyn, a coastal village between Bangor and Conwy.
[158] Rodenberg, pp. 12-13.

narrative progresses, Wales's distance could be said to take on an otherworldly aspect. The 'Intermezzo' of Welsh folk tales translated into German, for example, shows that there are other, fairy worlds within Wales itself, and many stories of travel between them and the everyday.[159] This interlude therefore introduces dramatic possibility which is unique to the Welsh setting, because although only certain people are granted access to the otherworldly, it is never far away, suggesting an undercurrent of suspense in Wales and Welsh life which in turn bleeds into the narrative. Introducing a break into Rodenberg's account of his journey may also have carried the implication, playful or otherwise, that the author himself had spent time with the fairies. If so, the implied distance of an otherworldly journey evokes Welsh settings in the corpus, which are frequently portrayed as occupying the furthest possible edge.

A curious feature of *Ein Herbst in Wales* is the representation of time, and the suggestion that it works differently in a Welsh setting. This, too, contributes to the sense of distance found in Wales, and will also be major factor in all of the corpus texts. Once again, the 'Intermezzo' contributes to this effect on two levels. Firstly, within the folktale narratives, those who enter the fairy realm return to this world to find that years have passed without them, although they themselves have not aged. Secondly, returning to the main, earthly narrative after such a break, which amounts to nearly half of the total pages in the text but for Rodenberg apparently only represents a few weeks, is almost as disorientating for the reader as it must have been for those returning from time spent with the fairies.[160] In practical terms, the pause enables a temporal leap which helps move the narrative along, bringing a change of seasons and of spiritual direction: his in-depth investigation of Welsh literature reminds Rodenberg how much he loves his native German poetry, and the main narrative re-opens with a rhapsodic tribute to the culture of Germany rather than of Wales. The particular distance and dramatic possibility Rodenberg is able to exploit here, using indigenous folklore as a source of suspense and a means to distort time and reality, naturally contributes a sense of mystery to the Welsh setting. So, too, does Rodenberg's attitude to authorship and identity. For example, he makes extensive use of poetry throughout, whether original or in translation, German, English or Welsh, or literary or popular;

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[159] Rodenberg, pp. 95-187.
[160] Ibid., p. 243. The 'Intermezzo' runs to around 150 pages in all (of 326), including sixty-five *penillion* (a form of vocal improvisation over a given melody) and musings on other aspects of Welsh culture.

for example, references to Goethe and Shakespeare exist alongside poetic duels traditionally performed at Welsh marriage celebrations. However, not all quotations are fully referenced, so the reader is often left wondering where a poem has come from and who wrote it. This leaves the impression of a general poetic backdrop in Rodenberg's Welsh setting, where all kinds of poems gather and merge indistinctly. Along with the folklore woven into the narrative's structure and content, it also suggests that there is no distinct border in Wales between the real and the otherworldly, linking this ostensibly non-fictional account with similar themes in earlier nineteenth-century fiction by Arnim and Alexis. Rodenberg's selective referencing is a reminder, too, that he is an interpreter of Welsh culture in more ways than one. He alone has not only collected and translated but also *arranged* the stories, songs and poems for the German reader, some of which, such as the sixty-five penillion translated in the 'Intermezzo', are apparently being presented in German for the first time.[161] The implication that such material is only accessible through a knowledgeable intermediary, like Rodenberg himself, therefore makes Wales appear further away and less tangible than ever. Choosing a setting which is inherently distant, dramatic and mysterious thus seems crucial to Rodenberg's narrative intent, for it gave him a degree of creative freedom over his material that may not have been possible in a better-known place. Knowing that his readers would be largely unfamiliar with Wales allowed him to mould it and its culture to his narrative, blending fact and fantasy to control how much or how little is revealed.

Although initially not an obvious successor to Arnim and Alexis, it could be argued that Rodenberg also makes use of a space/place duality when writing about Wales. Of the three nineteenth-century texts, *Ein Herbst in Wales* is without doubt the one in which Welshness and a sense of place in Wales are strongest: Rodenberg as narrator undoubtedly experiences 'the local and the bound' while staying on a family farm, for example.[162] At the same time, he also makes use of Welsh space, distinct from place, as the earlier authors have done. Sometimes the duality is geographical, and the Welsh setting is contrasted with more familiar locations such as England or Germany. This maintains a sense of the narrator's own foreignness and the fact that Wales is

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[161] Rodenberg, p. xv.
[162] Escobar quoted in Cresswell, p. 34.

other to him. At other times, however, the duality exists within Wales itself, as the narrative moves from real, named locations, and ordinary, everyday life, into otherworldly fairy realms which distort space and time. As in 'Owen Tudor', then, Rodenberg uses Welsh space as a source of difference and tension and as a vehicle for his plot. Like Arnim's coach device, Rodenberg's fairy world embedded in the middle of his narrative recalls Tuan's linking of space with movement, and of place with being stationary: in the Welsh folklore described by Rodenberg, this fantastical space enables movement between the everyday and the otherworldly, while in the main travel narrative it enables the narrator and the reader to move from one time or place to another. Meanwhile, as in Alexis's novel *Walladmor*, Rodenberg constructs a duality between different and remote *space* in Wales and better-known *places* elsewhere.

Conclusion

Distant and different, Wales has thus proved to be a particularly attractive setting for fictional narratives since 1750, and to native Welsh authors as much as to authors from outside Wales. Firstly, its marginal position, both in cultural and geographical terms, seems to invite the exploration of certain themes such as identity, belonging and otherness on the periphery, which are common to all the texts discussed in this chapter and will also be seen in the corpus texts for this thesis. Secondly, for non-Welsh and especially non-British authors, the inherent distance, drama and mystery of Wales, compared with other, more familiar and perhaps more pedestrian places, not only offers space for the fantastical in their narratives, but also the opportunity to explore fantasy's relationship with reality. This seems to be a key attraction for the three nineteenth-century German authors whose Welsh settings are shown above. Their protagonists firstly all travel *to* Wales, distancing themselves from their usual, familiar environments. On arrival they find that dramatic events are intensified or magnified by their Welsh setting, with its layers of myth and legend and eccentric characters who are rarely what they seem. Drama and suspense are often paralleled in stories within the main narrative, which are often inspired by indigenous Welsh folklore and in turn tend to involve mysterious identities and disguise; at times all the narrative strands seem to run together, blurring the distinction between fantasy and reality both for the characters within and the reader without. The whole has a striking effect upon the

reader, who not only shares the protagonists' lack of familiarity with the Welsh setting but also experiences the drama and mystery on every level.

In *Walladmor*, for instance, the Welsh setting is presumably part of Alexis's attempt to produce a convincing 'Scott' novel, as suggested above. Its distance from Scott's usual and too-familiar territory appears to play a vital role in maintaining the novel's general pretence, because Wales was plausibly Scottian in its people and problems but exotic enough to allow a high level of creative freedom: choosing an unusual and largely undiscovered literary territory ensures a personalised backdrop for the aspiring 'Walter Scott der Mark Brandenburg' ['Walter Scott of the March of Brandenburg'].[163] Rodenberg, too, makes use of Welsh exoticism for the purposes of creative control. *Ein Herbst in Wales* ostensibly seeks to interpret and inform, but the prominence of distance, drama and mystery in the narrative suggests that atmosphere is just as important as factual accuracy, if not more so, when recounting the author's Welsh travels. It is Arnim, however, who seems most fully to exploit and mould Wales to his narrative, in terms of both structure and subject matter. As Tully points out, the mail coach 'trope' makes possible 'the transfer of the writer from one scene to another, able to select at will the sights and incidents which fill his pages', while the Welsh setting provides layers (a 'typical' Arnim feature) in the form of 'outer and inner narratives as well as [...] periods and narrative voices'.[164] The result, according to one nineteenth-century critic, is a narrative 'in dem Geschichte und Sage, Wunder und Wirklichkeit des Augenblicks so lieblich in einander spielen' ['in which history and legend, wonder and reality of the moment blend into each other so sweetly'].[165] One possible reason for such layering is critical distance: as well as being physically far away from the author's and audience's world, Wales provides cultural oddities to marvel at, such as the memorable 'Jumpers' of the Welsh Methodist Revival, as well as the means to express an opinion on them through indigenous characters. Being eccentric, mysterious or simply unique to Wales, these characters embody their strange and faraway setting, lending authenticity to the surprising or unfamiliar but never tempering the exotic effect.

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[163] Friedrich Brunold, 'Der kranke Verfasser des Walladmor', *Die Gartenlaube*, 15 (1866), 232-33 (p. 232) <https://de.wikisource.org/wiki/Der_kranke_Verfasser_des_Walladmor> [accessed 2 April 2016].
[164] Tully, 'The Celtic Misconnection', p. 136.
[165] Moriz Carriere quoted in Arnim, p. 1075.

Speaking in the 1960s, Michel Foucault called history '[t]he great obsession of the nineteenth century [...]: with its themes of development and of suspension, of crisis and cycle, themes of the ever-accumulating past, with its great preponderance of dead men and the menacing glaciation of the world'.[166] It is a sentiment which seems to ring true with the three nineteenth-century authors discussed here, who use their Welsh settings to gain access to the past. This historical Welsh space tends to be defined by human features such as culture, usually in the form of legend and folklore, and in fact all three protagonists encounter local elders who seem to embody Wales's otherness and act as cultural gatekeepers. The juxtaposition of the past with more recent history, in the form of socio-political events in Britain, creates a temporal duality of the old and the contemporary which reinforces the sense of distance between Wales and everywhere else, though never severing the link between the two. Whether to escape or better understand the present, the overall effect is otherness and a sense that the improbable can be a reality in a setting which is culturally and temporally so far away. Space here is secondary to time, demonstrated by the authors' attitudes to the Welsh landscape. While landscape does become increasingly visible, progressing from being barely mentioned in Arnim's 'Owen Tudor' to being described in detail in Rodenberg's *Ein Herbst in Wales*, this chapter argues that in all three nineteenth-century texts it is mostly in the background, providing scenery for the stories, characters and mysteries encountered. The idea of Wales — distant, dramatic, mysterious — seems to be more important here than its physical features, even in Rodenberg's travel account. People, and their histories, relationships and stories, are therefore the driving factor in the narratives explored in this chapter, whether or not any can be described as authentically Welsh.

By contrast we will see that the corpus authors, while maintaining and even intensifying Wales's otherness, clearly shift their gaze from its human and social features like Welsh history and culture to its physical, spatial ones. Their narratives reveal a postmodern yearning not just for a different, marginal *place*, but a certain kind of *space* containing very few Welsh people and indeed very few characters at all beyond the protagonists. This 'unpeopling' is facilitated and

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[166] Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces.' trans. by Jay Miskowiec, *Diacritics*, 16 (1986), 22-27 (p. 22). <www.jstor.org/stable/464648> [accessed 21 May 2018].

underlined by the fact that the protagonists themselves are outsiders, because they are already looking to Wales as an escape or hiding place in which to ignore indigenous cultural associations and avoid personal contacts, both past and present, and any cultural framework is usually brought from somewhere else. In this way they differ from the nineteenth-century German protagonists, who, although foreigners in Wales, are not aiming for escape or introspection while there, but instead seek out Welsh people, history and culture and a largely temporal sense of distance. There is thus relatively little tension between their places of origin and the Welsh space they encounter in the texts. In the corpus texts, however, a more literal sense of distance does nothing to lessen the constant interference and opposition between space and place, which often takes on an otherworldly quality, juxtaposing real, known places and strange, unfamiliar space in Wales. Welshness fades to almost nothing in these later texts, to be replaced by an intense inward focus, almost unlimited creative and imaginative possibilities, and a complete contrast to the protagonists' lives elsewhere. The consequence of Wales's otherness in these narratives is that there is no clear distinction between truth and fiction, the real and the invented, and the past and the present. These blurred lines are doubled for the reader, especially if that reader is not British, for although the setting has the name of a real place and may not be entirely unheard-of, what it contains has nevertheless been constructed by the author. Once again, there is a postmodern flavour to this increased and highly individualised spatial engagement. Foucault seems to have predicted the 'spatial turn' of the 1980s and 1990s, and the spatial duality so strong in European fiction set in Wales, when he stated that '[t]he present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space. We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed'.[167] But the specific choice of Wales suggests that the setting itself, being unfamiliar, other and inherently dramatic and confusing, is instrumental in creating or providing this empty space and the accompanying narrative tension. The next chapter will show how the Hungarian author Antal Szerb, writing fiction in the 1930s, bridges Foucault's two eras and demonstrates the beginnings of a particular European interest in Welsh space.

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[167] Foucault, p. 22.

Chapter 2 — A Private Welsh Universe of Personal Obsessions

Antal Szerb, *A Pendragon Legenda*, 1934

A shift from people to place and space in Welsh settings begins in Antal Szerb's novel *A Pendragon Legenda*, translated into English as *The Pendragon Legend*.[168] The three nineteenth-century German authors discussed in the previous chapter are largely drawn to the human features of Wales, such as people, history and culture, and their Welsh settings are characterised by temporal and cultural otherness rather than spatial distance. Meanwhile, space in the European corpus texts is prized above all else. These narratives emphasize physical distance and difference in Wales, with the protagonists increasingly searching for a blank space in which to exist for a while, and where it is possible to have very little engagement with Welsh people, history and culture. *The Pendragon Legend*, as the first corpus text, fittingly appears to bridge the two eras and recall a wider critical shift, identified by Foucault, from the nineteenth-century 'obsession' with history towards the postmodern 'epoch of space'.[169] This is because, of all the corpus authors, Szerb arguably engages the most with cultural and historical aspects of Welshness, yet his Welsh landscape also takes on an important narrative role.

Szerb was a celebrated Hungarian academic and author, who studied in Graz and Budapest and later lived in Italy, Paris and London. Despite being baptised and raised a Catholic, his Jewish parentage led to increasing persecution: his work was censored and he was barred from academic posts, before being deported to a concentration camp in western Hungary where he was beaten to death in 1945. *The Pendragon Legend* was Szerb's debut novel. Its protagonist is János Bátky, a young Hungarian scholar living in London, who describes his occupation as 'assisting elderly Englishmen in the pursuit of their intellectual whims'.[170] While carrying out research in London at the British Museum, he is invited to Llanvygan Castle in North Wales as a guest of Owen Pendragon, the Earl of Gwynedd; both the earl and his ancestral castle appear to be fictional. Bátky's special research interest is early English mysticism, in which the Earl has a

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[168] The English version of the novel used in this thesis was translated by Len Rix (London: Pushkin Press, 2007, repr. 2010) and the English title will be used hereafter. For other versions consulted, see Bibliography.
[169] Foucault, p. 22.
[170] Szerb, *The Pendragon Legend*, p. 9.

professional and ultimately personal involvement, and during his stay in Wales the Pendragon family legend manifests itself in ghostly horsemen, prophecies of doom, empty tombs, death threats and human sacrifice. Suspense builds as various characters attempt to gain access to the body of the Earl's ancestor Asaph Pendragon, who is revealed to be the founding member of the secret Rosicrucian order and believed to possess alchemic secrets. At the same time, other characters set about solving the identity of Llanvygan's eerie nocturnal rider, whose appearance sometimes has fatal consequences. As well as the Hungarian protagonist, the international cast includes English, Welsh, Irish, Scottish and German characters, all of whom are caricatured at some point. Despite the consideration of serious spiritual concerns, such as immortality, the narrative tone is playfully humorous throughout.

Fittingly for an author who, according to Len Rix, 'defies classification', *The Pendragon Legend* is difficult to categorise.[171] Nicholas Lezard, for example, feels 'almost as if it is three or four novels at once', with hints of Sherlock Holmes, *The Da Vinci Code* and Evelyn Waugh.[172] Most reviewers summarise it as a combination of ghost story and crime fiction,[173] with aspects of the gothic novel, science fiction and the occult and romance.[174] At the same time, it is also 'a parody of them all'.[175] One blogger memorably describes the novel as 'Tintin for grown-ups'.[176] No evidence has been found while researching this thesis that Szerb was aware of or had read

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[171] Paul Morrow, 'The Len Rix Interview', *The Quarterly Conversation*, 7 December 2009 <http://quarterlyconversation.com/the-len-rix-interview [accessed 31 July 2017].

[172] Nicholas Lezard, 'A Hungarian in Wales', *The Guardian*, 17 June 2006 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2006/jun/17/featuresreviews.guardianreview21> [accessed 13 October 2013].

[173] See for example Ivan Sanders, 'Szerb, Antal' in *The Yivo Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe* (New York: YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, 2010) <http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Szerb_Antal> [accessed 17 March 2014]; István Nemeskürty and others, *A History of Hungarian Literature*, ed. by Tibor Klaniczay, trans. by István Farkas and others (Budapest: Corvina, 1983), p. 459; and György Poszler, 'The Writer Who Believed in Miracles', *The Hungarian Quarterly*, 43 (2002), 19-28.

[174] See, respectively, Kolja Mensing, 'Reiter um Mitternacht. Ein neu übersetzter Roman des wiederentdeckten Antal Szerb', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 24 December 2004 <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/buecher/rezensionen/belletristik/reiter-um-mitternacht-1197578.html> [accessed 18 March 2014]; Emit Lengyel, review of *The Pendragon Legend*, by Antal Szerb, *Books Abroad*, 38 (1964), 431-32; and Len Rix, 'Translator's Afterword' in Szerb, *The Pendragon Legend*, pp. 235-36 (p. 235).

[175] Lengyel, p. 432. See also Len Rix, 'Oliver's Return. The Subtle Artistry of Antal Szerb', *The Hungarian Quarterly*, 48 (2007), 61-72 (p. 64) and Paul Bailey, review of *The Pendragon Legend*, by Antal Szerb, trans. by Len Rix, *The Independent*, 10 July 2006 < http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/reviews/the-pendragon-legend-by-antal-szerb-translated-by-len-rix-407327.html> [accessed 17 March 2014].

[176] Emily Rhodes, *The Pendragon Legend* [online blog], <http://emilybooks.wordpress.com/2013/08/21/the-pendragon-legend/> [accessed 17 March 2014].

Hergé, whose first *Tintin* adventure was published in Belgium in 1929, but the blogger's reference does seem to capture the spirit of Szerb's fast-paced, action-packed narrative full of jokes, thrills, farce and mystery. Some critics have also identified in Szerb's fiction '[t]he fertilising power of the Celtic intellectual legacy' in Hungary.[177] For others, however, the Celtic element is merely one strand of a multi-layered narrative.[178] More frequently and consistently mentioned are Szerb's love of British culture and literature and his particular sense of affectionate irony, generously applied to himself and everyone and everything around him. Certainly *The Pendragon Legend*'s supernatural elements are counteracted throughout by the whodunit-style plotline and the protagonist Bátky's anti-hero status, for ultimately the various mysteries are solved and everyone carries on as before. Nevertheless, we can see some darker Celtic influence in Szerb's use of the Arthurian name *Pendragon* and the Earl of Gwynedd's ancestral quest, as well as in his interpretations of Welsh mythology involving lake legends, ghosts and prophets.

Although well-liked by his contemporaries and generally thought of as kind, funny and extremely intelligent, Szerb remains the most enigmatic of the European authors studied in this thesis. His major works of fiction have only been published in Britain fairly recently, and there is limited critical and biographical material available in English. Despite being warmly described by his translators as one of Hungary's 'most accomplished and most likeable [literary] figures' and even its 'most respected writer' in his time, and although his novels are said to have enduring popularity at home and abroad, Szerb is mainly celebrated in Hungary for his scholarly work, not for his popular fiction.[179] In Joseph Reményi's *Hungarian Writers and Literature. Modern Novelists, Critics and Poets*, for example, Szerb is used as a source more often than he is written about: three of the four entries under his name in the index are references, quoting from his critical works, and he does not merit his own chapter.[180] His contemporaries knew him as a polyglot scholar and essayist who contributed to the major Budapest journals (such as *Nyugat*

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[177] Miklós Szabó, *The Celtic heritage in Hungary*, trans. by Paul Aston (Budapest: Corvina, 1971), p. 74.

[178] For example, Zsuzsa Fülöp, 'The Image of Britain in Antal Szerb's Works' in *A tűnődések valósága. The Reality of Ruminations*, ed. by Judit Borbély and Zsolt Czigányik (Budapest: ELTE, 2010), pp. 253-63 (p. 256).

[179] See Géza Hegedüs, 'Introduction' in Antal Szerb, *The Pendragon Legend*, trans. Lili Halápy (Budapest: Corvina, 1963), pp. 5-7 (p. 6) and Rix, 'Translator's Afterword' in *The Pendragon Legend*, p. 235.

[180] Joseph Reményi, *Hungarian Writers and Literature. Modern Novelists, Critics and Poets* (New Brunswick and New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1964).

[*The West*] and the English-language *Hungarian Quarterly*) and moved in Budapest's intellectual circles, and whose principal literary legacy is a 'still unsurpassed' history of Hungarian literature.[181] Szerb's fiction, however, has attracted little attention in Hungarian criticism, a fact frequently lamented by the translator Rix.[182] One reason for this, Rix suggests, is Szerb's tendency to write about places other than his home country, as demonstrated by the mainly Welsh (and wholly British) setting for *The Pendragon Legend*. That a writer whose fiction remains outside the canon was drawn to a non-canonical, geographically marginal setting gives the novel a physical, spatial sense of marginal exploration.[183]

Some historicist critics regard Szerb's novels as quasi-allegorical, given that they were written against a backdrop of rising tension in 1930s Europe.[184] This makes it tempting to view the marginal Welsh setting as a declaration of solidarity with small-nation struggle and oppression. Yet Rix describes Szerb's 'cast of mind' as 'humane rather than ideological, mystical rather than political'.[185] A more likely attraction of the Welsh setting could in fact be its perceived distance, both cultural and physical, from mainstream European realities: the otherness of Wales, underlined in the novel by frequent comparisons to a more modern, concrete and cosmopolitan existence in London, allows Szerb to access space untainted by real-world associations and there to indulge in pure fantasy. On the other hand, this otherness would be less effective without the stark contrast of London, whose urban sophistication, in the form of museums, hotels and restaurants, would have been generally recognisable to Hungarian readers even if names and reputations were foreign. The two contrasting settings generate deliberate narrative tension, allowing fantasy and the irrational to exist alongside rational reality; an encounter with one reminds the reader of the existence of the other, and vice versa. It is possible that this was partly motivated by the author's own desire to escape 1930s reality, whether in the form of rationality and realism in the arts or hostile politics. Once again, however, the evidence

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[181] Paul Lendvai, *The Hungarians. 1000 Years of Victory in Defeat*, trans. by Ann Major (London: Hurst & Company, 2003), p. 6. The work in question was *A magyar irodalom története*, published in 1934.

[182] Rix, 'Oliver's Return. The Subtle Artistry of Antal Szerb', pp. 71-72. See also Vali Tóth, 'The Text Reveals Itself: Vali Tóth Talks with Len Rix', *The Hungarian Quarterly*, 51 (2010), 43-50 (p. 49).

[183] Morrow, 'The Len Rix Interview'.

[184] See for example Mensing, 'Reiter um Mitternacht. Ein neu übersetzter Roman des wiederentdeckten Antal Szerb'; Bailey, *The Pendragon Legend*; and Rhodes, *The Pendragon Legend*.

[185] Len Rix, 'Translator's Afterword' in Antal Szerb, *Journey by Moonlight*, trans. and rev. by Len Rix (London, Pushkin Press, 2007; repr. 2009), pp. 233-34 (p. 234).

suggests that rather than a political or social agenda, *The Pendragon Legend* embodies themes of very personal interest to 'a brilliantly ironical but never cynical mind, more in keeping with the eighteenth than the twentieth century.'[186] The narrative's 'life-loving, playful' humour, and the characters' experiences and obsessions, all reflect and probe the author's own, which embraced the academic and intellectual as well as a fascination with mysticism, spirituality and 'all kinds of religious experience'.[187] These come together in the novel to produce a Welsh setting defined more strongly by Szerb's individual 'cast of mind' than anything native to Wales. The fact that the whole is narrated by the flawed and often foolish Bátky both acknowledges and questions this highly subjective construct.

Szerb's love of Britain was undoubtedly a driving force behind his choice of setting. *The Pendragon Legend* was written not long after he had spent 'an enchanted year' (1929–1930) doing postdoctoral research in Britain, so it seems likely that the decision to set his first novel there was inspired by recent personal experience of its people and its culture.[188] Tellingly, however, Szerb's enthusiasm is mostly described as a love for all things 'English', with 'the category 'English' to include Irish, Scots and Welsh'.[189] In Géza Hegedüs's introduction to an early translation of *The Pendragon Legend*, for example, there are around twenty-five references in total to 'England' or 'English' and only one instance each of 'Wales' and 'Welsh'.[190] Equally there is frequent mislabelling in the novel itself, with Wales sometimes being referred to as England, or Welsh characters and characteristics as English. The Welsh landscape contains largely generic features such as ruined castles, mountains, lakes and woods, and ordinary Welsh characters in the novel are much less developed than the aristocratic Pendragons. In their stock roles, which include a nervous priest, two mad prophets and superstitious peasants in medieval dress, ordinary Welsh people are rarely directly involved in key events in the plot, such as intrepid assaults on ruined castles or eureka moments in the solving of various narrative mysteries. Instead such characters exist on the sidelines, being largely absent towards the

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[186] Rix, 'Translator's Afterword' in *Journey by Moonlight*, p. 234.
[187] Ibid., p. 234 and Rix, 'The Late Great Antal Szerb'.
[188] Rix, 'Translator's Afterword' in *The Pendragon Legend*, p. 235.
[189] Ibid., p. 235.
[190] Hegedüs, pp. 5-7. The closing sentence is typical: '[a]nd Szerb wrote in such a way as to make the non-English reader like England and make the English reader like the stumbling foreigner who often misunderstands English reality but loves English culture.' (p. 7)

beginning and the end of the narrative but appearing as comical props or extras at particularly dramatic moments. The main characters are similarly dismissive of the Welsh language, which is usually encountered only as the incomprehensible 'jabbering' of the various local characters described above.[191] Like them, Welsh has a minor and non-essential role in the narrative, as demonstrated by that fact that none of the main characters can speak it and even the philomath Bátky shows no interest in learning. In terms of the legends surrounding the old Pendragon Castle, the Welsh language is associated with local superstition in the form of a prophetic dream, which is sceptically received, subsequently ignored and the doom-laden prophecy never fulfilled.[192] Latin, on the other hand (in the form of prayer, incantation and inscriptions), both underpins the Rosicrucian strand of mysticism and solves the related mysteries. Latin also boosts Bátky's importance in the plot because he is often the only character present who can understand it.

As well as the cultural contrasts just described, Szerb creates certain connections based on nationality. In fact, some cultural common ground is established before any sense of opposition is introduced. For example, when Bátky first meets the Earl of Gwynedd in the novel's opening pages, the latter announces that 'I am not English. I am Welsh. That makes me, apparently, fifty per cent more like a Continental'.[193] Theirs turns out to be a lasting friendship and so represents a particular bond between Wales and Hungary, strengthened by the fact that Szerb displays some knowledge of his Welsh setting. He names real places in North Wales (the location for the fictional Llanvygan Castle) such as Corwen, Caernarfon, Moel Sych, Bala, Rhyl and Llandudno. Other places appear to have been chosen at random (Caerbryn and Abersych, for example, have real counterparts, or near-counterparts in the case of Abersych*an*, in South Wales) or else invented by the author (Llanfygan, Llyn Coled and Betws-y-Teg do not seem to exist outside of the novel), but all at least have an air of authenticity. It is also clear that Szerb had some knowledge of Welsh mythology, from popular folklore involving lakes and midnight riders to more literary legends. Arthurian details in the novel, such as the *Pendragon* name and the centuries-old family quest, have already been mentioned above, while Fülöp also identifies the

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[191] Szerb, *The Pendragon Legend*, p. 65.
[192] Ibid., pp. 97-99.
[193] Ibid., p. 10.

Grail legend in Szerb's Rosicrucian plot strand.[194] Apart from these, the terrifying omen of a red-eared white dog called Cŵn-Annwn [sic] is a clear reference to Annwn, the mythological Welsh otherworld of both Arthurian legend and Welsh literature such as the *Mabinogion*.[195]

For every instance of opposition or connection, however, there is parody and subversion, denying superior status to any one language, nationality or individual in the narrative. For example, if the relative usefulness of Latin compared to impenetrable Welsh appears to give value to mainstream intellectual pursuits over marginal ones, it is also undermined by the fact that it is Bátky, the slightly ridiculous foreigner, who has knowledge of the former, while the beautiful, quintessentially English Cynthia, the Earl's niece, is an expert on all things Welsh. Meanwhile, English traits and customs are parodied throughout, various characters teased about their general ignorance (especially Cynthia and the Irish character Maloney) and even Hungary is mocked for being unknown: Maloney, for instance, claims that it is a place 'made up by Shakespeare', and mistakes Hungarian for 'Hindustani'.[196] There is a certain irony in the fact that Welsh in turn seems impenetrable and otherworldly to Bátky. Furthermore, if the ordinary Welsh villagers and their language and legends seem primitive and trivial, it is the seductive yet arrogant and delusional Irish characters, Maloney and Eileen St Claire, who are parodies of nationalism and turn out to be fatally flawed. Szerb's Welsh setting thus seems to resist expected notions of centrality and marginality, becoming a liminal, unpredictable space where the usual rules do not apply.

Other examples are frequently literary: for instance, Szerb does not refer specifically to any indigenous Welsh literature, such as the *Mabinogion*, but there are repeated references to Milton, Shakespeare and Casanova.[197] Similarly, there is only a single brief mention of *A Walesi Bárdok* [The Bards of Wales], a patriotic Hungarian ballad by poet János Arany, known to all Hungarians.[198] Inspired by Thomas Gray's 1757 poem *The Bard* and first published in 1857, *A*

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[194] Fülöp, pp. 259-60.
[195] The *Cŵn-Annwn* are the red-eared hounds of this world, whose appearance usually brings death. Szerb has mistakenly used the plural 'cŵn' to refer to a single beast.
[196] Szerb, *The Pendragon Legend*, pp. 25-26.
[197] Ibid., p. 78 and p. 232 (Milton and Shakespeare); and p. 37 and p. 158 (Casanova).
[198] There are now several English translations available — see entries for Bernard Adams and János Arany in 'Bibliography'.

Walesi Bárdok is taught in all Hungarian schools and has inspired various cultural exchanges between Hungary and Wales (the Welsh composer Karl Jenkins, for example, set Arany's poem to music in 2011).[199] And yet Szerb's reference to this canonical work in *The Pendragon Legend* does not give its title, and is used principally to evoke a particular image of the English king Edward I in the minds of young Hungarians rather than to make an explicit connection with Wales.[200] It is therefore hardly surprising that Wales does not stand out for many readers and critics. Its appeal for Szerb must have lain in something other than its people, language and culture. As we will see, a common theme across Szerb's fictional works is the tension between familiarity and otherness, whether temporal, geographical, cultural or spiritual. Yet this tension is especially strong and rooted in place in *The Pendragon Legend*, where the Welsh setting represents all that is strange and supernatural. While Szerb may have felt an affinity with Britain as a whole, especially its literary heritage, it seems to be difference that he found and valued in Wales. After all, Bátky chooses to live in England, despite having the means to 'get by in whatever country I choose', but is then drawn to Wales by a series of chance encounters and unnerving coincidences.[201] Although there are strange happenings in both the Welsh and English settings, events in England always have their origins in the tangible, material world, whereas Welsh happenings evoke a more spiritual realm of ghosts and mystery. In Szerb's London, for example, mysticism and history are contained as fact in museums and books. In Wales, however, history is much closer to the surface, and the otherworldly, hitherto only experienced in those contained and factual places, becomes possible. Bátky states that the Earl of Gwynedd himself 'seemed to embody an historical past the way no book ever could'.[202] While London is reassuring and predictable, in Wales anything could happen at any time, and when Bátky realises he is becoming entangled in 'a dark and dangerous escapade' at Llanvygan Castle, he wants nothing more than to return to the former: 'to get away from a situation where earls were shot at in my presence. Back to the British Museum, and the impregnable calmness of books'.[203]

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[199] Jenkins' cantata can be sung in Hungarian, Welsh or English, or a combination of the three. It had its world premiere in Budapest that year and was then performed at the 2012 National Eisteddfod in the Vale of Glamorgan. See Huw David Jones, *A Bridge between Two Small Nations: The Bards of Wales* [online blog] <https://huwdavidjones.wordpress.com/2012/08/05/a-bridge-between-two-small-nations-the-bards-of-wales/> [accessed 6 December 2013].

[200] Szerb, *The Pendragon Legend*, p. 15.

[201] Ibid., p. 9.

[202] Ibid., p. 14.

[203] Ibid., p. 72.

In some ways Szerb's debut novel is an obvious successor to the three nineteenth-century texts discussed in the previous chapter. *The Pendragon Legend* once again centres on a young, male and educated European protagonist who is visiting distant, different Wales for the first time, with a cast of characters full of stereotypes and a setting rich in Gothic and Romantic scenery and literary associations. There is some engagement with Welsh myth and legend, as well as with wider contemporary movements such as Neo-Romanticism, mysticism and an interest in the Celts. On the other hand, Szerb's novel starts to put more emphasis on place and space, making the Welsh setting integral not just to the story and its development, but also to the way in which it is told. Crucially, however, the indigenous nature of this setting — i.e. Welshness — is secondary to its role as a space in which a protagonist from elsewhere can exist on very personal terms. The result, as we shall see, seems to correspond to the Earl's description of a 'private universe' built of 'personal obsessions'.[204]

Szerb's Wales could be described as a space both *of* and *for* the mind. It is simultaneously a product of invention and imagination, and a means to initiate discussion of, illustrate and even embody aspects of psychology, one of the novel's key themes.[205] It could therefore be seen as a kind of portal, in two distinct ways. Firstly, as argued above, Szerb's Welsh setting bridges the gap between nineteenth-century texts and the more recent depictions of Wales in the corpus, retaining the cultural interest of the former but beginning the shift from people to place which will be fully realised in the latter. Within the novel itself, the Welsh setting represents the duality of Szerb's many and varied 'personal obsessions': it provides access to another space beyond the known and the familiar, acting as a frontier zone between the worldly and the otherworldly, fantasy and reality, and even life and death. In all cases, the distinction can frequently seem blurred, often because the physical Welsh landscape obscures it. It is sometimes difficult to tell, for example, where exploration of Bátky's physical surroundings ends, and journeys into unfamiliar psychological terrain begin. This section will consider the 'personal obsessions' used to construct Szerb's Welsh setting, in order to show that Szerb's Welsh space, and the tension running through it, are always understood and expressed in the novel in deeply personal terms:

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[204] Szerb, *The Pendragon Legend*, p. 172.
[205] Szerb's interest in psychology included dreams, the ego and 'unusual states of consciousness', among other things (Rix, 'Translator's Afterword' in *The Pendragon Legend*, p. 236).

they are shaped from the outside, by experiences of other places and cultures, and the influence of Welshness is minimal. Szerb's debut novel thus seems to prepare the ground for the later corpus texts, whose Welsh settings remain isolated, unfamiliar and suited to increasing introspection.

Literature

Szerb had a deep personal attachment to all kinds of literature, with György Poszler stating that it 'was not an object of study for him, but part of living'.[206] Szerb himself jocularly claimed that 'I always read and wrote, almost from the moment I was born (I was the bespectacled kind of baby) […]'[207] His principal legacy in Hungary is his 'ground-breaking and immensely popular' history of Hungarian literature (*A magyar irodalom története*), published in 1934 when he was 33, but he was equally passionate about foreign literature and translated from four languages, including German and English.[208] Szerb's first critical work was an outline of English literature (*Az angol irodalom kistükre*, 1929), which necessitated the year of research in London, and this was followed some years later by a three-volume history of world literature (*A világirodalom története*, 1941); the latter is also said to be 'mainly interested in English literature'.[209] In addition he wrote various studies of individual writers (within English literature, notably William Blake) and essays on Hungarian historical and literary connections with Britain and Ireland.[210]

The early twentieth century in Hungary saw a concentrated political and cultural focus on the West, and on Britain in particular.[211] Politically, this was an attempt to repair Hungary's image

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[206] Poszler, p. 20.

[207] Quoted in ibid., p. 20.

[208] Géza Buzinkay, 'Antal Szerb, the Inquisitive Martian and Budapest in the 1930s', *The Hungarian Quarterly*, 46 (2005), 31-36 (p. 31).

[209] Nemeskürty and others, p. 479.

[210] Examples include 'Hungarians in Heaven and Hell', an article in *The Hungarian Quarterly*, 5 (1939), 297-304, focusing on two Hungarians who visited the Purgatory of Saint Patrick in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries; and critical work exploring contemporary Mihály Babits's 'profound knowledge and love of English literature' (see George F. Cushing, 'Babits and the English Classical Tradition' in *The Passionate Outsider. Studies on Hungarian Literature*, ed. by Lóránt Czigány (Budapest: Corvina, 2000), pp. 233-45 (p. 233)).

[211] See Tibor Frank, 'Anglophiles. The 'Anglo-Saxon' Orientation of Hungarian Foreign Policy, 1930s through 1944', *The Hungarian Quarterly*, 47 (2006), 60-72.

and international relations after its defeat in the First World War, the humiliation of the Treaty of Trianon in 1920 and the chaos of Communist revolution and counter-revolution.[212] Culturally, the English department at Budapest's university became 'a popular centre for the English spirit' thanks to British academic Arthur Yolland.[213] Meanwhile English literature was discussed in influential, westward-looking journals, in particular *Nyugat*, founded in 1908, and *The Hungarian Quarterly,* founded in 1936; there was also an explosion in translation of English literary classics.[214] Mihály Babits, one of Hungary's foremost twentieth-century literary figures and a first-generation *Nyugat* writer, declared the Hungarian writer's role to be that of 'a living ambassador of the West in the stormy East'.[215] These attitudes formed the backdrop to Szerb's education and writing career, the latter beginning in the 'unusually lively' literary atmosphere in Hungary between the wars.[216]

Literature therefore did not simply pull Szerb towards a British setting but also guides and shapes the experience of it. The landscapes of British literature seem to have been particularly appealing to Hungarian audiences in general. The 1943 *Treasury of English Literature*, for example, introduces the Hungarian reader to literary scenery which 'glows with miraculous colours':

> […] the foggy shores, lakes and hills of home soothe their
> restlessness; they embark upon voyages with Childe Harold, they
> hide with Ossian among the valleys. Milton shows us the
> underworld, Blake opens up the deserts of nightmare, Wordsworth
> and Tennyson resonate with the melancholy of familiar landscapes;
> the near and the distant, that which might be and that which never

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[212] See also George Bisztray, 'Two Homelands: Mihály Babits and European Consciousness in Modern Hungarian Literature' in *A Journey into History. Essays on Hungarian Literature*, ed. by Moses M. Nagy (New York, Bern, Frankfurt and Paris: Peter Lang, 1990), pp. 145-60.

[213] Frank, p. 67.

[214] Gábor Halász, in his 'Preface to the Treasury of English Literature', lists Shakespeare, Milton, Shelley, Keats, Tennyson, Swinburne and Wilde — *The Hungarian Quarterly*, 40 (1999), 45-51 (p. 51).

[215] Quoted in Moses M. Nagy, 'The Genius of Hungarian Language and Literature' in *A Journey into History*, ed. by Nagy, pp. 7-32 (p. 19).

[216] Csilla Bertha, '"The Hungarian of the West": Yeats's Reception in Hungary' in *The Reception of W. B. Yeats in Europe*, ed. by Klaus Peter Jochum (London and New York: Continuum, 2006), pp. 150-61 (p. 150).

> was are equally soaked through with atavistic experience, with the
> Celtic adoration of trees, stones, hills and waters, with the almost
> animalistic closeness of nature that even today remains unbroken
> and full of mystical power in Lawrence's poetic prose.[217]

The English novel is thus presented not just in terms of its physical landscapes ('Heroes wander into inns, down roads, through urban valleys, are entertained on country estates […]') but also its social geography: 'no one will ever meet as many [fascinating people] as the hero of an English novel does on his complicated adventures! […] its characters are chiefly social creatures, surrounded by a gaggle of families, friends, acquaintances and strangers.'[218] This could not be more true of *The Pendragon Legend*, the cast of which represents a variety of types, nationalities, convictions and social categories. It is not difficult to imagine the narrative landscapes Szerb could have constructed based purely on his immense literary knowledge, before he had even visited Britain itself. Given that he was born and brought up in Budapest, and specifically in vibrant, progressive Pest rather than 'sleepy' Buda, the many wild or rural parts of Britain immortalised in British literature must have held a particular, exotic appeal.[219] Certainly Szerb tended in his own writing to depict cityscapes rather than the countryside, so perhaps felt a double thrill in the presence of unnatural habitats like these which were also in a foreign country.[220] It could be argued that such a response is reflected in the dual Welsh and English settings in *The Pendragon Legend*, and their layers and grades of otherness and mystery.

  Literary references abound in the narrative, from the canonical to the obscure: for example, Homer, Shakespeare, Arány, Goethe, Hans Christian Andersen and Dostoevsky are referenced alongside *Who's Who*, the occult philosophy of Robert Fludd, rare manuscripts in the Earl of Gwynedd's library, and an unnamed collection of 'North Wales folklore'.[221] It is clear from the

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[217] Halász, p. 47.

[218] Ibid., p. 48.

[219] Buzinkay, p. 33.

[220] In an unpublished paper to the Oxford Hungarian Society, entitled 'Landscapes of the Mind: the subtle artistry of Antal Szerb' (Oxford, 9 May 2008, pp. 1-11), Rix gives the examples of Szerb's *Martian's Guide to Budapest* and urban locations such as Venice, Rome and Paris in his novel *Journey By Moonlight*, concluding that '[n]owhere, interestingly, does he describe a rural Hungarian landscape' (pp. 1-2).

[221] Szerb, *The Pendragon Legend*, p. 20.

opening sentence, in which the protagonist and narrator Bátky quotes from Byron's satiric poem *Don Juan*, that literary references will play a significant role in the telling of Bátky's story, and it is implied that day-to-day life is viewed through an equally literary lens.[222] Byron himself, for instance, is presented to the reader not only as a narrative role model but also a social one, being someone 'who knew his way around polite society'.[223] This results in a setting constructed primarily out of the author's vast reading experience, while first-hand experience of place seems to be of secondary importance; it is not certain, for example, whether Szerb himself ever travelled in Britain beyond London. Literature is, without doubt, the means by which Bátky makes sense of his foreign setting, and the people and events he encounters there. Thus he takes haunted British castles in his stride, given that their existence is 'something we have all been prepared for by literature'.[224] He can even accept the eerie sight of a singing prophet in the middle of a moonlit lake because the image reminds him of 'a Hans Christian Andersen illustration come to life', stirring up childhood memories 'like the soft strains of a distant violin'.[225] Other figures in the narrative, whether alive or dead, remind Bátky of various Shakespearean characters as well as the fictional German nobleman Baron von Münchhausen.[226] The Earl of Gwynedd himself is said by Bátky to resemble the sort of author of yore whose head 'one sees wreathed in laurel on the frontispiece of old books'.[227] Thanks to his voracious appetite for often obscure texts, at various dramatic moments Bátky is able to call upon knowledge of, say, 'old English locksmithery', secret entrances to ancient castles and escaping captivity, and thereby save the day.[228] He describes such an occasion as 'one of those rare situations where literature shows some sort of connection with real life', which knowingly draws the reader's attention to the role of literature in the narrative.[229] Bátky's prodigious bookishness becomes a status symbol of sorts, for he is often the only character present who can interpret or use literary

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[222] 'My way is to begin at the beginning' (Szerb, *The Pendragon Legend*, p. 9). *Don Juan* was published in stages between 1818 and 1824.

[223] Szerb, *The Pendragon Legend*, p. 9.

[224] Ibid., p. 50.

[225] Ibid., p. 88.

[226] For examples of Shakespearean characters see ibid., p. 17, p. 51 and p. 78. Münchhausen is mentioned on p. 22. He is the protagonist in *Baron Münchausen's Narrative of his Marvellous Travels and Campaigns in Russia* (1785), created by German author Rudolf Erich Raspe and loosely based on a real Baron Münchhausen, who was notorious for tall stories about his military career.

[227] Szerb, *The Pendragon Legend*, p. 9.

[228] Ibid., p. 49, p. 90 and p. 185 respectively.

[229] Ibid., p. 90.

references and thus drive the plot forward, as in the example above. Likewise a lack of literary knowledge can imply questionable morals and motives in others: the Irish character Maloney, for example, who turns out to be a mole and meets a suitably sticky end, is described as being out of place among books and ignorant of both famous authors (such as Rudyard Kipling) and famous literary works (such as *Hamlet*).[230] The decent characters, by contrast, are well read and often bibliophiles.

Within this elaborate literary framework, however, Wales stands out from the rest of Britain as somewhere which is seemingly beyond literary reach. This is implied from the moment Bátky meets the Earl of Gwynedd in opening pages of the novel, and before Bátky has even left London. The reclusive Welsh Earl in particular is said to 'embody an historical past the way no book ever could', and rumours that he is immortal or has 'magical healing powers' defy rational explanation.[231] For every literary reference acting as a navigational aid there is also a place or situation, whether in Wales or related to Wales or Welsh characters, which Bátky finds unreadable. If his understanding of the world comes primarily from literature, we can only infer from this duality that such strange Welsh places are devoid of the usual literary markers. On the first night at Llanvygan, for example, the 'intellectual preparations for the Welsh adventure' undertaken in London are of little help to Bátky when it comes to decoding his 'oppressively historic' surroundings:

> I had seen rooms like it in London museums and French chateaux, but then there had been guides and written inscriptions to direct one as to what to imagine […] But none of the elaborately carved wardrobes in this room carried any such source of enlightenment. Nothing tied the imagination to what was merely informative and comforting.[232]

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[230] Szerb, *The Pendragon Legend*, pp. 17-18, p. 20 and p. 54 respectively.
[231] Ibid., p. 14 and p. 12.
[232] Ibid., p. 38 and pp. 47-48.

Szerb's literary framework in the novel therefore not only summons up strong associations in certain places, but also highlights an absence of such associations elsewhere. And, for the most part, it is the Welsh setting which seems to contain and provide access to these other places, sometimes quite literally beyond literary reach. For example, Bátky describes finding texts in the Earl's library at Llanvygan 'that were not even in the British Museum'.[233] Later, he appears to equate such literary otherness with the sinister events taking place in North Wales, expressing a desire to leave this 'dark and dangerous' region and get '[b]ack to the British Museum, to the impregnable calmness of books'.[234] Wales in general is portrayed as being older, emptier and more inclined to defy the rational and explicable than other British locations, having '[o]nce teemed with marvels' such as myths, legends, fairies and Merlin.[235] Similarly, Bátky 'would never have believed that in Wales, in Great Britain, there could be such ancient, truly Nordic places, without traces of people or human dwelling'.[236] Although its strange landscapes, 'old atmosphere' and the possibility of 'fresh mystery' remain, it is notable that specific mythological 'marvels' are consigned to the distant past, so that indigenous Welsh literary markers seem far less tangible in the narrative than those from other cultures and in other places.[237] In fact, throughout the novel, any literary connections made with the Welsh landscape are always from English or continental European literature, and never Welsh.

The Earl, as mentioned above, seems to Bátky to embody the past in an eerie and irrational way. Fittingly, like his ancestors before him, Owen Pendragon's 'personal obsession' is delving into the 'ancient knowledge' and 'magical modes of understanding' of a pre-Enlightenment, 'remote, primordial past'.[238] Likewise, it is only the Earl who recognises and voices — in Bátky's presence — the tension between the 'ancient knowledge' of true mysticism, and methodical, scientific, twentieth-century modernity, stating that 'our rational minds can't fathom it […] We just can't grasp these things with our modern patterns of thought'.[239] Bátky, on the other hand, often finds himself struggling to navigate the North Walian landscape alone. The

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[233] Szerb, *The Pendragon Legend*, p. 77.
[234] Ibid., p. 72.
[235] Ibid., p. 170.
[236] Ibid., p. 206.
[237] Ibid., pp. 169-70.
[238] Ibid., p. 119.
[239] Ibid., p. 119.

dense 'Celtic Forest', on the one hand, is both a quasi-mystical place 'where every improbability becomes possible', and completely beyond his education and experiences: 'I, alas, had been city bred from a child, and had studied only the liberal arts. I had never been able to tell one tree from another.'[240] On the other hand, a high, bare plateau, devoid of both physical features and literary markers, is no less bewildering; referring to locations in *Macbeth* V.5, Bátky complains that '[t]here was no Birnam Wood to come to Dunsinane'.[241] It is on this plateau, in a cube-shaped building which has moving walls but no doors or windows, that Bátky's experiences become intensely surreal, even hallucinatory. Crucially, this place so far removed from literary familiarity is also where he feels furthest away from daily reality, and even from being alive:

> Nothing occupied me beyond the moment. I was at the end of the
> world, beyond my own life, just thirty seconds before everything
> imploded, light years away from all that was rational. […] In fact it
> was no longer 'I', but a stream of pure life, utterly impersonal, cut
> off from its source and racing into extinction.[242]

Time, space and even self are distorted here and Bátky cannot distinguish between dreams and actual events, not least because '[a]lready during this strange adventure I had totally lost my sense of reality'.[243] The fact that the irrational, inexplicable and incomprehensible are concentrated in Wales maintains the sense of duality of setting, for the strange and surreal nature of Szerb's Wales is all the stronger when alternated with London and its reassuringly civilised social gatherings, museums and books. Bátky captures this too when he wonders afterwards if the terrifying ordeal had been the result of a 'divided ego', a state in which the subconscious mind '[takes] on a life of its own' and which 'has often described by psychologists as part of the condition experienced by spirit mediums.'[244] Moving so far beyond the rational, and into such

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[240] Szerb, *The Pendragon Legend*, p. 213 and p. 211.
[241] Ibid., p. 213.
[242] Ibid., p. 222.
[243] Ibid., p. 214. This episode is strongly reminiscent of the fairy realm which features repeatedly in Rodenberg's nineteenth-century text on Wales.
[244] Ibid., p. 218.

bewildering spiritual territory, leads to another of Szerb's 'personal obsessions' and potential inspiration for the Welsh setting: mysticism.

Mysticism

It has been said that 'the Hungarians are not a spiritual people', but Szerb had a passionate interest in religion, spirituality and the mystical.[245] This included a 'lifelong fascination' with alchemy, an 'intense "religious-historical" sensibility' and the 'exploration of unusual mental and spiritual states'.[246] It is therefore unsurprising that, firstly, Szerb's fiction often features ghosts, monks and the supernatural, and also that he chose to set his novels outside of Hungary, his apparently non-spiritual home country. Rix has suggested that, given the above, Szerb 'must have loved Wales, with its haunting, numinous presence and magical associations'.[247] He was also greatly interested in Romantic movements and particularly those outside of Hungary, perhaps because the latter lacked the spiritual influences of the former: it has been pointed out that '[w]hile in Germany, England, and France [Romanticism] was bound up with religious revival, no comparable trend can be detected in nineteenth-century Hungary. […] both Catholic and Protestant theology were at a low ebb'.[248] Szerb wrote essays on the subject of early Romanticism and on William Blake, was said to be 'directly influenced' by Neo-Romanticism, and even advocated a Romantic 'renewal'.[249] But his interest in the movement seems to have manifested itself specifically in links with British culture, and especially its Celtic folklore. He listed his 'bibles of pre-Romanticism', for example, as 'Ossian, Chatterton's forgeries, Percy's Ballads'.[250] Meanwhile the 'English' character seems to Szerb to have been most susceptible, and soonest, to early-Romantic ideas, because:

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[245] Bryan Cartledge, *The Will to Survive. A History of Hungary* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), p. 506.
[246] Len Rix, email correspondence with Christina Les, 10, 12 and 18 February 2014.
[247] Ibid., 18 February 2014.
[248] Milály Szgedy-Maszák, 'Romanticism in Hungary' in *A Journey into History*, ed. by Nagy, pp. 67-91 (p. 69).
[249] Nemeskürty and others, p. 459 and p. 479.
[250] Antal Szerb, 'William Blake' in *Reflections in the Library: Selected Literary Essays 1926–1944*, ed. by Zsuzsanna Varga and trans. by Peter A. Sherwood (Oxford: Legenda, 2016), pp. 17-37 (p. 21). The reference is to Thomas Chatterton's eighteenth-century writings which were passed off as the work of imaginary 15th-century poet and monk Thomas Rowley, and to Bishop Thomas Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765).

[d]er puritanische Geist machte die englische Seele geneigt zur

Melancholie, gewöhnte sie daran, dem Gedanken der

Vergänglichkeit, des Todes ständig ins Auge zu blicken. […] Der

puritanische Todesgedanke befreit jene andere Welt, die der

Klassizismus aus der erhabenen Geometrie seiner Gärten

ausschloss: das Reich der Nacht, des Waldes, des Mondscheins,

des Wirrwars, das Reich von Spenser und Shakespeare.[251]

[[t]he puritan mind makes the English soul prone to melancholy,

makes it accustomed to constantly looking thoughts of mortality

and death in the eye. […] The puritan concept of death liberates

that other world which Classicism excludes from the sublime

geometry of its gardens: the realm of the night, the forest, the

moonlight, confusion, the realm of Spenser and Shakespeare.]

Fittingly, then, Szerb's 1928 essay on Blake is also an in-depth exploration of mysticism. It is one of several studies which appeared independently of, and prior to, his literary surveys, suggesting that the subject was of special personal interest and importance. Here Szerb explores Blake's mysticism and 'inspiration', by way of Dante, Jungian psychology and contemporary studies of folklore, among other things. In so doing he reveals his own thoughts on the nature of mysticism, dreams, influences and the unconscious, as well as on English literature and culture.

    There are similar themes and interests in *The Pendragon Legend*, Szerb's debut novel, which can only have intensified during his year in London six years prior to its publication. Szerb's description of Blake as 'the most eccentric' of 'all the many eccentric poets of his eccentric nation' is particularly striking when considered alongside *The Pendragon Legend*, where it could be applied to any one of the British or Irish characters but most of all to the Earl of Gwynedd.[252] It is surely significant that although Blake's character sets him apart, in Szerb's view — he is the

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[251] Antal Szerb, 'Präromantik (Jean-Jacques Rousseau)' in *Gedanken in der Bibliothek: Essays über die Literaturen Europas*, ed. and trans. by András Horn, pp. 155-73 (pp. 157-58).
[252] Szerb, 'William Blake', p. 17.

most eccentric: '[e]verything about him was totally odd' — he is at the same time inseparable from his literary, national, geographical and cultural context.[253] This could suggest that the various eccentric characters in *The Pendragon Legend*, although representing distinct nationalities such as Welsh or Irish as well as displaying extreme and singular personalities, are nevertheless supposed to be part of a single whole. Szerb's suggestion that the mystic possesses 'double vision' seems to correspond to this, and to anticipate the duality of setting found in the novel:

> Mystics dwell among us and yet inhabit another world — because
> the affairs of this world, which we believe to possess absolute
> validity, are for them no more than symbols; the entire world of
> Phenomena is but an allegory of something else: the Other, the
> Real. […] In Blake, […] even the most concrete geographical
> concepts are but symbols […][254]

More generally, Szerb's descriptions of mysticism as 'life-affirming' or 'one variety of Vitalism' certainly resonate with the author's own worldview, and seem to have been carried over into *The Pendragon Legend*'s lively narrative.[255]

Szerb's year in London, from 1929 to 1930, was not his first experience of living abroad, but it seems to have had an immediate and inspirational effect on the young foreign scholar, given that he used it as a setting so soon afterwards and indeed for his very first novel. Although he had first spent time in Italy and Paris, these places do not feature in his novels until *Journey by Moonlight*, which was first published in 1937 and has since been labelled his fictional 'masterpiece'.[256] It is therefore worth comparing *Journey by Moonlight* and *The Pendragon Legend* in this chapter, because the different settings correspond to marked differences in the narrative style and content. Szerb's trademark themes and features are present in both works,

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[253] Szerb, 'William Blake', p. 17.
[254] Ibid., p. 25.
[255] Ibid., p. 29.
[256] Rix, 'Translator's Afterword' in *The Pendragon Legend*, p. 236.

from his distinctive characterisation and playful irony to an interest in the mystical and spiritual, the lot of the scholar and travelling in the footsteps of history. Most critics agree, however, that in the later novel the author has refined his art: descriptions of people and places are richer, while ideas and themes are more developed and probe more deeply. As one German reviewer puts it, for example, 'wer die elegante Zeichnung der Charaktere in *Reise im Mondlicht* mochte, wird von den etwas dünnen Figuren in Szerbs Debüt wohl enttäuscht sein.' ['Anyone who liked the elegant drawing of character in *Journey by Moonlight* will likely be disappointed by the somewhat thin figures in Szerb's debut.'][257] This disparity between the two novels perhaps sheds light on the choice of setting for each, however. Whether a conscious decision or not, it is striking that Szerb's earlier, less cultivated but more fantastical narrative in *The Pendragon Legend* plays out in a primitive and fantastical North Walian wilderness. In *Journey by Moonlight*, by contrast, the greater complexity and shaping of the narrative are framed by the more classical and civilised setting of ancient Italian towns and cities, and by the glamour and sophistication of Paris.

Moreover, in *The Pendragon Legend* Bátky is alone in Wales, in that he is the only Hungarian in the narrative and is not acquainted with any of the Welsh characters before they meet by chance in London. Although the novel's bizarre events and eccentric people are magnified through his non-native eyes, his singular status can thus make *him* seem the most exotic character in the narrative. Bátky's foreignness is in turn emphasized by supernaturally strange surroundings, implying that Wales, or whatever it represented to Szerb, was necessary to achieve particular levels of otherness. Meanwhile, in *Journey by Moonlight*, the protagonist Mihály largely mixes with other Hungarians who share his background, interests and memories, and somehow all happen to be in Italy at the same time. The same applies to his wife, Erzsi, when she spends time in Paris. This certainly diminishes the exotic nature of the setting, and to an extent the strangeness of events. A related contrast between the two novels is the way they explore the idea of civilisation. One gets the sense that Mihály could not escape civilisation in Italy if he tried, a sentiment which is at the core of his on-off relationship with bourgeois conformity; even dumped rubbish, such as Monte Testaccio, a two-thousand-year-old pottery

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[257] Mensing, 'Reiter um Mitternacht'.

waste heap in Rome, has a distinguished history.[258] Bátky, on the other hand, is swept further and further away from civilisation the minute he leaves London, and perhaps even the minute he is invited to Wales and begins to receive mysterious and anonymous threats. Italy, then, seems to Szerb to *embody* the idea of civilisation, while Wales is its very antithesis.

Interestingly, Mihály Babits, a major literary figure in Hungary and a key influence on Szerb's non-fiction writing, had a similar dual interest in Italy and England.[259] According to George Bisztray, Babits saw the two countries as 'the most fascinating poles of the multi-faceted European culture'.[260] Bisztray goes on to explain that, for Babits:

> [i]n Italy, it was the idea of permanent and living classicism
> intertwined with Catholicism, and Dante, the perfect identity of the
> subjective self that impressed him. In England, on the other hand,
> he admired the rebellious modern spirit which defied order and
> identity, as demonstrated in Shakespeare's plays.[261]

In a similar way, Szerb's settings could be seen to represent dramatically different parts of a larger entity, whether that was imagined as Europe or Britain. In *The Pendragon Legend*, the curious contrasts within Britain itself suggest that London does seem to belong to a different world, largely representing normality and all things civilised in opposition to the wilds of Wales. Details from Szerb's other works of fiction, however, suggest that Wales and London are merely poles of the same entity, which was most likely thought of as 'England'; as Tibor Frank has noted, the United Kingdom was and is 'still called England in Hungary in those times and today'.[262] In Szerb's 1934 short story 'A Dog Called Madelon', for example, the sight of an ivy-covered Welsh chapel in the English capital prompts the delighted exclamation that 'in the midst of all the traffic, London churches retain that pristine air of rustic piety', as if this 'rustic piety' is

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[258] Antal Szerb, *Journey by Moonlight*, p. 182.
[259] Regarding Babits' influence, see Cushing, p. 229. Szerb probably also knew Babits personally, as the latter was editor of the journal *Nyugat* after the First World War (see Reményi, p. 14).
[260] Bisztray, p. 153.
[261] Ibid., p. 153.
[262] Frank, p. 62. See also Rix, 'Translator's Afterword' in *The Pendragon Legend*, p. 235.

merely the busy city's alter-ego, rather than the product of a different culture, place and people.[263] The very fact that such contrasts exist in a single location seems almost to be more important than the nature of the difference, and could once again be a result of Szerb's overwhelmingly literary worldview. As we have seen, it is through literature that he first becomes acquainted with other times, peoples and places. Thus he might have equated Ireland, Scotland and Wales with England because, for him, all four nations were first and foremost bound together by a single, English-language literature, references to which abound in *The Pendragon Legend* whether the narrator is in London or Wales. It would therefore appear that, for Szerb, difference in terms of setting is largely nominal, symbolic and culturally superficial. As this chapter shows, *The Pendragon Legend* relies heavily on clichéd images and national stereotypes, particularly for its characterisation, but never probes far enough beyond the ugly, alien Welsh language or the primitive Welsh people to reveal an authentic, indigenous identity in Wales. Instead, Szerb's Welsh setting lacks the features he so valued in other western European places, such as a literary and cultural heritage. Crucially, Szerb's Wales is never really defined on its own terms, independent of other countries and cultures. It seems to be valued as much for what it does *not* represent, such as familiarity, modernity or rationality, as for what it offers, in the form of a world beyond the known, literary universe, encounters with the mystical, and creative freedom.

Returning to the earlier comparison of *The Pendragon Legend* and *Journey by Moonlight*, the different treatment of setting in each text points increasingly to the idea of Wales as space, while place is elsewhere. Both novels deal with spiritual journeys and the surreal, but for Mihály, in Italy, the process of self-discovery is always anchored to the familiar, such as famous history, friends or acquaintances and shared memories or experiences. He does not travel to Italy alone but in the company of his new wife, and although visiting for the first time arrives armed with knowledge and expectations of the destination; there are even instances of déjà-vu.[264] The Italian setting of this later novel thus seems to contain all the features of *place*. Meanwhile, Bátky's

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[263] Antal Szerb, 'A Dog Called Madelon' in *Love in a Bottle*, trans. and rev. by Len Rix (London: Pushkin Press, 2013), pp. 169-79 (p. 169). Incidentally, the protagonist in 'A Dog Called Madelon' is also a Hungarian academic called János Bátky.
[264] See for example Szerb, *Journey by Moonlight*, p. 62.

'spiritual adventure' in *The Pendragon Legend* takes place among people he has only just met, and in a location — Wales — he barely knows, had never intended to visit and which constantly evades his attempts to make sense of it using the knowledge he already has.[265] This early Welsh setting, in contrast to the later Italian one, therefore seems to correspond more closely to definitions of *space*. A key factor here could be that, despite similar themes, the two novels address subjectivity in different ways. Both protagonists can be introspective and self-absorbed, but in Mihály's case there is a greater sense of being in the wider world, even if he is not yet sure where he fits into it, because his actions and experiences have an impact on the people around him, such as his wife or friends, and he is obsessed with history, whether personal or general. Bátky, meanwhile, is single and somewhat detached from his own past. We are told little about it, other than that he comes from Hungary but has chosen to live abroad, in England. These differences are further reflected in the two novels' narrative perspectives. *Journey by Moonlight* is narrated in the third person, and Mihály is not always present: some chapters, for example, recount his wife Erzsi's experiences without him. *The Pendragon Legend*, on the other hand, is narrated by Bátky entirely in the first person. Bátky's intensely subjective gaze thus defines the Welsh setting, and the result is a location built on scant personal acquaintance rather than general knowledge (as was the case for Mihály in Italy). It is presented as highly personalised space rather than the depiction of a widely-known place.

Locating this space somewhere unfamiliar, like Wales, seems to have been necessary in order to give Szerb absolute creative control over his narrative. This may have been linked to his attitude to learning and knowledge. Bringing the action to an apparently empty space, with its lack of literary, social, cultural or professional associations, appears to lessen pressure on the author to maintain authenticity and acknowledge reader expectations. It also affords him freedom to advance and discuss potentially controversial ideas on 'non-scholarly' or unfashionable topics, promoting knowledge for its own sake and not just for professional advancement.[266] Physical distance from Bátky's familiar environment also provides an opportunity for critical distance in the narrative, enabling a critique of the Hungarian academic systems and traditions in which

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[265] Szerb, *The Pendragon Legend*, p. 14.
[266] Rix, 'Translator's Afterword' in *The Pendragon Legend*, p. 235.

Szerb worked as well as scrutiny of outlandish ideas. The character of the Earl of Gwynedd is a key vehicle for many of these. He has the familiar breeding and authority of a British aristocrat but his Welsh identity brings a hint of the exotic, allowing for unusual, 'un-English' levels of passion for his work and a stronger than expected sense of affinity with continental outsiders like Bátky.[267] The fact that the Earl is considered mad even by British standards further prepares the ground for strangeness in the novel.[268]

The character of Bátky, on the other hand, is kept at arm's length from the reader throughout. Although narrator and protagonist, he admits in the opening lines that he is not 'the hero of this remarkable tale'.[269] Ironic or otherwise, the comment underscores the fact that Bátky remains just beyond likeability and admiration, although he is not wholly undeserving of the reader's sympathy. This distance can be partly attributed to authorial self-deprecation, for Bátky has been described as an 'unmistakable' but 'cruelly satirised' version of Szerb himself, but it also, arguably, represents another layer of critical distance.[270] Szerb may have deliberately prevented the reader from getting too close to Bátky in order to discourage associations between the protagonist, the author and the novel's strange themes. It is also another possible reason behind Szerb's choice of setting. He was well known in Hungary as an authority on *English* literature, but by using Wales, a location largely unfamiliar to both author and reader, he may have avoided seeming too personally invested in potentially unpalatable material. At the same time, critical distance through characterisation is also employed here for the author's benefit, regardless of outside factors and influences such as potential readers' responses. Bátky could be seen as Szerb's alter-ego and a useful device for exploring a third 'personal obsession', in the form of psychology.

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[267] Szerb, *The Pendragon Legend*, p. 11; see also p. 10 and p. 60.
[268] Ibid., pp. 12-13.
[269] Ibid., p. 9.
[270] Rix, 'Translator's Afterword' in *The Pendragon Legend*, p. 235.

Psychology

Rix has described *The Pendragon Legend* as a 'highly original psychological study' and it is known that Szerb was familiar with contemporary ideas in the field.[271] He had read the work of Freud and Jung, and explores key psychoanalytical themes such as dreams and the ego in all his fiction.[272] He also makes explicit links between landscape, journeys and the mind, and spiritual journeys are a recurring theme. According to Rix, Szerb uses his landscapes to explore 'shifting states of consciousness', starting with his debut novel: in the case of Bátky, Welsh locations in the *The Pendragon Legend* 'both alter his moods and become the symbol of those moods'.[273] Such usage recalls Smethurst's 'Romantic geographies', in which the '"private" appropriation of geography' is seen as an attempt to 'define or express the self' and, ultimately, as 'a means of externalizing the subconscious'; the resulting Romantic landscapes thus 'verge on the allegorical or symbolic representation of secret impulses, desires or frustrations'.[274] Similarly, Szerb's narrative topography seems to reflect the debates which might have been taking place in the author's mind as well as on the page. Particular to his approach, however, is a strong and constant duality of space and place, made possible by using well-known locations alongside otherworldly settings such as Wales. This duality can take the form of psychological space in Wales versus physical place elsewhere; movement in Welsh space versus stasis in other places; or the fantastical within Wales versus reality outside it. It also extends to characterisation, with individuals in *The Pendragon Legend* demonstrating their geographical origins in personality and behaviour.

Szerb's interest in psychology, particularly as it manifests itself in *The Pendragon Legend*, is strikingly similar to that of the contemporary British author John Cowper Powys. Only two of Powys's major novels were set in Wales but he felt a lifelong affinity with it, living in North Wales (Corwen and then Blaenau Ffestiniog) from 1935 until his death in 1963, and Welsh

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[271] Rix, 'Translator's Afterword' in *The Pendragon Legend*, p. 235.

[272] See for example Czigány, *The Oxford History of Hungarian Literature*, p. 439 and Rix, 'Translator's Afterword' in *The Pendragon Legend*,, p. 236.

[273] Rix, 'Landscapes of the Mind: The Subtle Artistry of Antal Szerb', p. 5.

[274] Smethurst, p. xi.

mythology often features in his other fiction.[275] Important themes for Powys included mysticism and mythology (especially Celtic and Welsh folklore and grail legends), the opposition between spirituality and modernity, and psychology, particularly that 'of margins'.[276] Like Szerb, his fascination encompassed both the scientific and the spiritual. On the one hand, according to Jeremy Hooker, Powys's aim was 'to explore the animal and spiritual capacity of human nature, in opposition to scientific and psychological determinism with its narrow and destructive ideas'.[277] Equally, however, he is said to have been 'well-acquainted' with contemporary ideas in psychology and psychiatry.[278] Also like Szerb, Powys is 'a writer who uses his characters to think with', and landscape plays a key role in his characterisation and plots.[279] Dorset, Somerset and Wales feature most often in his work, where 'landscapes and places are frequently a source of descriptions, metaphors and images which reveal his characters using their sensations to draw upon or immerse themselves in this stream'.[280] Crucially, as seems to be the case in *The Pendragon Legend*, symbolic topography which has been 'reshaped by individual minds' looms larger in Powys's narratives than factual or physical space, despite his intimate acquaintance with the landscapes he describes.[281] It is striking that both Powys and Szerb required place to be 'reshaped' on an individual and imaginative level in their narratives, adding further dimensions to the physical space encountered: in his 1936 novel *Maiden Castle*, for example, Powys is said to have made Welsh mythology 'more important in his fictional Dorchester than the town's actual history'.[282] With this in mind, it could be suggested that Szerb shared Powys's longstanding passion for 'the magical view of life'.[283] Certainly both used their fictional settings to reach territory beyond the everyday.[284] For Powys, Wales in particular was 'a magical realm

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[275] The novels set in Wales are *Owen Glendower* and *Porius*, first published in 1941 and 1951 respectively.

[276] For Jeremy Hooker, Powys is 'the novelist of margins, the poet, philosopher and psychologist of margins' (*Writers in a Landscape*, p. 127).

[277] Hooker, *Writers in a Landscape*, pp. 127-28.

[278] Margaret Drabble, 'The English Degenerate', *The Guardian*, 12 August 2006 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2006/aug/12/featuresreviews.guardianreview14> [accessed 7 September 2016].

[279] Hooker, *Writers in a Landscape*, p. 127.

[280] Ibid., p. 111.

[281] Ibid., p. 111-12.

[282] Ibid., p. 107.

[283] Ibid., p. 105.

[284] Margaret Drabble, for instance, describes 'the mysterious heart of the Powys universe, which is and is not Wessex. Hardy's Wessex (of which Powys was keenly conscious) has an epic dimension, but in Powys the distance from mundane reality is even greater'. ('The English Degenerate').

associated with the powers of the imagination';[285] in the novel *Owen Glendower*, for instance, he describes a 'mythology of escape' present in Wales, and 'to a degree unknown in any other earthly region'.[286] Coupled with 'a magician's sense of the malleable and soluble nature of external reality', Wales as a setting thus becomes an endlessly creative playground for Powys, but strictly on the author's own terms: the Welsh language, for example, 'is conveniently a language without social or cultural determinants and functions, and therefore entirely at the disposal of the individual imagination'.[287] The same seems to apply not just to Szerb and *The Pendragon Legend* but to all European corpus texts in this thesis, and, given the added otherness of Wales for foreign protagonists, to extend beyond the Welsh language to Wales in general.

Szerb was aware of Powys's early works because he included the British author in his 1941 history of world literature (*A világirodalom története*), describing him as 'an excellent synthesist of all currents of the modern novel. He learnt much from Gide, Proust, Freud — he is one of the best representatives of psychoanalysis in English literature'.[288] Hungarian academic Zsuzsa Fülöp even claims that Powys's 1932 novel *A Glastonbury Romance* 'must' have been the 'model' for *Pendragon*, identifying the grail legend as the common central theme.[289] Fülöp's link is not the first to be made between Powys and *The Pendragon Legend* — Sam Sacks in the *Wall Street Journal*, for example, has also identified 'teasing pastiches' of Powys, P.G. Wodehouse and Aldous Huxley — but this thesis does not support Fülöp's unequivocal claim.[290] It is true that *Wolf Solent* and *A Glastonbury Romance* had already been published by the time *The Pendragon Legend* appeared in 1934, so Szerb may well have been aware of both novels, and their engagement with Welsh mythology and Arthurian legend, either prior to or while writing his debut work. But he himself only really dabbles in folklore in his fiction, being equally — if not more — fascinated by place, people and interaction between the two. There is very little mention of Arthur in *The Pendragon Legend*, for example, despite the nod to his father's name in

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[285] Hooker, *Writers in a Landscape*, p. 105.
[286] Quoted in Hooker, *Imagining Wales*, p. 16.
[287] Hooker, *Writers in a Landscape*, p.113 and p. 135.
[288] Quoted in Zsuzsa Fülöp, p. 258. The works in question would have been Powys's Wessex novels, published throughout the 1930s: *Wolf Solent* (1929), set in Dorset and Somerset; *A Glastonbury Romance* (1932), set in Somerset; *Weymouth Sands* (1934), set in Weymouth itself; and *Maiden Castle* (1936), set in Dorchester.
[289] Fülöp, p. 258.
[290] Sam Sacks, 'Laughing Off Disaster', *The Wall Street Journal*, 19 December 2014 <http://www.wsj.com/articles/reputations-sam-sacks-on-antal-szerb-1419025539> [Accessed 31 August 2016].

the title, while Rix reveals more influences from the field of psychology on the novel than traces of the grail legend.[291] Powys is nonetheless a plausible source of inspiration for the themes and setting of Szerb's first novel, if not a definitive model. If Szerb did indeed discover Powys before or while writing *The Pendragon Legend*, then the latter's 'magical view of life' and obsession with the 'Magic West' may well have left a deep impression upon a young and receptive kindred spirit, and could help to explain the deeply fantastical yet psychological nature of Szerb's Wales.[292]

Despite this, however, Powys's fiction is arguably more concerned with place than with space. Firstly, his characters and plots tend to centre on a particular, named location, with much less movement and distance covered than can be seen in later European texts set in Wales. These locations are frequently referenced in the titles of Powys's novels (e.g. *Maiden Castle*, *A Glastonbury Romance*, *Weymouth Sands*) while none of the corpus texts make any specific reference to Wales in their titles, and only Szerb hints at a Celtic connection.[293] The locations used by Powys were well-known to the author and in turn filled with familiar associations such as history, folklore and famous landmarks, albeit embellished and 'reshaped' for the purposes of the narrative.[294] Wales in the corpus texts, however, is an attractive parallel universe precisely because it lacks such familiar associations from a European perspective. Powys's locations are also 'densely peopled' with characters who know them intimately, whereas the European Welsh settings grow steadily emptier over the course of the twentieth century, leaving a hazy impression of an unfilled and otherworldly space.[295] It is nonetheless fascinating that Powys and Szerb have both used setting to distance themselves from 'mundane reality' and embark upon psychological and spiritual exploration.[296] Wales was only one of several locations in their fiction, but seemed for both authors to promise more magic and mystery than 'any other earthly region'.[297] Smethurst's symbolic 'Romantic geographies', which shun the rational and home in

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[291] For example, in his 'Translator's Afterword' in *The Pendragon Legend*, p. 236.
[292] Hooker, *Writers in a Landscape*, p. 106.
[293] The nineteenth-century German texts discussed in the previous chapter, however, make stronger references to Welsh places (e.g. Rodenberg's *Ein Herbst in Wales*) and Welsh people (e.g. Arnim's 'Owen Tudor. Eine Reisegeschichte').
[294] Hooker, *Writers in a Landscape*, pp. 111-12.
[295] Drabble, 'The English Degenerate'.
[296] Ibid.
[297] Powys quoted in Hooker, *Imagining Wales*, p. 16.

on the self, once again come to mind. However, a more fitting theoretical framework for *The Pendragon Legend*, given that it combines Romantic and Celticist interests with contemporary psychology and extensive interaction between place and imagination, might be provided by psychogeography.

Widely considered to be one of the first psychogeographers, the Welsh fantasy and horror writer Arthur Machen is another roughly contemporary British writer who shares common ground with Szerb. Machen moved in decadent and neo-Romantic circles and was interested in all things occult, mysterious and mystical. Literature, he believed, should contain 'ecstasy', which he summarised as 'rapture, beauty, adoration, wonder, awe, mystery, sense of the unknown, desire for the unknown'.[298] In his own work he sought to achieve this by using contrasting landscapes, and chiefly those of rural Wales and London, as settings for physical and psychological exploration. In his introduction to psychogeography, Merlin Coverley places Machen within a wider English literary tradition, in which the 'topography' of a setting is 'refashioned by the imaginative force of the writer'.[299] This immediately chimes with Powys's fictional settings discussed above, which are described by Hooker as having been 'reshaped'.[300] According to Coverley, the 'refashioning' of literary topographies reveals 'the strange and otherworldly within our midst' and produces a 'dreamscape in which nothing is as it seems, and which can only be navigated by those possessing secret knowledge'.[301] A key objective in this reading of psychogeography is locating 'that point of access, called the Northwest Passage by de Quincey, which provides an unexpected shortcut to the magical realm beyond our own'.[302] There are striking similarities here to *The Pendragon Legend* and its contrasting settings of North Wales and London, for the former could be seen as the mystical 'Northwest Passage' in relation to the latter's rational, urban solidity. Szerb's novel therefore appears to be equally interested in places or spaces which allow access to the magical, with the protagonist Bátky attempting to navigate a dreamscape in which reality and fantasy, and the everyday and the otherworldly, seem to merge. This suggests a compellingly strong link between Szerb's approach to setting in *The*

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[298] Arthur Machen, *Hieroglyphics* (London: Martin Secker, 1912), p. 24.
[299] Merlin Coverley, *Psychogeography* (Harpenden: Pocket Essentials, 2010), p. 16.
[300] Hooker, *Writers in a Landscape*, pp. 111-12.
[301] Coverley, p. 17-18.
[302] Ibid., p. 18.

Pendragon Legend, and the kind of psychogeographical landscapes found in Machen's fantasy fiction. And yet only one reviewer draws a comparison between Machen, Szerb and Wales, and not in Szerb's favour. Ulrich Baron, in the German weekly *Die Zeit,* is dismissive of Szerb's fantastical version of North Wales:

> Und der Stammsitz der Pendragons — 'mitten im Märchenland, wo einst Feen geboren worden sind' — ist als Schauplatz Schwarzer Magie nur ein schwacher Abklatsch jener heidnischen Schrecken, die der Waliser Schriftsteller Arthur Machen heraufbeschwor. [303]

> [And as a setting for black magic, the Pendragon family seat — in 'the land of myth and legend, the birthplace of fairies' — is merely a weak imitation of that pagan terror evoked by Welsh writer Arthur Machen.]

Once again, the broader critical consensus discussed in this chapter suggests rather that any 'imitation' in Szerb's work tends to take the form of mischievous parody, something which Baron seems to have overlooked. Nevertheless Machen was a well-established and influential author by the time Szerb came to write *The Pendragon Legend*, and the latter's visit to England followed a recent resurgence in Machen's popularity, culminating in reissues of his fiction and the publication of his autobiography. Given Machen's reputation and interests, and the fact that Szerb has no obvious personal connection with Wales, Machen may well have been an inspiration for Szerb's Welsh setting, and its narrative role in exploring the workings of the mind.

Not for the first time, however, a subtle distinction between the two authors' literary topographies challenges the notion of clear influences or obvious imitation in Szerb's work. First of all, Machen, like Powys, worked with places he knew intimately, and the Welsh landscapes in

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[303] Ulrich Baron, 'Gespensterlose Welt. Antal Szerbs wunderbarer Roman über Menschen, die sich in Romanen zu Hause fühlen', *Die Zeit*, 9 December 2004 <http://www.zeit.de/2004/51/L-Szerb-TAB/komplettansicht> [accessed 26 March 2014].

his fiction are based on those fondly remembered from his childhood. Any 'refashioning' or embellishment by the author therefore comes from a position of familiarity, with the otherworldly lying only just beyond or behind the everyday. For Szerb, meanwhile, the attraction of Wales seems to be based entirely on its otherness. Geographically and culturally, it is presented as being as far away from Bátky's natural habitat as it is possible to be, and its very lack of familiarity for the author, the protagonist and the reader implies a void to be filled, promising exotic distance and endless creative opportunity. It is not possible to state that Szerb never came to Wales, but his portrayal of Welsh place is markedly different from that of other authors who knew it well. For the purposes of this novel at least, what the protagonist knows and does not know are both filtered through the prism of literature and a bookish worldview. This intensifies any duality of place, adding a further, literary layer to the locations in the novel. While Machen explores spatial contrasts, between urban and rural, physical and imagined or everyday and otherworldly places, Szerb adds to these familiar and foreign locations, empty and populated spaces, and places with and without literary associations. A key aspect of duality of place in *The Pendragon Legend*, and indeed in all of the European corpus texts, is that the main narrative perspective is that of an outsider, displaced from his or her native and familiar setting. This in particular sets Szerb apart from similar fiction by contemporary British authors like Powys or Machen, and points strongly towards the presence of space in his Welsh setting, rather than simply named and known places. The foreignness and unfamiliarity encountered there, often contrasted with somewhere more familiar and mundane, suggests uncharted territory and its myriad navigational challenges and explorative possibilities, both on the ground and in the mind.

Following previously discussed definitions of space and place, this chapter has argued that the Welsh setting in *The Pendragon Legend* seems to contain elements of both. Szerb approaches Wales first of all as a named, known and bordered *place*, inspired perhaps by Hungary's cultural focus on the West and certainly by his own love of all things British. As such Wales had particular cultural, geographical and historical allure thanks to its Celtic mythology, ancient language and physical position right on the western edge of Britain and Europe. A Welsh setting seems to suit contemporary literary trends, such as the Celtic Revival and Neo-Romanticism, in addition to Szerb's personal delight in human experience, the spiritual and mystical and the

nature of knowledge. And yet there is little doubt that his version of Wales, to paraphrase Elana Gomel, refuses to be just a place: defying boundaries, expectations and meaning, it can also very strongly resemble a *space*.[304] In contrast to the named, factual parts of the Welsh setting, such as towns or cities, this space is where a 'private universe' can be built out of 'personal obsessions', and where 'established values' or 'the local and the bound', such as indigenous Welsh language and culture, matter less than the outsider protagonist's own culture, interests and worldview.

Szerb's setting in *The Pendragon Legend* may have taken inspiration from contemporary British authors, such as Arthur Machen and John Cowper Powys, who saw in Wales an opportunity to access the magical. Both Machen and Powys 'reshaped' or 'refashioned' Welsh places they knew well in order to reflect mental as well as physical exploration, and to intensify a sense of the supernatural. Szerb takes this further, however. Far from simply 'reshaping' or 'refashioning' knowledge of Wales, whether historical, linguistic or cultural, he seems to have been more interested in bringing its unfamiliar aspects to the fore. Thus the narrative emphasizes Wales's distance from tangible reality, the contemporary and the everyday, along with its exotic and foreign elements, which even the British characters find hard to comprehend, and its wild, unreadable and strangely empty landscape. Rather than peeling back behind the façade of a well-known place as, say, psychogeographers have done with London, Szerb has found a space far beyond which can be filled and moulded at will. It is fitting that movement, another characteristic distinguishing space from place, is crucial in Szerb's narrative.[305] Wales in *The Pendragon Legend* is both a destination in itself and a gateway to further journeys, allowing both the author and the protagonist to access 'a realm without meaning' *for them*.[306] Moreover, this blank 'realm' does not represent dismissal of the margins so much as acknowledgement and restitution: Szerb brings to the fore the under-explored fringes of thought and consciousness, to reveal space *beyond* literary knowledge, *beyond* previous psychological experiences and even *beyond* this mortal life. In such a far-distant and fantastical space he is able to explore his own non-rational and non-scientific 'personal obsessions' which might have been looked down on by peers and colleagues in Hungarian intellectual circles. As Bátky says in the novel, '[o]ne is

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[304] Gomel, p. 3.
[305] Cresswell, pp. 15-16.
[306] Ibid., pp. 15-16.

ashamed of the incomprehensible, the irrational, as though it were a form of mental illness. I tried to avoid thinking about it'.[307] And yet the otherworldly Welsh setting makes this impossible, being such a powerful, physical embodiment of the incomprehensible and irrational that the characters cannot help but become entangled in it the moment they cross the threshold.

In this way *The Pendragon Legend* sets the tone for the rest of the corpus. Subsequent texts continue to reinforce Wales's non-canonical, marginal status, while simultaneously, and increasingly, bringing its physical presence to the fore: the Welsh settings are progressively emptied of people and relatable connections but nevertheless dwarf the newly-vulnerable protagonists, who are taken physically and mentally to the furthest extreme. Wales in these texts is always as far away as possible from everything the protagonists know, and some even go so far that they do not or cannot come back. Magic, myth and mysticism recede in the later texts but a strong sense of the otherworldly remains, as does an interest in the spiritual and in the profound existential questions of life, death and identity. Lastly, as we have just seen in Szerb's Welsh setting, a particular spatial aspect of Wales in the corpus is liminality. The access it offers to irrational space beyond readable places suggests a setting suspended between reality and fantasy, disorientation and direction, and knowledge and oblivion. In line with Bianchi's readings of Wales in fiction, there is a distinct sense of questioning notions of centrality, indeed of 'embrac[ing] a hybridity that abrogates all centres.'[308] Perhaps more fittingly it brings to mind Westphal's geocritical 'recentring' of place in literary criticism, driven in part by the postmodern need to 'restore the imaginary margins'.[309] The texts in the next chapter are set on the very edge of Wales, where they explore further both geographical and psychological margins.

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[307] Szerb, *The Pendragon Legend*, p. 176.
[308] Bianchi, p. 72.
[309] Westphal, p. 59.

Chapter 3 — The Welsh Edge of the World

Uwe Timm, 'Nicht morgen, nicht gestern', 1999

Jörg Bernig, *Weder Ebbe noch Flut*, 2007

This chapter compares two contemporary German authors who have used Wales as a setting for their fiction: Uwe Timm (b. 1940) and Jörg Bernig (b. 1964). Theirs are the only corpus not to have been translated into English so far. The narrative focus in both shifts from Szerb's era (the late 1920s and early 1930s) to the last decade of the twentieth century: the middle part of the twentieth century appears to have produced less European fiction set in Wales than in the centuries preceding and following it, and there is a similarly lower yield in the travel writing genre.[310] Timm's short story, 'Nicht morgen, nicht gestern' ['Not tomorrow, not yesterday'], was first published in 1999 in a collection of the same name. While there is no specific era mentioned in the narrative, the setting seems to be contemporary: the death of Dylan Thomas (in 1953) and his widow Caitlin's subsequent move to Sicily (in 1982) are discussed as distant events, for example, while air travel and the contraceptive pill are unremarkable details. Timm's story is also set solely in Wales. By contrast, Bernig's 2007 novel, *Weder Ebbe noch Flut* [*Neither high nor low tide*], is set specifically in the late 1980s in Leipzig, and in the early 1990s in Swansea. At a glance the Welsh setting seems to be the only link between these texts and Szerb's novel discussed in the previous chapter, and even this connection seems somewhat tenuous at first. Set in and around Swansea, Timm's and Bernig's stories are both geographically and conceptually distant from *The Pendragon Legend*. The latter's playful fantasy, murder mysteries and haunted castles in deepest North Wales are replaced with a sober tone, failed relationships, the South Wales coast and a focus on nature and the elements. Beyond these superficial differences, however, there are striking and unexpected similarities in the way Wales is portrayed, firstly in its apparent attraction as a setting and then in the way characters engage with their Welsh surroundings. There is also clear development of certain narrative themes encountered in Szerb.

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[310] See chart at European Travellers to Wales, 1750–2010, 'Distribution of records over time', which shows dramatically reduced output between 1911 and 1979. <http://etw.bangor.ac.uk/about-database> [accessed 30 July 2017].

Following Gomel's assertion that there exist certain 'spaces that refuse to be mere places', the previous chapter concluded that Szerb's Welsh setting contains elements of both place and space.[311] While the author's love and knowledge of Britishness suggest that he may initially have been attracted to Wales as a named, bordered entity possessing a particular history, geography and culture, this sense of factual *place* in *The Pendragon Legend* ultimately gives way to constructed *space*, in which indigenous 'established values' matter less than the author's own culture, interests and worldview. As the Earl of Gwynedd states, 'every one of us constructs a private universe out of his personal obsessions'.[312] This Welsh setting could have been inspired by contemporary British fiction writers such as Arthur Machen and John Cowper Powys, both of whom make particular connections between Wales, the magical and the psyche: by 'reshaping' or 'refashioning' the Welsh places they knew well, they were able to suggest psychological as well as physical exploration, and a heightened sense of the otherworldly. However, Szerb arguably goes further. While Machen and Powys take a recognisably psychogeographical approach to setting, seeking out strangeness behind or within familiar places, Szerb's Welsh setting is almost entirely other, and the novel's spatial tensions thus more extreme: his Wales offers space *beyond* literary knowledge, *beyond* the protagonists' own psychological experiences, and even *beyond* mortal life. It could perhaps be thought of as both imagined space *and* space for the imagination, empty of indigenous culture but full of intellectual and spiritual possibility.

Both Timm and Bernig also seem to pursue tensions between space and place, although there are significant differences between *The Pendragon Legend* and their texts set in Wales. Like Szerb, Timm and Bernig seem initially to have been drawn to Wales as a known, named place, but in contrast to the Hungarian author they have a definite personal connection with their Welsh settings, having both lived in Swansea. Moreover, certain features of their Welsh settings, such as topography, climate and occasionally culture, are even presented as unique to Wales, suggesting a sense of place rather than empty space. Personal experience aside, however, Wales for Timm and Bernig is in fact no less temporally and physically distant than it was for Szerb.

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[311] Gomel, p. 3.
[312] Szerb, *The Pendragon Legend*, p. 172.

Physical journeys that are undertaken in their texts also contain an element of the spiritual, and there is great emphasis placed on geographical and psychological remoteness and isolation. A new feature here is that the Welsh setting also offers perspective on events in other times and places. There is a definite sense of pushing beyond connections, for both texts emphasize otherness through distance, lacking images which would be familiar to the protagonists (not to mention to German-speaking audiences) and hinting at the healing power of the foreign and faraway.

The key difference between Szerb's private Welsh universe and Timm's and Bernig's Welsh settings is that the latter are more physical and visual, with an emphasis on geography, the weather and darkness and light. The coastal location, and on an island (i.e. the British mainland) at that, is contrasted with the protagonists' original settings deep in mainland Europe, so that the attraction of Wales takes on a physical, *spatial* element in contrast to Szerb's culturally-framed response: Bernig, for example, has described his Welsh setting as 'geografisch sehr nützlich' ['geographically very useful'] as it is 'exzentrisch im wahrsten Sinne des Wortes' ['eccentric in the truest sense of the word'].[313] Timm and Bernig have also moved away from Szerb's embracing of the magical and mystical. Their narratives retain the otherness of *The Pendragon Legend*, and its blurred boundaries between reality and the imagination, but none of Szerb's engagement with Celtic mythology or contemporary esotericism. Likewise both German authors use literature to interpret and engage with their Welsh settings, but have each called upon the work of just one author, rather than Szerb's exhaustive literary framework. For Bernig the author is Adalbert Stifter (1805–1868), a nineteenth-century writer from Bohemia who is known throughout the German-speaking world, while Timm's literary reference is Dylan Thomas (1914–1953). We can therefore see a key shift in perspective in these later texts, from Szerb's general interest in people and psychology to intense introspection in Timm's and Bernig's narratives; from multiple literary references to a single literary model; and, perhaps most importantly, from Szerb's emphasis on the cultural and the social to Timm's and Bernig's emphasis on the physicality of Wales. Extreme introspection especially drives the construction and moulding of their Welsh settings, most noticeably in the lack of contact with Welsh people

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[313] Jörg Bernig, interviewed by Christina Les, 26 November 2015.

beyond the farcical or fleeting. This inward focus seems much more intense for Timm and
Bernig than in Szerb's novel, because the former have few principal roles in their texts, while
Szerb's narrative seems crowded with major characters. At the same time, however, Timm and
Bernig blend narrative voices in a way which undermines the authority of their narrators. As a
result, although their Welsh settings are constructed with more realism than Szerb's, neither their
protagonists nor their readers seem to know Wales any better in the end. The protagonists'
surroundings are entirely moulded by the cultural and emotional baggage they bring with them,
rather than what they find once there. As we shall see, this may have been inspired by the
authors' own ways of seeing the world as well as their specific literary influences.

Uwe Timm

Uwe Timm was born in Hamburg in 1940. In the German-speaking world he is a highly-regarded
author for both children and adults, and several of his novels are studied in German secondary
schools. Timm studied in Munich and Paris, gaining a PhD on the work of Albert Camus, and
completed writer residencies at British and American universities, including Swansea University
in 1994. Timm's writing is known for its political and social themes, including the 1968 student
protests (*Heißer Sommer* [*Hot Summer*], 1974; *Kerbels Flucht* [*Kerbel's Escape*], 1980; *Rot*
[*Red*], 2001), Germany's colonial history in Africa (*Morenga*, 1978), life in post-Reunification
Berlin (*Johannisnacht* [*Midsummer Night*], 1996) and personal loss during the Second World
War (*Am Beispiel meines Bruders* [*By My Brother's Example*], 2003).[314] His involvement in
student movements in the 1960s especially is said to have had a particular and lasting influence
on his writing: the author's website, for example, claims that 'die Aufarbeitung dieser Zeit zieht
sich durch sein gesamtes Werk' ['the reappraisal of this period runs through his entire
œuvre'].[315] However, while critics have tended to focus on these far-reaching themes, Timm
himself claims to be interested above all in the art of storytelling, and seems to be inspired less

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[314] So far, two of these works have been translated into English: *Johannisnacht* as *Midsummer Night* by Peter Tegel
(New York: New Directions, 1998) and *Am Beispiel meines Bruders* as *In My Brother's Shadow* by Anthea Bell
(London: Bloomsbury, 2005).
[315] Uwe Timm, 'Biographie' (dtv Verlagsgesellschaft: Munich, 2015) <http://www.uwe-timm.com/biographie>
[accessed 4 October 2016].

by social conscience than by an 'Ästhetik des Alltags' ['aesthetic of the everyday'].[316] For him, this is encapsulated in 'gezeichnete Dinge' ['sketched things'] or 'sprechende Situationen' ['meaningful situations'].[317] He is also interested in myth, belief and superstition, and describes his work as 'überflüssig' [superfluous] rather than didactic.[318] Elsewhere Timm's narratives have been described as a unique combination of the real, the fictional and what he calls the 'wunderbarer Konjunktiv' ['wonderful subjunctive'], so that his stories 'frequently call into question clear distinctions between fact and fiction'.[319] They reflect a personal subjective bias, for he has stated that '[m]eine Vorstellung von Literatur ist nicht, dass sie objektiv sein sollte, im Gegenteil, ich wünsche mir den sehr subjektiven Blick' ['My idea of literature is not that it should be objective, on the contrary, I want a very subjective view'].[320] At the same time, his writing is also said to possess an 'Innerlichkeit' ['introspection'] attributed to formative experiences of West German literature in the 1970s.[321]

Other significant interests in Timm's work are landscape and literature, both of which play a key role in his narrative set in Wales. His approach to landscape is informed by a belief that no part of the earth is untouched by humans: that no true wilderness remains, and there is no place completely unknown to us because *someone* has already been there and captured it in images (to which reality is then, often, unable to compare).[322] For Timm this means that the natural world can no longer offer an 'emanzipative [...] Gegenwirklichkeit' ['emancipatory contrasting reality'] or unmediated encounters with nature on its own terms.[323] It could be argued that these views on landscape seem also to inform Timm's 'fondness for literary models', and especially writers 'who came to grief because their vision cannot be realized in the society in which they find

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[316] This is the subject of his essay collection *Erzählen und kein Ende: Versuche zu einer Ästhetik des Alltags* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1993).

[317] Martin Hielscher, *Uwe Timm* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2007), p. 147 and p. 7.

[318] Timm, *Erzählen und kein Ende*, p. 24.

[319] Antje Krueger, 'Presenting a Moment of the Past: Third Positions in Uwe Timm's Works', *Colloquia Germanica*, 45 (2012), 386-400 (p. 397) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43653020> [accessed 5 November 2016].

[320] Uwe Timm, 'Das Nahe, das Ferne. Schreiben über fremde Welten' ['The Near, the Far. Writing about Foreign Worlds'] in *Uwe Timm Lesebuch. Die Stimme beim Schreiben*, ed. by Martin Hielscher (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2005), pp. 329-49 (pp. 342-43).

[321] Rhys W. Williams, 'Uwe Timm oder unsicher in die 70er Jahre: *Heisser Sommer* und *Kerbels Flucht*' in *Uwe Timm*, ed. by David Basker (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1999), pp. 47-65 (p. 63).

[322] Timm, in a speech to the Japano-German society at Sendai University in 2003 entitled 'Die Erde, der Himmel, die Wolken' ['The Earth, the Sky, the Clouds'], in *Uwe Timm Lesebuch*, ed. by Hielscher, pp. 458-66 (p. 463).

[323] Timm, 'Die Erde, der Himmel, die Wolken', pp. 462-63.

themselves'.[324] Landscape and literature certainly seem to come together powerfully but uneasily in 'Nicht morgen, nicht gestern', where the troubled figure of Dylan Thomas haunts a Welsh setting dominated by natural rather than man-made forces and features. In fact, humans in Timm's Wales are conspicuous by their absence, hinting that there could be scope there for the 'emanzipative [...] Gegenwirklichkeit' which he feels has been lost.

'Nicht morgen, nicht gestern' is the title story in a collection first published in 1999, and the collection as a whole is said to have been 'largely neglected' by both scholars and the general reader.[325] The title story is mentioned infrequently or not at all, and few reviewers comment on the fact that it is set in Wales.[326] In Timm's entry in the *Kritisches Lexikon zur deutschsprachigen Gegenwartsliteratur*, for example, Axel Ruckaberle even states that it is set in Ireland.[327] The first-person narrative of 'Nicht morgen, nicht gestern' recounts a woman's journey to South Wales to visit her new lover. He is a tour guide specialising in Dylan Thomas and resident in Wales, while she is a photographer; their nationalities are never specified but it would seem that she is German and he is British. The relationship is new and the protagonist starts her trip full of nervous excitement and anticipation. There is even a plan to produce a book together on Dylan Thomas and Wales, which is what led to them meeting at a photography show in Munich. Themes in the text include fate and chance, and the past haunting both places and people. Most of all, however, the narrative centres on Timm's overarching interest in storytelling, and the interplay of fact and fiction, myth and truth, and humans and nature. Related to this is the weaving of Dylan Thomas's life and work into the narrative, which blurs the boundaries between these couplings and makes the reader question what is real and what is not.

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[324] Williams, 'Uwe Timm oder unsicher in die 70er Jahre', p. 63.

[325] David Basker, 'Connection, Dysfunction, Generation: Uwe Timm's *Nicht morgen, nicht gestern* and Rot' in *Uwe Timm II*, ed. by David Basker (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007), pp. 50-70 (p. 50). Some of the scant critical attention it has received has been very negative. Examples include Axel Ruckaberle, 'Uwe Timm' in *Kritisches Lexikon zur deutschsprachigen Gegenwartsliteratur*, 11 vols (Munich: Edition Text + Kritik, 2002), X, 1-18 (pp. 15-16); and Christian Grawe, review of *Nicht morgen, nicht gestern*, by Uwe Timm, *World Literature Today*, 73 (1999), 734.

[326] As is the case with Grawe, p. 734, or Julia Encke, 'Die Kunst des Kürschners. Uwe Timms erster Erzählband *Nicht morgen, nicht gestern*', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 27 August 1999 <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/buecher/rezensionen/belletristik/rezension-belletristik-die-kunst-des-kuerschners-11301629.html> [accessed 11 November 2016].

[327] Ruckaberle, p. 16.

Timm creates a sense of mystery from the start with his reluctance to clearly identify people, places and times. The location is not specified to start with, but the occasional named place (London, Glen Lough, Laugharne) gradually narrows the geographical focus until Wales is finally mentioned on page nine of twenty-two. The protagonist only names her destination later, when recalling an exchange with her doctor at home: 'Ich hatte ihr dann auch gesagt, daß ich wegfahre, drei Wochen, nach England, genauer nach Wales.' ['I had told her then too that I was going away, for three weeks, to England, to Wales to be precise.']328 Even then, no place, feature or person, including Dylan Thomas, is ever described as Welsh. However, the main source of mystery, created and sustained by Timm's use of anonymity and selective naming, is the identities of the characters themselves. Dylan Thomas, for example, is simply referred to as *er —he —* to start with, until he is named seven pages in. From the description of the house above a bay in the opening scene, then of its now-deceased resident (a final, fatal trip to America in 1953; a widow and children), it is possible to guess that Timm is referring to Dylan Thomas and his boathouse in Laugharne, especially if the reader is also aware of Timm's connection with Swansea. This might not be so obvious to the general German reader, however, which suggests that Timm wished to control how and when identities are revealed, rather than expecting the reader to work them out. In consequence, there is a sense of multiple, merging narrative voices and entangled fates.

The identity of the protagonist is a puzzle which remains unsolved, because she is anonymous and enigmatic throughout. She is also genderless for much of the narrative, and only twice are we given an indication that she is female: firstly, fourteen pages into the narrative, she mentions being prescribed the Pill, and later she recalls being described as 'eine bekannte Fotografin' ['a well-known female photographer'].329 Given that she is the first-person narrator in the text, this results in an unsettling narrative perspective for the reader, which reflects the protagonist's own disorientation in Wales. Equally, no information is given about her past beyond a single, brief reference to a previous relationship, and it is implied that the trip to Wales

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328 Timm, 'Nicht morgen, nicht gestern', p. 38.
329 Ibid., p. 38 and p. 42.

and her new relationship represent something positive in comparison. There is a clear sense of pleasure and possibility as she describes how:

> [i]ch zählte die Tage, die wie Schildkröten krochen, bis vorgestern, als ich endlich ins Flugzeug steigen konnte. Und hätte man mich gefragt, was ich fühle, ich hätte nur sagen können, die reine, reine Freude. [330]

> [I counted the days, which crawled by like tortoises, until the day before yesterday when I could finally get on the plane. And if anyone had asked what I was feeling, I could only have said pure, pure joy.]

The new lover she is visiting is only ever referred to by his first name, Marc. He lives locally to Laugharne but his nationality is not mentioned; it is certainly never said explicitly that he is Welsh. The few details revealed about Marc's past are all linked to Dylan Thomas. A failed attempt to write a PhD on the poet has left Marc stuck as a jobbing tour guide in Thomas's old haunts, and as the narrative becomes increasingly alcohol-fuelled, dark and violent, Marc's identity seems to become inseparable from that of his idol. Timm's use of voice is important here, too. Lines of Thomas's poetry, in the original English, appear unannounced and unattributed at certain points in the text. During a visit to his favourite beach, for example, Marc goes down to the water's edge and 'roars' at the waves, 'Rage, rage against the dying of the light.'[331] Another follows Marc's description of Thomas's marriage: 'Sie haben sich geprügelt, zusammen getrunken, aber sie hat ihn einfach nicht verstanden. Nichts. And I rose/In rainy autumn/And walked abroad in a shower of all my days.' ['They exchanged blows, drank together, but she just didn't understand him. Nothing.'][332] Later, after a disagreement, all the protagonist can think of is 'diese Strophe' ['this stanza']: 'That his tears burned my cheeks and

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[330] Timm, 'Nicht morgen, nicht gestern', p. 38.
[331] Ibid., p. 30. The verb used is *brüllen*.
[332] Ibid., p. 37.

his heart moved in mine.'[333] Although the use of certain punctuation ('/' for line breaks) and poetical terms (*Strophe*/*stanza*) indicates that these are quotations, and the change in language hints at their origin, they are not differentiated within the narrative in any other way: for example, as is the case for dialogue, Timm does not use italics or quotation marks. Once again, compounded by the anonymity and murky identities seen above, the different voices bleed into one another and disrupt individual perspectives. The resulting blur of experiences and identities, in which times, facts and fiction merge, resists all attempts to be broken down and seen clearly, and binds the different characters and personal narratives together tightly.

This blurring and binding-together is reinforced by Timm's use of nature and the elements. It could be argued that the central protagonist in the narrative is in fact the Welsh landscape, which has brought all the human characters together, whether dead, alive, historical or fictional, and then governs their respective fates. If human aspects of the story, such as characters' identities and motivation, remain mysterious, then the Welsh landscape, by contrast, is a powerful and unambiguous narrative presence. Landscape imagery both opens and closes the narrative, appearing before characters and their relationships have even been introduced and enduring after relationships have broken down and the people have gone. Moreover, genuine historical features, in the form of Dylan Thomas's house, garden, much-loved view and local pub, strengthen Wales's material and territorial presence in the narrative, if not its cultural identity. This in turn heightens the contrast between Timm's vague fictional characters and the real, tangible places they inhabit. Any desire the reader might have to see clearly, and thus separate the blurred strands of the characters' lives, is echoed in the narrative theme of darkness and light. To differing extents, all the characters define the Welsh landscape in such terms. Marc, for example, is obsessed with its darkness, and the forces which block out the light. For example, he describes an unchanging view of 'Schafe' ['sheep'], 'Menschen wie Schatten' ['people like shadows'] and 'dunkle Häuser' ['dark houses'], in that order, and seems particularly in awe of 'die nicht in Worte zu fassenden Wolken' ['clouds that can't be expressed in words'] and their quasi-divine rule over the Welsh sky: 'Es gibt keinen Gott, nur diese Wolken' ['There is no God, only these

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[333] Timm, 'Nicht morgen, nicht gestern', p. 40.

clouds'].[334] Marc wants in his book to make the landscape 'sichtbar' ['visible'] by showing 'diese einzige Hoffnung Licht' ['this only hope, light'];[335] later, he describes Caitlin Thomas's move to Sicily after her husband's death as a journey 'endlich, in die Sonne, ins Licht, dorthin, wo man nicht mehr aus der Dunkelheit die Sonne besingen muß' ['finally, into the sun, into the light, to a place where you no longer have to sing the sun out of the darkness'].[336] The protagonist, by contrast, is often confronted by unexpected light. It colours and brightens her first and last impressions of Wales, as well as providing a glimmer of hope and comfort when things begin to turn sour. In the opening scene, for instance, she describes how '[d]er große Wind hatte die Wolken aufgerissen, das Blau leuchtete, und ich sah hier zum ersten Mal die Sonne' ['the strong wind had broken up the clouds, the blue shone, and for the first time here I saw the sun'].[337] Her final image of Wales, which she captures on camera, is similarly redeemed by a chance patch of sky and its contrasting shades.[338] The protagonist seems drawn to the light even at the darkest moments of the narrative, whether in the vibrant colour of an egg yolk at breakfast or the brightly-painted walls of a room, even as Marc is increasingly consumed by darkness inside and out.[339] In the breakfast scene just mentioned he wears sunglasses, despite being indoors, which are symbolically 'schwarz und undurchsichtig' ['black and opaque'].[340]

Other prominent features in Timm's Welsh landscape are the coast, the sea and the changeable coastal weather. They are used to illustrate that to live here means to accept a different and uncompromising set of laws, which are indifferent to tiny humans and their insignificant lives. The first people described in the story, for example, are mussel pickers, seen by the protagonist from a high cliff-top, who are at the mercy of the tide; at the same time, the protagonist finds her own hearing and movement restricted by the wind.[341] Dylan Thomas, according to Marc, was driven to drink and his death by 'dieses Ertragen der großen Einsamkeit' ['having to endure the great loneliness'] of 'eine Landschaft ohne Menschen' ['a landscape

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[334] Timm, 'Nicht morgen, nicht gestern', pp. 33-34.
[335] Ibid., pp. 33-34.
[336] Ibid., p. 44.
[337] Ibid., p. 25.
[338] Ibid., p. 46.
[339] Ibid., pp. 41-42.
[340] Ibid., p. 41.
[341] Ibid., p. 25 and p. 27.

without people'], and Marc seems to be following him.[342] Marc himself seems particularly affected by the sea and has a favourite beach 'wo er sich nach jeder Reiseführung erst mal reinigen müsse' ['where he first has to cleanse himself after every tour group'].[343] However, this ritualistic 'cleansing' has no effect on the power balance between humans and the Welsh landscape, and he is reduced to a ridiculous figure raging at the indifferent sea.[344] Against all this, rain provides the soundtrack.[345] Emphasizing the coastal location and its powerful natural laws helps to create a narrative atmosphere of tension, suspense and otherness: there is a strong sense of being very far from the everyday, at the very edge of one's comfort zone and on an emotional as well as a physical brink. The protagonist appears to teeter here until a moment of decisiveness in the final scenes of the narrative, but Marc, we soon realise, seems already to have gone over the edge.

The more we see of Timm's Welsh setting, the more noteworthy it seems that few critics have drawn attention to it: not only is Wales the sole location in the narrative, but in its raw physicality it is a forceful and unmistakable presence. There is also a specific cultural connection to south-west Wales, for the spirit of Dylan Thomas guides the action and haunts the characters as they move in and around Laugharne. Moreover, the Welsh location is presented to the reader as unique. It is a place of extremes, superlatives and opposites, and at once more liveable and less liveable than anywhere else. Early on, for example, Marc claims it has 'die geringste Selbstmordrate in Europa' ['the lowest suicide rate in Europe'], while the protagonist states that '[e]s gibt keinen Ort, […] wo man es mit sich selbst besser ertrüge als in diesem Haus, [...] mit diesem Blick auf die Bucht' ['There's no place [...] you could cope with yourself better than in this house, [...] with this view over the bay'].[346] At the same time, it is described as an environment so isolated and overwhelming that it can only be endured with alcohol, 'tiefe Religiosität' ['strong religious beliefs'] and by clinging to 'diese einzige Hoffnung Licht' ['this only hope, light'].[347] Marc wants to capture these unique qualities in a way that they has never

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[342] Timm, 'Nicht morgen, nicht gestern', p. 34.
[343] Ibid., p. 27.
[344] Ibid., p. 30.
[345] See for example ibid., p. 34 and p. 37.
[346] Ibid., p. 34 and p. 36.
[347] Ibid., p. 34.

been captured before, so that only a certain kind of book, image and level of interpretation will do Wales justice. His ideal is:

> [k]ein Reiseführer im landläufigen Sinn, wie er sagte, sondern ein Buch, das diese Landschaft aus sich heraus beschreibt. [...] Keine Fotos, die einfach nur bebildern, nein, das Licht sollte das Thema sein [...][348]

> [[n]ot a guidebook in the usual sense, as he said, but a book that describes this landscape on its own terms. [...] No photos that simply illustrate, no, light should be the theme […]]

Two reasons could be suggested for the apparent lack of critical interest in Timm's Welsh setting. Firstly, place is deliberately downplayed. Typical markers of place, such as names and fixed boundaries, remain hazy and mysterious, with some even being obscured altogether. Secondly, what is in fact being described as unique is, arguably, *space*: all the features which set the location apart from any other are physical, spatial or elemental, and it is these which are said to have produced particular indigenous cultural qualities. Welsh song, poetry, religion and even Dylan Thomas himself are ultimately described as products of their unique physical surroundings.[349] Thus nothing and no-one in the narrative is actually described as Welsh, Wales itself is named no more than a couple of times and the Welsh language is neither spoken nor referred to. Dylan Thomas's work is quoted in its original English, as we have seen, and none of the characters is ever labelled with a nationality. Local people are only ever glimpsed from afar, as we saw with the mussel pickers above, and are described as 'duldsame, vermummte Menschen wie Schatten' ['passive, muffled-up people like shadows'], drinking away their overwhelming loneliness and so powerfully ruled by the landscape as to have almost merged with it; for Marc they are just another feature alongside sheep and houses, if they are distinguishable at all.[350] What remains is the elemental: 'nur diese Wolken, die vom Meer

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[348] Timm, 'Nicht morgen, nicht gestern', p. 33.
[349] Ibid., pp. 33-34.
[350] Ibid., pp. 33-34.

kommen, das Gras, die Hügel, den Regen, der fällt, die Wolken, die weiterziehen, eine Landschaft ohne Menschen.' ['just these clouds coming from the sea, the grass, the hills, the rain falling, the clouds moving on, a landscape without people.'][351] The main sense of conflict in the narrative thus seems to be between humans and nature, not countries or cultures.

In 'Nicht morgen, nicht gestern' we therefore see a continued lack of Welshness, despite engagement with specific local culture in the form of Dylan Thomas's life and work. Timm's Welsh setting resists human definition and intervention, and is governed instead by universal, natural laws such as the tide and the weather. In fact, human ties to places or people, such as Dylan Thomas's and Marc's complicated relationships with Wales, are shown to be dangerously oppressive, while the protagonist's perspective, often characterised by height and visual clarity, seems to help her escape a similar fate. Wales is also depicted as unique, containing the extreme, the unexpected and the superlative, and the protagonist's slightly awestruck, out-of-body responses bring a sense of the otherworldly to otherwise mundane things. A recurring image of two seagulls high in the sky is a particularly strong example of this. A location on both a physical and emotional edge, together with the narrative blurring of perspectives, identities and experiences, compound an atmosphere of otherness and suspense, but also suggest a threshold, and the possibility of both optimism and despair. The next section shows that Bernig takes up and develops these themes, also finding in Wales a sense of isolation, edges, powerful natural forces and the possibility of space after lengthy entrapment in place.

Jörg Bernig

Jörg Bernig, an award-winning German-language novelist and poet, was born near Leipzig in 1964 and grew up in the GDR. He started out as a miner before gaining a degree at the University of Leipzig and completing a doctorate at the Freie Universität in Berlin. As a graduate he taught briefly in a secondary school in Scotland, then at Swansea University. He has retained links with Swansea and returned for several residencies, most recently in November 2015. There

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[351] Timm, 'Nicht morgen, nicht gestern', p. 34.

seems to be very little critical work on Bernig to date, while Timm has been the subject of two volumes in Swansea University's 'Contemporary German Writers' series, published in 1999 and 2007 respectively. Bernig also appears to have more of a local standing in Germany, with involvement in the arts and literature in his home region of Saxony, compared to Timm's national and international reputation. However, some of his work has travelled beyond Germany, with translations into Romanian, Polish, Lithuanian, Latvian, Italian and Czech. A poetry collection inspired by Swansea and Wales, *flower angel ship*, has also been translated into English, as has the 2002 novel *Niemandszeit*.[352] Two recurring themes in Bernig's work are memory, and the changing borders, allegiances and fate of the central European region that was once Bohemia; these themes are particularly strong in *Niemandszeit*, which of all his texts seems to have attracted the most critical attention.

Further interests explored in Bernig's fiction are thresholds, time and 'Grenz- und Randerfahrungen' ['border and edge experiences'], and it is these which are most pertinent to *Weder Ebbe noch Flut*, his novel set in Wales.[353] First published in 2007, it is Bernig's third novel of four published to date. Its protagonist is an East German academic, Albert Klueß, who arrives in Swansea at the start of the narrative to take up a teaching post at the university. The reader gradually learns that he has left everything behind him, both material and emotional, in his hometown of Leipzig: after a long struggle with infertility, he one day quite literally runs away from his girlfriend, Dorothee, stopping only to pack two bags of belongings or 'das Allernötigste' ['the bare necessities'].[354] This sudden, abrupt departure is a physical and psychological break from everything Albert knows, and he seems determined to maintain it through distance and isolation. This means first escaping to a friend's farm 'in [...] einem gottverlassenen Ackbürgerstädtchen [...], so abgelegen wie nur je etwas' ['in [...] a godforsaken little farming town on the Elbe, as isolated as they come'].[355] Albert then continues to Wales, or as he describes it, 'an den äußersten Rand' ['to the outermost edge'].[356]

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[352] Jörg Bernig, *flower angel ship*, trans. by Tom Cheesman and others (Swansea: Hafan Books, 2013); Jörg Bernig, *No Man's Time*, trans. by Steven W. Lawrie (Aberdeen: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2014).
[353] Bernig, interviewed by Les.
[354] Bernig, *Weder Ebbe noch Flut*, p. 10.
[355] Ibid., p. 11.
[356] Ibid., p. 7.

Bernig's third-person narrative shifts constantly between different times, places and perspectives. For example, the story is mostly told from Albert's perspective and in the present, from his new vantage point of Swansea, but this is also interspersed with Dorothee's experiences in Leipzig as well as memories of their relationship. In addition, there are extracts from Albert's academic research on the life and work of nineteenth-century Bohemian writer Adalbert Stifter, who was himself haunted by a childless marriage. Thus Bernig makes use of multiple voices, as Timm has done, and creates a blend of different times, places and shared experiences. This makes the reader conscious of a layered narrative and calls individual perspectives into question. Unlike Timm, Bernig clearly signposts the different narrative voices, using named third-person narrators (Albert and Dorothee), presenting Albert's academic writings in a different font and quotations from Stifter's work or correspondence in italics. Yet these visual markers do not stop the voices from overlapping and merging, because layers and complicated bonds in the narrative are introduced early on which suggest unstable perspectives. For example, we start to learn about Albert's obsessive entanglement with the long-dead Stifter, the result of a chance encounter with the latter's work at university, before we know anything of his real-world relationship with Dorothee. For Albert, Stifter's work represents '[e]twas, wohin die Gegenwart nicht reichte. Es war eine andere Ordnung der Dinge und der Verhältnisse, auf die er bei Stifter stieß und die ihn anzog.' ['something into which the present couldn't reach. It was a different order of things and relationships that he encountered in Stifter, and which attracted him.']357 But even he recognises the dangers of such an addictive form of escape ('War er zu dicht an Stifter?' ['Was he too close to Stifter?']), albeit initially in terms of his research, and his struggle to write about Stifter objectively and using formal, academic language.358 The wider implication is that Albert's view is clouded by Stifter and therefore precarious, and Dorothee's less frequent voice only serves to destabilise it further. Her steady presence, in the place which used to represent daily reality for both of them, highlights the fact that the most frequently-used voice in the narrative (i.e. Albert's) is fragile, conflicted and distant.

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357 Bernig, *Weder Ebbe noch Flut*, p. 10.
358 Ibid., p. 28 and p. 50.

Movement and distance, whether physical, psychological or temporal, are therefore significant in the text, as are the complexities of belonging, leaving and returning. While leaving is possible in terms of physical distance, there are always emotional ties to the places left behind; and yet both psychologically and temporally there is also no going back. Albert describes this in relation to Stifter leaving home to be educated, and the lifelong impact this had on him and his writing:

> Zu Hause, das gab es nicht mehr. [...] Es gab kein Zurück zu den
> Menschen, zur Familie. [...] Zum Gebirge, ja. Zur Moldau, ja. Zu
> den Dingen, ja. Die Menschen aber... Sie geistern dann durch die
> Erzählungen, die Menschen. [359]

> [Home no longer existed. [...] There was no way back to the
> people, to family. [...] To the mountains, yes. To Moldavia, yes. To
> things, yes. People, though… After that people wander through the
> narratives like ghosts.]

The novel's blend of voices also explores tensions between space and place, as the characters seek to distance themselves from their everyday unhappiness. In Leipzig, Albert and Dorothee find refuge in intimacy, and in the rocky, forested landscape of Saxon Switzerland.[360] Albert also has the private realm of his Stifter research, described as 'ein Raum [...], wohin er zurückziehen konnte, wann immer er wollte' ['a space he could retreat into whenever he wanted'].[361] However, the reassuring familiarity of these seems increasingly insufficient or even ineffective as an escape: more and more, the characters seek another kind of space, *beyond* what they know and are comfortable with. There is also a striking contrast between Albert's agitated, urgent need to move and Dorothee's stillness once their relationship has broken down. She initially remains rooted in Leipzig and all the places which were once meaningful in their relationship, such as their house and their favourite park, while Albert's response takes him to Wales and as far away

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[359] Bernig, *Weder Ebbe noch Flut*, p. 27.
[360] See for example ibid., p. 21 and pp. 35-36.
[361] Ibid., p. 10.

from connections, ties and other people as he can possibly go. The narrative tension between these contrasting voices and contrasting locations is underlined by a Welsh setting which is both physically and figuratively on the edge. Firstly, it is significant that the main, precarious narrative voice, constantly challenged by others from different times and places, is situated in marginal Wales for most of the novel: it brings to mind Bianchi's description of Wales as 'a blind spot which will not let the narrative gaze settle centrally', with its suggestion of a location which itself resists the dominance of any one narrative voice or representation.[362] Albert's journey to this marginal and liminal space is thus equally symbolic: as he moves further from everything he knows, often appearing to drift or be driven by forces beyond his control, there is a sense of nearing the very edge of understanding and reality. This is a departure from Szerb's Welsh space, which represents a similar intellectual and psychological extreme but deep within his Welsh setting, and usually in woods or mountains. In Bernig's novel, as in Timm's narrative, the defining spatial feature of Wales is its literal, physical position on the edge.

Like Timm, Bernig has first-hand experience of Wales as a named, bordered place, which must have partly inspired his setting. Bernig has himself described *Weder Ebbe noch Flut* as 'auto*geo*grafisch' ['auto*geo*graphical'; Bernig's emphasis].[363] Yet what he, too, chooses to bring to the fore is otherness and emptiness, because Wales is an attractive destination for Albert precisely because he has no ties, memories or relationships there at all. In Wales he finds that there is 'Raum genug, daß keiner dem andern nahe kommen mußte' ['space enough that no one had to go near to anyone else'].[364] Unlike the Bohemian Forest, which once offered him and Dorothee an escape to another world, Wales is not even on the same landmass as the place that, until now, he has called home.[365] Bernig's Welsh space offers Albert not just the freedom to move wherever and whenever he wants, after years of being trapped in one place by both politics and his personal life, but also a chance to travel right to the edge. Bernig places even more emphasis on Welsh edges in his novel than can be seen in Timm's narrative, particularly in relation to mainland Europe. Albert's journey to Wales is itself recounted in symbolic detail,

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[362] Bianchi, p. 45.
[363] Bernig, interviewed by Les.
[364] Bernig, *Weder Ebbe noch Flut*, p. 105.
[365] Albert and Dorothee's symbolic journeys from Leipzig into the Bohemian Forest are detailed in chapter seven of the novel (ibid., pp. 35-36).

which is not the case for Timm's protagonist, and shows him reaching a particularly striking emotional and physical threshold at the Belgian port of Ostend: 'Er saß mit dem Rücken zum Kontinent, ganz Belgien, die Ardennen, Deutschland lagen hinter ihm.' ['He sat with his back to the continent, the whole of Belgium, the Ardennes, Germany lay behind him.']366 From there he proceeds to the outer edge of Europe and, as he sees it, the world, referring to his newfound perspective 'von diesem walisischen Rand Europas' ['from this Welsh edge of Europe] and 'an seinem walisischen Weltrand' ['on his Welsh edge of the world'].367 There is also a suggestion that Albert, like Timm's protagonist, might find in Wales a space governed by forces beyond his control. The ferries he watches from the harbour in Ostend slowly move into the distance 'als würden sie von den ihnen nachfolgenden Schiffen über den Horizont gedrängt' ['as if urged over the horizon by the ships behind them'].368 Once in Wales, nature and the elements feature strongly again, with particular mention of the sky and clouds as well as the all-powerful rule of the sea.

Bernig certainly seems to pursue the idea of Wales as a unique setting. In his novel it is singled out from Europe and even the rest of Britain, with the edge location being repeatedly described as *walisisch* [Welsh], as we have just seen, and unlike anything Albert has ever known. This uniqueness is partly attributed to indigenous culture, such as the local 'Singsang' ['sing-song'] accent or the national *Eisteddfod*, both of which are wonderingly described by Albert;369 meanwhile, other examples of exotic cultural experience, such as fish and chips or the TV show *Blind Date*, are generally British rather than exclusive to Wales.370 By far the strongest cultural reference in the narrative, however, is one that Albert has brought with him from Germany: the life and work of Adalbert Stifter. In a similar way to Szerb's protagonist Bátky in *The Pendragon Legend*, Albert therefore uses cultural understanding from a different time and place to make sense of his new, Welsh setting. Stifter is well-known in the German-speaking world, particularly for his extremely detailed descriptions of nature and landscape, and Bernig sees himself as following in this tradition with regard to 'die Rolle von Landschaften, wie sie sich auf

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366 Bernig, *Weder Ebbe noch Flut*, p. 17.
367 Ibid., p. 28 and p. 150.
368 Ibid., pp. 16-17.
369 See for example ibid., p. 45.
370 Ibid., pp. 59-60 and p. 62.

uns auswirken, wie wir auf sie wirken' ['the role of landscapes, how they affect us, how we affect them'.][371] Stifter's style and themes, similarly attributed to geography, form what Bernig refers to as 'ein südliches Narrativ' ['a southern narrative'], making Stifter a 'Referenzmann' ['reference man'] for writers within this 'southern' German tradition.[372] Thus the culture Albert has left behind plays a larger role in shaping his experiences in Wales than the local culture he encounters, which is sampled occasionally but remains distant and largely mysterious. Stifter's influence also explains the prominence of landscape in Bernig's novel, and surely contributes to the lack of Welsh people. Through Albert's eyes, Wales is largely empty of other human beings. Interaction with locals — such as the chatty hairdressers whose shop is below Albert's flat, the old lady who runs the corner shop and the pub regulars spoiling for a fight with the foreigners — is rare, brief and often clichéd or farcical. The most developed characters after Albert, Dorothee and Stifter are Albert's three colleagues at the university, who are Scottish, French and Spanish respectively. These fellow outsiders are the extent of Albert's very small social circle, and he shows no obvious desire to expand it. This both intensifies the introspective narrative voice and serves as a reminder of its problematic nature.

In this way, although Bernig's Welsh setting initially seems less blurred and mysterious than Timm's thanks to more extensive description of places and journeys, it nevertheless remains only hazily defined. Due to a similar lack of indigenous identity, a highly subjective yet precarious narrative perspective and the fact that Wales is chiefly described in terms of what it is *not*. In general, characteristics of place are encountered much less often than those of space. The emptiness and isolation of Wales, as well as its location on the edge, therefore come to represent openness, opportunity and an existence without obligation. Meanwhile, restriction, repetition and expectation remain elsewhere. For Albert, in *Weder Ebbe noch Flut*, there is a clear physical and emotional distinction between Wales and where he has come from: after a suffocating existence in landlocked Leipzig, he finds the wide, unpeopled vistas of coastal Swansea a balm for the soul. The same physical distinction is not explicitly made in Timm's narrative, because we find

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[371] Bernig, interviewed by Les.
[372] Ibid. Bernig places himself within this tradition and suggests Theodor Fontane as Stifter's northern counterpart.

out so little about where the protagonist has come from, but her reaction to Wales suggests that she, too, finds a welcome change of perspective on the Carmarthenshire coast.

In Timm's and Bernig's texts, which engage much more with Wales's physical landscape and the power of nature, the Welsh settings therefore seem to represent an indifferent sort of space, and a key threshold on the protagonists' personal journeys. Even the texts' titles reflect this liminality — not tomorrow, not yesterday; neither high nor low tide. For both protagonists, Wales is a welcome retreat and they travel there willingly, yet they also keep Welsh *place* at arm's length, preferring distance, solitude and introspection to local human contact. As a result, both protagonists retain and even seem to relish their outsider status. Welsh space is not hostile as such but refuses to embrace or be embraced by these newcomers, who find their needs reflected and intensified in an environment where human concerns are dwarfed by elemental and universal forces. However, this indifferent space can also be positive, especially when compared with the protagonists' places of origin. Bernig makes this most explicit in *Weder Ebbe noch Flut* with recurring imagery related to sinking. In Leipzig, it refers to the constant threat of being swallowed up by the grim relentlessness of everyday life. Bernig describes how, '[u]m nicht im Alltag zu versinken, [...] zogen sich Dorothee und Albert an einzelnen Tagen in ein anderes Leben zurück.' ['so as not to get bogged down in the everyday, [...] on particular days Dorothee and Albert retreated into another life.']373 In Swansea, however, it becomes a willing act of immersion in something Albert really cares about: '[v]ielleicht war es möglich, von diesem walisischen Rand Europas aus auf seine Arbeit zu schauen. Sich versenken — und darin versinken.' ['Maybe it was possible, from this Welsh edge of Europe, to keep his mind on his work. To immerse himself — and sink in it.'374 Moreover, Swansea's physical liminality allows for possibility. When Albert almost drowns off the Welsh coast, after deliberately ignoring warning signs about the half-tide, a miraculous rescue turns the near-fatal experience into a moment of re-birth, revelation and realisation.375 Similarly, in 'Nicht morgen, nicht gestern', recurring images involving height, flight and light bring optimism to an increasingly dark and threatening narrative, and help the protagonist to find clarity and a way out. It could be said,

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373 Bernig, *Weder Ebbe noch Flut*, p. 35.
374 Ibid., p. 28.
375 Ibid., chapter 23, pp. 118-24.

then, that Timm's and Bernig's texts bring a new, transcendental quality to their Welsh settings, whose space *beyond* offers the possibility of realisation, revelation and return on the protagonists' own terms. There is also a definite sense of travelling '[f]rom the middle zones of existence to the sharp edge of life'.[376] The European mainland is exchanged for its very fringes, and stasis for a setting which is unpredictable and rarely still. For all its indifference and emptiness, Welsh space in these texts is thus characterised by suspense on the brink, which means that senses are heightened, emotions rawer and experiences more vivid. The combination of physical openness, psychological space, perceptual sharpness and limited outside interference makes these Welsh settings uniquely suitable for personal journeys of self-discovery.

The Welsh space in Timm's and Bernig's texts therefore shares several distinct characteristics. Firstly, it allows their protagonists to move beyond what they know, both physically and emotionally. Through the authors' personal experience of Wales they are able to travel to liminal Welsh space right on the edge, as well as to fulfil an almost transcendental desire to rise above their familiar environments. Wales thus enables the protagonists to gain the greatest possible distance from their origins and their pasts. While Szerb, as discussed in the previous chapter, was also concerned with finding space beyond the familiar, the primary attraction of his Welsh 'private universe' seems to have been its distance from the seriousness of academia in Hungary. The distance sought by Timm's and Bernig's protagonists, however, is an attempt to cast off associations and distractions, find clarity and gain perspective, and concerns physical as much as intellectual surroundings. As we saw in the previous chapter, Szerb's Welsh space, although concerned with psychological thresholds as well as social and cultural margins, is not coastal but wooded, mountainous and inland. Timm's and Bernig's theme of edges and extremes therefore brings a new and striking geographical element to their Welsh settings, and this greater engagement with the physical environment has been the main influence on the theoretical framework for this chapter. The key spatial theories called upon therefore all relate to edges, thresholds and the effect of powerful physical surroundings on personal, psychological space. Westphal's geocriticism features once again, alongside Kenneth White's 'geopoetics',

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[376] Leon Chestov quoted in Kenneth White, *Across the Territories. Travels from Orkney to Rangiroa* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2004), p. vi.

John Cowper Powys's 'elementalism' and Edward S. Casey's most recent work, *The World on Edge*.[377]

   A sense of awe inspired by extreme landscapes is certainly not a new response to Wales in literature, nor is it exclusive to visitors from elsewhere. George Borrow wrote in the nineteenth century that in Wales 'Nature displays herself in her wildest, boldest and occasionally most magical forms'.[378] Some time later Hilaire Belloc wrote of Snowdon that '[t]here is no corner of Europe that I know [...] which so moves me with the awe and majesty of great things as does this mass of the northern Welsh mountains seen from this corner of their silent sea'.[379] More recently, Anglo-Welsh writer Jan Morris has spoken of the '[h]allucinatory grandeur, romantic exoticism, Outback emptiness' of Wales.[380] Jon Anderson, meanwhile, has described the 'strong' and 'historical' bond between land and people which underpins indigenous Welsh culture, especially its storytelling.[381] This is reinforced in turn by unique spatial terms in the Welsh language such as *tirwedd*, *tirlun, hiraeth* and *cynefin*.[382] On the one hand, Timm's and Bernig's focus on nature and the elements reflects the heightened sensitivity to one's natural surroundings that Wales seems to inspire. More generally, the suggestion that Wales represents a retreat or escape also corresponds to the idea of '[n]ature as therapy', which has deep roots in German-language literature especially.[383] On the other hand, nature in Timm's and Bernig's texts is not just awe-inspiring but also *other*. The protagonists' extreme reactions to, say, the Welsh sea or sky, lend the settings a sense of the supernatural, which is hinted at in Borrow's reference to its 'magical' nature. Thus, while these Welsh settings are certainly valued by the protagonists for their healing potential, this is not simply 'nature as therapy', as Ireton puts it in his title, as opposed to toxic

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[377] Edward S. Casey, *The World on Edge* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2017).

[378] Quoted in Haining, p. 17.

[379] Belloc quoted in Jan Morris, *Wales. Epic Views of a Small Country* (London: Penguin, 2000), p. 14.

[380] Morris, p. 15.

[381] Anderson, *Page and Place*, pp. 29-30.

[382] Ibid., pp. 34-35. Anderson writes: '*Tirwedd* describes the land's shape, form, and physicality, whilst *tirlun* reflects the image of landscape and our perception of landscape in social and cultural terms [...]' (p. 35). He borrows Simon Elmes's definition of *hiraeth* as 'that sense of belonging or homesickness that Welsh people feel in their hearts when a long way from the Valleys of the south or the mountains of the north' (ibid.). For *cynefin*, Anderson quotes Mike Pearson and Michael Shanks: 'Cynefin (habitat), that area where we feel we belong, the immediate environment, the surroundings which impress themselves upon us in the formative years between 5 and 15' (ibid.).

[383] Sean Ireton, 'Nature as Therapy: Case Studies from Austria (Adalbert Stifter) and North America (Doug Peacock)', *Pacific Coast Philology*, 46 (2011), 122-38 (p. 122) <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.bangor.ac.uk/stable/41851021> [accessed 26 September 2016].

modern civilisation. Bernig's protagonist Albert in fact turns his back on the nature closer to home which once offered a welcome and restorative retreat. Instead, the environment sought by Albert and by Timm's protagonist needs to be extreme, on the edge and — crucially — *somewhere else*. Bernig expresses this in *Weder Ebbe noch Flut* as the 'heilsame Erfahrung der Fremde' ['the healing experience of the foreign'].[384] Albert says of Wales that '[i]ch genieße es, hier zu leben [...] Allein schon das Meer zwingt die Dinge irgendwie in ihre eigentliche Dimension' ['I enjoy living here [...] The sea alone somehow forces things into their actual dimensions'].[385] Timm, too, has acknowledged in his essays the cathartic element of writing about the foreign and faraway, stating that:

> [d]as Nächste ist oft das Fernste, nämlich man selbst. [...] Die
> Beschreibung der fremde Welt ist eben auch eine Selbstprüfung,
> eine Selbstbeschreibung, Selbstanalyse.[386]

> [[w]hat is nearest is often furthest away, namely oneself. [...]
> Describing the foreign world is therefore also examining the self,
> describing the self, self-analysis.]

A key aspect of Timm's and Bernig's Welsh settings is therefore not just closeness to the elemental, but to a natural world which contrasts completely with the one they know.

In a similar way, Kenneth White's geopoetics revolves around a strong sense of one's physical surroundings and a departure from the known and habitual, which feeds into personal, psychological renewal:

> Geopoetics breaks familiarity, and recognizes a
> strangeness. Beginning with the lie of the land, remaining
> close to the elements, it opens up space, and it works out a

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[384] Bernig, *Weder Ebbe noch Flut*, p. 121.
[385] Ibid., p. 121.
[386] Timm, 'Das Nahe, das Ferne', pp. 342-43.

new mindscape. Its basis is a new sense of land in an

enlarged mind.[387]

Duality of place is crucial to White's philosophy: his 'experience of place' is always written about 'in conjunction with my original territory, Scotland', just as the protagonists' places of origin are a constant presence, whether implicit or explicit, in Timm's and Bernig's texts.[388] White is also concerned with personal orientation and perspective. He describes his own formative travel experiences as moving out of a labyrinth and into a void, then seeking an outlook post, often located on a geographical edge. The act of writing such journeys is itself integral to his spatial understanding, often being done 'whenever I felt the need to get my bearings'.[389] Finally, geopoetics 'opens up space', as in the quotation above, whether this is space beyond cultural constraints (such as time or societal expectation) or space in a literal, physical sense. For example, White writes that 'I wanted out of a civilization that was only marking time. I wanted more space'.[390] However, he also speaks wonderingly of the '[s]heer physicality' and 'sense of space' of the Atlantic Ocean.[391] An obsession with 'Atlantic margins' and 'the Atlantic edge' resonates in particular with the Welsh settings in this chapter, and their emphasis on the coast, edges, distance and perspective.[392] Interestingly, theirs are the only Welsh settings in the corpus in which it is truly possible to look out and beyond, with one's back to everything else and nothing in front. Unlike the mostly inland, North Walian settings in Szerb, Sebald and Bakker, in Swansea and the surrounding area one can look out onto the open sea, with no land between the onlooker and the horizon. Moreover, not only is the coast a dramatic contrast to the protagonists' inland origins in continental Europe, it is also an ancient and symbolic space of contemplation and realisation. As White has said:

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[387] Kenneth White, *On the Atlantic Edge* (Dingwall: Sandstone Press, 2006), p. 52.
[388] Kenneth White, *The Wanderer and his Charts. Essays on Cultural Renewal* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2004), p. vi.
[389] Ibid., p. vii.
[390] Ibid., p. 113. See also p. 173.
[391] White, *On the Atlantic Edge*, p. 45.
[392] 'Atlantic margins' are referred to in White, *The Wanderer and his Charts*, p. 120, while the 'Atlantic Edge' appears in the title of his 2006 collection of lectures referenced here.

[l]ooking at a globe, what strikes the eye most are coastlines. This area where land and water encounter each other is perhaps the most characteristic feature of our planet.

That is maybe why an old Gaelic text, The Talk of the Two Scholars, has this: 'The shore was always a place of revelation for the poets'. And why, centuries later, an essayist such as [Ralph Waldo] Emerson could write: 'The point of greatest interest is the place where land and water meet.' Here, he goes on to say, is 'the concentration of the vastitude, the form of the formless', stimulating in man both 'the cave of memory' and 'the house of reason'.[393]

There are parallels here with the striking prominence of the Welsh coastline in Timm's and Bernig's texts, and its role as a threshold which accommodates perspectives from and of different times and places. White also seems to echo the new sense of openness for the protagonists in their Welsh settings, along with the removal of (familiar) form or bounds: paradoxically, these narrow the protagonists' inner focus, in the manner of Emerson's 'concentration of the vastitude' and 'form of the formless', guiding them where rigid, familiar structures had only robbed them of direction or impeded movement altogether. The physical Welsh environment is thus shown to influence the minds of its inhabitants, particularly if they are outsiders seeking to cast off the chains of home.

John Cowper Powys's elementalism further explores the relationship between humans and their natural environment, but with a particular connection to nature in Wales. Powys's fascination with Welsh place, culture and history, discussed in the previous chapter as a possible influence on Szerb's Welsh setting in *The Pendragon Legend*, is sometimes joined in his fiction by a 'sense of a pervasive, assertive nature' and 'an intense concentration upon all the orders of the natural world [...] Nature, and man joining with nature — gaining hope, faith and courage'.[394]

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[393] White, *On the Atlantic Edge*, p. 25.
[394] Denis Lane, 'Elementalism in John Cowper Powys's Porius', *Papers on Language and Literature*, 17 (1981), 381-404 (p. 391 and p. 404).

According to Denis Lane, this elementalism is particularly strong in Powys's final novel *Porius*, published in 1951. *Porius* concerns individuals resisting the tyranny of man-made systems, both religious and political, by drawing on both their physical surroundings and 'the creative power of the imagination'.[395] In narrative terms, this means that '[e]very aspect of the novel is drawn with reference to the elemental world — human thought, speech, action, contemplation, all are viewed as coordinate with other parts of nature'.[396] The Welsh settings in this chapter could equally be said to contain 'a quivering sense of the earth' present in Powys's novel, while its 'twilight atmosphere of change' chimes with Wales's liminality in the German texts.[397] Another aspect of Powys's elementalism which resonates with Timm's and Bernig's Welsh space is the role and universal importance of the imagination in human experience. As he states in *Porius*, '[t]he human imagination must never be robbed of its power *to tell itself other stories*, and thus to create a different future.'[398] The ability to tell oneself other stories is a major personal obsession for so many of Timm and Bernig's characters. Imagination is crucial in their attempts to see beyond the confines of place, and they constantly look for psychological space within their everyday lives in which to imagine or construct alternative realities and futures. Arguably, however, only those who manage to break away and out of place, and their everyday lives, succeed in getting closer to actually changing anything, and this is where the Welsh settings have most significance: it is in Welsh space, completely unconnected to anyone or anywhere else, unencumbered by the stifling associations of place and with only indifferent nature to overhear, that the protagonists can for the first time clearly picture 'a different future' for themselves.

For Timm's and Bernig's protagonists, Wales is an attractive setting because it is an overwhelmingly physical, elemental presence, mostly empty of other people and indifferent to the problems they bring with them or mistakes they have left behind. These indifferent surroundings allow the protagonists to focus completely on themselves, with no distractions, obligations or emotional investment in what happens around them. This is a further departure from Szerb's narrative in *The Pendragon Legend*. While the possibility of being truly objective

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[395] Lane, p. 382 and p. 404.
[396] Ibid., p. 390.
[397] Ibid., p. 404.
[398] Quoted in ibid., p. 386, Lane's emphasis.

is just one of many questions explored in Szerb's novel (and always indirectly, through his characters), Timm and Bernig are frank about subjectivity in their work in general. For Timm it is his *modus operandi* and main defence against critics who question or demand authenticity in his works, especially those set in foreign places. He has written that:

> [m]it der Frage nach der Authentizität ist der Vorwurf verbunden, die fremde Welt sei falsch und sehr einseitig und nicht objektiv genug dargestellt. Meine Vorstellung von Literatur ist nicht, dass sie objektiv sein sollte, im Gegenteil, ich wünsche mir den sehr subjektiven Blick. [399]

> [[t]he question of authenticity is always bound up with the accusation that the foreign world is false and very one-sided and not portrayed objectively enough. My idea of literature is not that it should be objective, on the contrary, I want a very subjective view.]

Bernig, meanwhile, talks of spontaneous or chance happenings as he writes, with the result that his narratives often arrive at 'Zonen, wo manches in der Wahrnehmung verschwimmt' ['Zones where much becomes blurred in terms of perception'].[400] This, too, refers to 'Fremdheitserfahrungen' ['experiences of foreignness'] in particular.[401] As in Szerb, Timm's and Bernig's Welsh settings are hard to pin down as places, because any features specific to the local culture or inhabitants are very often played down. The powerful presence of the physical landscape and the elements contributes to this, creating a sense of space which defies human intervention and understanding, or indeed anything on a human scale. On the other hand, strong physicality coupled with intense subjectivity seems to result in a more direct, tangible relationship between individual and environment, and therefore a particularly vivid and meaningful experience of place, space and one's own position in it. Reaching a geographical

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[399] Timm, 'Das Nahe, das Ferne', p. 342.
[400] Bernig, interviewed by Les.
[401] Ibid.

edge seems also to represent a personal, psychological threshold for the protagonist, corresponding with Leon Chestov's description of arriving at 'the sharp edge of life' from the 'middle zones of existence'.[402] Once again, Kenneth White suggests the importance of the coast in contributing to heightened awareness:

> To live close to the sea and with the sea is to be aware of the
> biological origins of life. It is also to be aware of rhythms and
> patterns — tidal systoles and diastoles, wave-shapes and wave-
> movements, currents and winds, a changing meteorology, the
> multiple variations of a coastline —, and, with all that, to have a
> pervasive sense of chaos and cosmos, chaosmos.[403]

Likewise, in his recent study of the 'edge-world', Edward S. Casey insists upon the 'privileged' status of coastal edges, because 'a coastline [...] attracts attention and energy by its unilateral status as the only edge that matters'.[404] As such, edges are 'not merely incidental aspects of perception'.[405] Moreover he emphasizes the natural over the human at such 'wild edges', with the adjective 'wild' to be understood 'in the straightforward sense of whatever the nonhuman environment delivers on its own, unassisted by human influence or interaction'.[406] These 'wild edges' embody 'the earth's enduring elementarity' and are 'indifferent' to the 'complications' of biological life'; here, 'the earth shows itself in a manner that is both reduced and prominent — reduced to bare rock, prominent in human (and other animal) perception.'[407] Casey's coastal edges are thus 'deeply orienting phenomena' and resonate strongly with the Welsh coast in Timm's and Bernig's narratives, on which human insignificance, sharpness of perception and a desire for personal orientation prevail.[408] Along with White and Powys, for whom close encounters with nature bring opportunities for individual creativity, self-discovery and self-renewal, Casey therefore makes explicit the connections between a strong sense of 'wildness'

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[402] Quoted in White, *Across the Territories*, p. vi.
[403] White, *On the Atlantic Edge*, p. 25.
[404] Casey, p. 150.
[405] Ibid., p. xiii.
[406] Ibid., p. 138.
[407] Ibid., p. 151.
[408] Ibid., p. 151.

and personal development which are hinted at in Timm's and Bernig's texts, especially when one is situated on an edge. We are reminded of a positive, productive kind of marginality identified in Welsh fiction by Bianchi, and also present in Szerb's Welsh setting discussed in the previous chapter.

Similarly, Westphal's geocriticism engages in 'recentring' literary settings and refocusing attention on the imaginary aspects of space and edges. Just as geocriticism 'operates somewhere between the geography of the "real" and the geography of the "imaginary" [...]', so Wales is presented by Timm and Bernig as a liminal space, in which real writers, narratives and experiences blend with fictional characters, imagined narratives and subjective, individualised encounters with Welsh space.[409] Liminality is crucial to Westphal's understanding of 'the relationship between referential and fictional spaces', and his theoretical model aspires to:

> […] reflect a sense of openness, permitting contact between the two spaces. We have to keep in mind that liminality is the threshold (limen) and not the border (*limes*): the threshold presupposes free crossings, unlike the border, which can be sealed.[410]

This recalls Casey's work, in which 'limits figure as secondary' alongside 'transitional' and 'inherently mobile' edges, and it is notable that the ability to move freely, and in any direction, is a particular characteristic of Welsh space for Timm and Bernig.[411] Westphal goes on to describe his proposed 'threshold' for reading literary space as '*bifrons*, like Janus', the two-headed Roman god of transitions and beginnings (*bifrons* means 'two-faced').[412] It seems fitting, then, that Jon Anderson, in a recent study of Welsh settings in anglophone Welsh writing, has also used Janus specifically to describe modern-day Wales and what he sees as current and uniquely Welsh 'tensions between people and place'.[413] Anderson writes that '[o]ne of Wales's Janus

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[409] Westphal, p. 170.
[410] Ibid., p. 98.
[411] Casey, p. 55 and pp. xvii-xviii.
[412] Westphal, p. 98.
[413] Anderson, *Page and Place*, p. 30.

faces looks inward and to the past, whilst the other looks outward and to the future'.[414] His interpretation is that the former face is concerned with a 'historical affinity to landscape', stemming from indigenous Welsh culture and language as well as traditional occupations, while the latter seeks to reconcile traditional, historical ties to places with a role in the globalised world.[415] These references to Janus thus reinforce not only the liminal nature of spatial depictions in literature, but also put forward the idea that Welsh settings have a particular liminality all of their own.

Geocriticism offers further insight into the emptiness of Timm's and Bernig's Welsh settings. Westphal introduces his notion of 'the too-full world of literary geography', claiming that:

> [t]oday the writer always comes in second place: the writer is
> always preceded by those who have fixed the referent, who are
> sometimes themselves writers. [...] Nevertheless, this
> overdetermination caused by a ubiquitous referent sometimes leads
> to a liberating effect: no longer able to fill the empty spaces as in
> Homer's time, writers will empty the too-full world today.[416]

There are intriguing connections here to Timm's and Bernig's emptied Welsh space, which could certainly be seen as a reaction to 'overdetermination', if not necessarily of Wales itself. Rather, 'overdetermination' in the texts seems to be associated with the protagonists' places of origin, while Wales in contrast offers a more 'liberating' space. The ghostly presence of other writers in a particular landscape also comes to mind, and to cleave to the 'fixed' or 'ubiquitous' is portrayed in both texts as dangerous and even fatal. Timm's character Marc falls victim to this through his obsession with Dylan Thomas, while Bernig's Albert only narrowly escapes following Adalbert Stifter to an early grave. It could therefore be argued, for both Albert and Timm's protagonists, that blank, marginal Welsh space is what saves them from such a fate.

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[414] Anderson, *Page and Place*, p. 30.
[415] Ibid., p. 30.
[416] Westphal, p. 83.

Journey, Movement, and Opening Up

White highlights the importance of movement and travelling in geopoetics when he writes that:

> [a]ccording to [Robert Louis] Stevenson, if you put a rucksack on
> your back and make off, it's to free yourself from the shackles of
> the past (mistakes, regrets, obsessions), it's to approach a new
> being in a new world. You're out to put some distance between
> society and yourself, between your (habitual) self and your
> (potential) self. You're moving out of time into space, and space is
> first and foremost the landscape, which is invigorating and
> inspiring for taste, sensibility and mind. [...] clarity of vision goes
> with movement, while prolonged sedentary study can make the
> sight opaque, and dilute, dissipate, efface the vision.[417]

Moving purposefully away from one place and towards another is certainly an inescapable feature of both texts discussed in this chapter. Such journeys are not necessarily purposeful in the expected sense, with a clear destination and outcome, but one senses the protagonists' strong desire to arrive at, or at least get closer to, a point which is both distant and completely different from the one they started from. For Timm's protagonist this means escape in an aeroplane, from her nondescript home and 'Tage, die wir Schildkröten krochen' ['days which crawled by like tortoises', to Wales's windy clifftops and restless skies.[418] Bernig's Albert, meanwhile, makes his journey to Wales in several symbolic stages by bus, train, ferry and taxi. This is brought into relief during the ferry crossing, when Albert wonderingly, and almost disbelieving, reflects upon the Channel Tunnel being built below him: 'Nur zwanzig Minuten für eine Eisenbahnfahrt vom französischen Festland nach England!' ['Only twenty minutes for a train journey from continental France to England!'][419] It is clear that this new route, compressing time and distance, is the very antithesis of Albert's slow but inevitable approach to Wales, which seems to be

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[417] White, *The Wanderer and his Charts*, pp. 81-82.
[418] Timm, Nicht morgen, nicht gestern, p. 38.
[419] Bernig, *Weder Ebbe noch Flut*, p. 17.

driven as much by the hand of fate as by technology and makes Albert acutely aware of space, distance and the edge of his known world. His arrival at this edge — 'Albert stellte seine Armbanduhr eine Stunde zurück […] Jetzt war er wirklich weggegangen' ['Albert put his watch back an hour […] Now he had really left'] — is all the more momentous as a result.[420] White's interpretation of exile has some relevance here. As in his own personal experience, neither Timm's nor Bernig's protagonist feels able to stay in his or her 'original territory', but neither are they forced to leave: for both there is a genuine, optimistic desire to go somewhere new.[421] The resulting journeys could thus be likened to White's 'exile without pathos. In fact it's more extension and expansion'.[422] Despite a sense of moving into the unknown, and the fact that narrative chance and circumstances play a large part in deciding where the characters go, the travellers do have a specific, named destination: Wales. Timm's protagonist, for example, is drawn there following a chance, professional-turned-romantic encounter, while Albert's motivation in Bernig's novel is an out-of-the-blue job opportunity, albeit only after he has made the break from place and is already on the move. Nonetheless both characters have a sense of anticipation, expectation and a vague awareness of what Wales might offer when they get there, along with a feeling that whatever it is could not be found elsewhere.

White's geopoetical spatial awareness, detailed in the above quotation, captures tensions between place and space which are becoming increasingly familiar in the corpus for this thesis. In Timm's and Bernig's texts especially the protagonists could be said to leave the 'shackles of the past' for 'a new being in a new world', moving from society to the individual, and from 'habitual' to 'potential'.[423] Finding a space one can move into, and then around in, is a crucial step towards counteracting the negative effects of stasis in a familiar place: as Albert tells Dorothee in *Weder Ebbe noch Flut*, during lengthy and ultimately unsuccessful fertility treatment, '[m]an hat den Eindruck, immer am selben Ort zu sein [...] Und weil es immer derselbe ist, ist es eigentlich keiner. Das ist eine Unwelt, und wir verschwinden darin.' ['You get the impression of always being in the same place. [...] And because it's always the same place,

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[420] Bernig, *Weder Ebbe noch Flut,* p. 17.
[421] White, *The Wanderer and his Charts*, p. vi.
[422] White, *On the Atlantic Edge*, p. 52.
[423] White, *The Wanderer and his Charts*, p. 81.

it's not really anywhere. It's a non-world, and we're disappearing in it.']424 Both protagonists lack perspective in their places of origin, and their movement towards and within Wales is marked by an obsessive pursuit of edges or observation from a height. White brings to mind both Albert's 'Unwelt' and the tiny, faceless people in Timm's Welsh landscape when he states that 'clarity of vision goes with movement, while prolonged sedentary study can make the sight opaque, and dilute, dissipate, efface the vision'.425 Following Casey's reading of edges, the coastal geography encountered in Wales only sharpens this clarity, being 'inherently mobile rather than fixed' and sending forth 'energy, definition, profile and outreach'.426

Just as White's geopoetics is rooted in a desire to leave behind 'a civilization that was only marking time' in favour of 'more space', Timm's and Bernig's protagonists desire to be free of the measuring and monitoring in their places of origin, particularly with regard to time.427 Stepping out of this temporal structure is a strong motivating factor in the protagonists' decisions to leave familiar places, whether this amounts to escaping the burden of the past (such as relationships or political systems) or shedding the weight of future expectations (such as wanting a baby, or completing a PhD). What is more, the Welsh space they move into is depicted as being out-of-time altogether. The focus is on physical aspects of the protagonists' surroundings, rather than, say, social or temporal structures imposed by humans. This means that the only checks and restrictions on the human characters are physical ones such as geography, topography and the elements. They can still be immensely, even fatally powerful — the sea especially, in this coastal region — but they are also indifferent to the world at human level. In terms of individual actions and decisions they are therefore a less restricting force than social obligations, expectations and rules, which seem not to exist in these Welsh settings at all or are a background presence at most. Nature offers the protagonists a different kind of reassurance in the form of a *lack* of control over what goes on around them, along with the acceptance that certain decisions either do not matter, or are out of their hands.

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424 Bernig, *Weder Ebbe noch Flut*, p. 29.
425 White, *The Wanderer and his Charts*, p. 82.
426 Casey, p. xviii and p. xv.
427 White, *The Wanderer and his Charts*, p. 113.

This is where Timm and Bernig perhaps diverge slightly from geopoetics and, instead, Powys's elementalism comes to mind. Powys, too, is concerned with turning points and realisation, as well as the endurance of humanity and nature versus tyrannical but transient man-made systems; as the character of Myrddin declares in Powys's key elementalist novel, *Porius*, '[t]he earth lasts and man lasts, and the animals and the birds and the fishes last, but gods and governments perish!'[428] Most of all, perhaps, the overall tone of Timm's and Bernig's Welsh texts chime with the positivity underpinning elementalism, for Powys has been described as 'perhaps the definitive philosopher of meliorism in the twentieth-century English novel'.[429] In particular, the German authors' Welsh fiction seems to carry echoes of Powys's belief in personal betterment through the relationship with one's physical, natural surroundings, or 'man joining with nature — gaining hope, faith and courage'.[430] Neither Timm nor Bernig gives his text a traditional happy ending, or his readers the satisfaction of mysteries solved, missions completed and all problems overcome: both narratives are open-ended, uncertain and full of unanswered questions. Nonetheless there is a clear sense of the protagonists having got closer to a particular physical environment than ever before, and closer to knowing themselves as a result. In response to an observation that despite Albert's turmoil and trauma, *Weder Ebbe noch Flut* ends on a positive note, Bernig called it 'mein positivster Roman überhaupt' ['my most positive novel by far'].[431] It is plain that a certain amount of clarity, perspective, self-discovery and realisation has been achieved in both texts, and that the Welsh settings, with their raw elemental power and sheer, inescapable physical presence, have helped to sharpen self-awareness and make this possible.

Mapping Space and Literature as Map

These internal responses to physical space are reinforced by the texts' unexpected cartography. Maps are as conspicuous by their absence here as they were in Szerb's novel, and perhaps even

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[428] Quoted in Lane, p. 387.
[429] Lane, p. 404.
[430] Ibid., p. 404.
[431] Bernig, interviewed by Les.

more so given that, firstly, Timm and Bernig tend towards realism in their fiction, and, secondly, they also have personal experience of the Welsh landscape they describe, which may well have involved consulting a map at some point. The lack of maps in their texts suggests, to start with, that the protagonists are unwilling or unable to navigate their new territory, and to orientate themselves in an unfamiliar setting. Certainly, as we have seen, it seems to suit them to remain or be kept at a distance from their new surroundings, cleaving to liminal spaces on the edge rather than becoming entangled in the local and defined. However, given that a map can only offer 'a creative interpretation of the space it claims to represent', and a two-dimensional one at that, it could also be argued that the protagonists here have a closer encounter with their physical surroundings without one.[432] The scale and sharpness of the geography and topography of Wales in both narratives is a plausible consequence of this.

Present in both texts, however, are intriguing literary threads, which act as a map of sorts for the troubled protagonists. In the absence of external, tangible cartography or other navigational tools, the writings of Dylan Thomas (in 'Nicht morgen, nicht gestern') and Adalbert Stifter (in *Weder Ebbe noch Flut*) act as a spiritual guide, travel companion and moral compass, and at first only reinforce a sense of disorientation. Timm's protagonist entrusts herself to Marc, who seems incapable of going anywhere or doing anything Thomas has not been or done, while Albert brings only his folder of Stifter notes to Wales alongside a couple of bags of clothes; tellingly, these notes are described as mere 'Anfänge und Annäherungen aus verschiedenen Richtungen.' ['beginnings and approached from different directions.'][433] At times these writers also offer warnings when actual indications of danger, such as tidal warnings (in Bernig's text) or violence and alcoholism (in Timm's), have been ignored. Using literature as a kind of map once again implies that Wales is seen by these authors as a malleable, creative space which can be personalised, rather than a place with fixed boundaries, as it would be portrayed on a map, and existing cultural features. As is the case for White's geopoetics, the authors' own cultural references shape the way they interpret the foreignness encountered. Even Timm, who has chosen a Welsh literary reference in Dylan Thomas, seems to have done this: Thomas is arguably

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[432] Jerry Brotton, *A History of the World in Twelve Maps* (London: Penguin, 2013), p. 14.
[433] Bernig, *Weder Ebbe noch Flut*, p. 28.

the most international of writers from Wales, with far-reaching influence and a complicated legacy at home, so his profile chimes with Timm's apparent 'fondness for literary models [...] who came to grief because their vision cannot be realized in the society in which they find themselves'.[434] This predicament in turn is echoed in both protagonists' journeys to Wales, when they break out of the clutches of place and move towards a space of their own. Personal 'literary models' would therefore seem more appropriate in such a space, while traditional cartography appears to belong to the places left behind. Lippard, for example, describes maps as being full of links to other times and other people:

> For most of us, the map is a tantalizing symbol of time and space.
> Even at their most abstract, maps (especially topographical maps)
> are catalysts, as much titillating foretastes of future physical
> experience as they are records of others' (or our own) past
> experiences. [...] A map can be memory or anticipation in graphic
> code.[435]

Such markers are the very shackles of place that the protagonists have tried to cast off in coming to Wales, and as such are the last thing they want to encounter while there. Besides, as Lippard has also said with regard to place, '[t]he journey defines the destination'.[436] This chimes with the experience of Timm's and Bernig's protagonists, for whom Wales is something of a chance encounter — scarred by past trauma, they simply feel a deep compulsion to leave the places which have become stifling and overfamiliar, without at first knowing where, literally or figuratively, they will end up. A map in the traditional sense, then, would be of no use either for the journey or the destination, both of which have a significant psychological component and are shaped by things that have happened elsewhere.

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[434] Williams, 'Uwe Timm oder unsicher in die 70er Jahre', p. 63. For Thomas's complicated sense of identity see for example Walford Davies' introduction to Dylan Thomas, *The Loud Hill of Wales: Poetry of Place*, ed. by Walford Davies (London: Dent. 1991), pp. ix-xx.
[435] Lippard, p. 77.
[436] Ibid., p. 43.

For Timm and Bernig, the narrative presence of Thomas and Stifter also reinforces their own literary values, providing a model for being in and reading one's surroundings and bringing a focus on stories and ways in which to tell them. Meanwhile the characters' relationships with these other writers steer the plot, influencing their behaviour and movement within the Welsh settings; for Timm's characters in particular, Dylan Thomas is a key reason for them being in Wales at all. This connection between real and fictional characters, and the way their stories overlap and intertwine, contributes to the general sense of thresholds by blurring edges and perspectives. Some characters seem always to be teetering on the brink of *becoming* the writer they spend so much time with, in their work or research, and as we have seen it is sometimes hard to distinguish between individual voices, views and experiences. While these literary links help to guide the characters, then, they also serve to divert and disorientate the reader, not least because they strengthen the problematic subjectivity of both narratives. While it is not always possible to distinguish between the real and imagined features of these Welsh settings, it is certainly clear that we are being shown a very personal interpretation of the protagonists' surroundings, reinforced by constant references to writers who are important to these protagonists but not necessarily connected to their Welsh location. The fact that two long-dead writers feature far more strongly here than any local Welsh people encountered in the present offers further proof of this precarious personalisation of space through multiple voices.

For most people, Dylan Thomas and his poetry are inseparable from Wales itself. For many the connection to place is even more specific, for as Don Sinnock writes, 'somehow it is always Laugharne, and really only that small portion of it occupied by the Boathouse, that one thinks of as the Dylan Thomas landscape.'[437] Thomas's work contains many themes relevant to 'Nicht morgen, nicht gestern', including the familiar paradox of place, which can provide a sense of belonging but also, even simultaneously, a feeling of being trapped or constrained by other people's rules, expectations and demands. In Thomas's case, the 'urge' to 'explode, and explode out of, his frustrated sense of belonging', while growing up in suburban Swansea, coexisted with 'his realization that this is also where he incorrigibly belongs'.[438] Equally relevant to Timm's

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[437] Don Sinnock, *The Dylan Thomas Landscape* (Swansea: Celtic Education (Services) Ltd, 1975), p. 9.
[438] Davies, 'Introduction', p. xv.

narrative is Thomas's continual exploration of 'the individual's mysterious relationship —
sometimes reassuring, sometimes daunting — to the physical world around him', which has been
named a factor in his enduring reputation as a poet.[439] Finally, Thomas always stressed the
uniqueness of Wales as a personally inspiring and productive space, 'stat[ing] categorically more
than once that it was only in Wales that he could write'.[440]

The relationship between Timm's protagonist and her Thomas-obsessed lover could be seen
to explore the tension between feeling trapped in place, and yet being unsure of one's ability to
break out into space. This may also present a further link to White and geopoetics, because, for
White, Thomas's unfortunate end is the inevitable conclusion of a life and œuvre tied slavishly to
one place, and the author's 'need to define [himself] with respect to it'.[441] He goes on to say that,
'[f]or about the last two hundred years, as soon as a British-born writer had any guts and brains,
he chose expatriation. If one or two did stay at home, only one course was open to them:
alcoholic oblivion (witness Dylan Thomas).'[442] If Timm feels the same about Thomas, he surely
expresses his view with more sympathy in 'Nicht morgen, nicht gestern', where Marc is pitied
for his predicament as well as scorned. However, the reader's sympathies are clearly directed
towards the anonymous protagonist, whose vulnerability and empathy are evident in her
narration, and therefore towards her craving for distance from the familiar rather than Marc's
stagnation. This craving can be seen in particular in recurring images of the sky, such as sunlight
breaking through greyness, racing clouds and seagulls wheeling high above the action on the
ground. As a result of seeking and gaining this distance, and encountering otherness in the
process, she alone can be said to have achieved Timm's own standard for personal journeys into
the unknown: hers could definitely be described as 'eine Selbstprüfung, eine Selbstbeschreibung,
Selbstanalyse' ['examining the self, describing the self, self-analysis'], in Timm's words, which
allows her to know herself better in the end.[443]

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[439] Davies, 'Introduction', p. xx.
[440] Ibid., p. xix.
[441] White, *The Wanderer and his Charts*, p. 43.
[442] Ibid., p. 43.
[443] See above, p. 117.

By contrast, Bernig's choice of Adalbert Stifter has no obvious connection to the Welsh setting in *Weder Ebbe noch Flut*. As a nineteenth-century, German-speaking Bohemian writer (his birthplace is now in the Czech Republic), Stifter is physically, temporally and culturally more distant from Wales than Dylan Thomas, who in Timm's narrative still haunts Welsh places and the people in them. As in Szerb's novel, Bernig's references to literature and culture from outside Wales contribute to the subjectivity of his settings, and an obscuring of indigenous Welshness. In both cases, travelling to a destination which is so distant and different results in frequent encounters with space *beyond* these imported frameworks, into which the protagonists' previous personal experience, and ways of seeing and understanding, cannot reach. And yet, as with Dylan Thomas in Timm's narrative, Stifter also has a hand in guiding Bernig's protagonist Albert as he navigates his new territory, even as he sometimes obscures the view. Stifter initially represents a link to the past, indeed the only physical link Albert has brought with him to Swansea, in the form of Albert's research notes. Stifter, too, was unable to have children with his wife, a fact which weighed as heavily and destructively on them as it later does on Albert and Dorothee. His fiction is considered to be an example of *Biedermeier* literature, which shunned contemporary progressivism in favour of 'timeless aspects of the human condition'.[444] Key themes in his work include the necessity of realising and accepting one's lowly, human place in the 'cosmos', as well as the frustrations of relationships and of attempts to achieve human intimacy.[445] Stifter's contemporaries both admired and scorned his lack of narrative drama and extravagance. On the one hand, this manifested itself in a 'focus on [...] ordinary things and insignificant events', as fellow writer Friedrich Hebbel disparagingly put it.[446] On the other hand, Joseph von Eichendorff praised the absence in Stifter's work of any 'Spur von moderner Zerrissenheit, von selbstgefälliger Frivolität, von moralisch experimentierender Selbstquälerei' ['trace of modern fragmentation, of smug frivolity, of morally experimental self-torture'].[447] For

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[444] F. Roger Devlin, 'Adalbert Stifter and the 'Biedermeier' Imagination', *Modern Age*, 50 (2008), 110-19 (p. 111) <https://home.isi.org/journal-issue/spring-2008-0> [accessed 10 January 2017]. In German literary criticism, the period between Romanticism and late 19th-century realism is labelled *Biedermeier-Vormärz*. According to Devlin, '[w]riters of this period are accordingly treated either as part of the Vormärz, the "progressive" movement in society leading toward the Revolutions of 1848, or as part of the "reactionary" Biedermeier tendency.' (ibid., p. 111)

[445] Ibid., p. 113-14.

[446] Ibid., p. 117.

[447] Joseph Eichendorff, 'Über die ethische und religiöse Bedeutung der neueren romantischen Poesie in Deutschland' in *Werke*, Joseph Eichendorff, 5 vols (Munich: Winkler Verlag, 1976), III: *Schriften zur Literatur*, pp. 51-77 (p. 74).

Albert, the appeal of the ordinary and apparently insignificant, in the midst of private trauma and public upheaval in 1980s Leipzig, and then on his symbolic journey to Wales, is obvious.

Once in Wales, however, Stifter's life and work eventually help to shape Albert's engagement with his Welsh setting, as well as his goals and aspirations for the future. A particular influence on Albert is Stifter's 'leisurely natural description', which is widely agreed to be his best-known prose feature: nature and landscape are a key presence in Stifter's writing, and are always detailed and precise.[448] As we have seen, Bernig emphasizes the physical, elemental features of the Welsh landscape in *Weder Ebbe noch Flut*, and Albert has many close encounters with these. However, it transpires that the longer he spends in Wales, the less important Stifter becomes for him. It might be argued that what Albert once looked for in Stifter's work, i.e. a cerebral, temporal retreat from the everyday in Leipzig, is in fact to be found all around him in Wales: it is physically manifested in this space on the very edge of Albert's known world, beyond all past experience and habitual cultural references. The reader's attention is thus steered away from markers of place and time, such as culture and history, and towards the exploration of concerns which are timeless, profoundly human and universal. In such a space even a literary 'map', in the form of Stifter's writing and worldview, turns out to be of limited use.

The absence here of traditional maps, and the presence of personal literary references, thus provides a kind of individualised, internal framework for navigating private and psychological space, allowing the protagonists quite literally to tell themselves other stories (after Powys), and imagine possible futures in their marginal, relatively empty Welsh settings. Weaving together real and fictional writers, as well as real and fictional narratives, thus helps to maintain a sense of otherworldliness in both texts. Bernig has said outright of his Welsh setting that 'eine Karte wäre viel zu konkret in dieser doch nicht *un*wirklichen, [sondern] *anders*wirklichen Welt' ['a map would be far too concrete in this world, which isn't *un*real [but rather] real in a *different* way'].[449] For Albert, for example, the kind of details one would find on a map, such as 'Wege' ['ways'],

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[448] Devlin, p. 115.
[449] Bernig, interviewed by Les; Bernig's emphasis.

'Namen' ['names'] and 'Orte' ['places'], belong in the familiar territory of his past, from which Wales could not be more different. Moreover, the repetition of these three words throughout the novel, but especially in chapters seven and thirty-six, suggests that they have a relentless hold over Albert which he is keen to shake off. Curiously, when Albert does acquire a map, it is a map of a place he is leaving (Stifter's Bohemian territory), and also happens right at the end of the novel.[450] As a gesture it is nearer to confirming and preserving the past than to planning or navigating future journeys, as Bernig has said himself; in acquiring the map it seems 'als würde [Albert] sich vergewissern wollen, dass er das, wo er da gewesen war, nicht geträumt hatte' ['as if [Albert] wants to reassure himself that where he had been was real, that he hadn't dream it'].[451] Being in Wales, by contrast, is about self-discovery, existing in the moment and maintaining openness and open-endedness: neither the reader nor Albert knows what will happen next in such an unknowable setting. Timm creates a similar effect in his refusal to name many of the people and places encountered in Wales. To use traditional maps here would therefore negate these effects, pinning down a surreal setting with a name and a shape, familiarising the strange, and restricting possibility in a space where, otherwise, anything could happen. As Bernig has said of his fiction in general:

> […] es geht immer um Übergänge, von einem ins andere oder gar
> in mehrere Geschichten [...] Oftmals setzen meine Romane so in
> gewissem Maßen an eine Schwelle ein, wo alles offen scheint oder
> ist; und sich manches verändert. [452]

> […] it's always to do with transitions, from one story to another or
> even to several stories [...] My novels frequently begin on a
> threshold, in a sense, where everything seems or is open; and quite
> a lot changes.]

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[450] Bernig, *Weder Ebbe noch Flut*, p. 184.
[451] Bernig, interviewed by Les.
[452] Ibid.

The knowledge of potential outcomes, as contained in the 'other stories' of Thomas and Stifter, therefore only adds to the suspense.

Bernig also seems to believe that direction for Albert must come from within; he has argued that 'in einer solchen Verlorenheit [such as Albert finds himself experiencing in Wales, having left everything behind in Germany] hilft eine Landkarte überhaupt nicht' ['a map is no help at all for a sense of loss like this'].[453] Ultimately, as is also evident in Timm's narrative, the protagonists must find their own way out of their 'Verlorenheit' or 'sense of loss', rather than using any material navigational aids. There is a suggestion here of the limits of literary models as well as of traditional cartography, because both Thomas and Stifter were unable to do this in their own lives and met untimely, unhappy and controversial deaths: after many years of domestic unhappiness and then serious illness, Stifter committed suicide at the age of sixty-two, while Thomas, already in poor health in his 30s, famously died in New York after a drinking binge, aged only thirty-nine. These literary models are still more helpful than actual maps, however, because their personal nature, in the form of individual experience, acts as a warning as much as a guide, and is a reminder to the protagonists that orientation is in their hands alone. Despite or because of this literary mediation and a lack of traditional cartography, the protagonists seem to have a refreshingly tangible encounter with their surroundings in Wales than they have had elsewhere, gaining proximity to nature as well as a clearer sense of self.

The intertextuality in Timm's and Bernig's texts is not unique in the corpus, as we saw in the many literary references in *The Pendragon Legend*. Unlike Szerb, however, the German authors here each employ a single literary model, which seems to act as both a physical and spiritual guide to their protagonists. Moreover, these literary figures are as much models of how not to be and behave, and where not to go, as they are familiar faces in a foreign place. The protagonists are only too aware that neither Stifter nor Thomas achieved lasting happiness, and both died in sad, self-inflicted circumstances having failed to find where they belong in their respective worlds. The Welsh chapter of the protagonists' lives, by contrast, ends with the distinct possibility of better things: their personal narratives are open-ended, in a way that those of their

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[453] Bernig, interviewed by Les.

literary models manifestly are not. The final section therefore returns to the unique impact upon these personal narratives — a 'recentring', perhaps, to use Westphal's term — which is made by marginal Welsh space.

A Personal Threshold

This chapter has shown that Timm and Bernig, both of whom have spent time in Wales, embrace something similar to Szerb's 'private universe' built out of 'personal obsessions' in their Welsh settings, but with a new and striking geographical dimension. In 'Nicht morgen, nicht gestern', for instance, the protagonist's lover Marc seems to occupy a private universe characterised by darkness and shadows, in which he has begun to resemble his violent and volatile obsession, Dylan Thomas. The protagonist, on the other hand, is preoccupied by images of light and space. One senses a yearning for some kind of sanctuary from the unsatisfactory everyday whenever her attention is drawn to a break in the clouds, to seagulls high overhead or to the bright breakfast room which maintains its brightness whatever the weather; it is also present in her fascination with, and apparent sympathy for, Caitlin Thomas's relocation to Italy, 'in die Sonne, ins Licht' ['into the sun, into the light'], following her husband's untimely death.[454] All the reader knows about the protagonist's everyday life is that she exists in the shadow of a previous, failed relationship, and would rather be elsewhere. In comparison, Wales and Marc offer passion, connection and literal moments of illumination. In *Weder Ebbe noch Flut*, meanwhile, Bernig's protagonist Albert arrives in Wales weighed down by personal obsessions of the past, present and future, with a failed, childless relationship behind him and a research project on Adalbert Stifter yet to be completed. His new Welsh setting offers multiple private universes, be they the city of Swansea within Wales; the university within Swansea; his little group of non-Welsh colleagues, all escaping their pasts, within the languages department; or the trio within that group for whom English, foreign to all of them, offers a private realm of shared otherness.[455] Bernig has said that capturing this sense of 'eine Welt *in* der Welt' ['a world *in* the world'] in the Welsh

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[454] Timm, 'Nicht morgen, nicht gestern', p. 44.
[455] See for example Bernig, *Weder Ebbe noch Flut*, p. 61.

setting, particularly as embodied by the university, was a key element in the characters' stories.[456] The physical and cultural marginality of Timm's and Bernig's Welsh settings thus makes it possible for outsiders to bring their obsessions with them, even if these involve people who are long-dead or completely unconnected to Wales, and to carve out an introspective retreat from the protagonists' crowded, contemporary everyday.

However, this is not where their personal journeys end. The longer the protagonists stay in Wales, the more their original passions and preoccupations start to fade. Their chosen, literary guides become increasingly dangerous models, and can only direct them so far in a space which is ruled by non-human, elemental forces. Moreover, the edges and openness of their physical environment in Wales mean that mental space no longer needs to be feverishly sought, which in turn leads to previous obsessions being replaced by newfound perspective, realisation and acceptance. Crucially, however, neither protagonist finishes exactly where he or she started. Albert, after a final soul-searching and ghost-confronting research trip in Europe, returns enthusiastically to Swansea — '[z]urück ans Meer! Endgültig' ['[b]ack to the coast! For good'] — and an idyllic closing scene with good friends and the promise of new beginnings.[457] Timm's protagonist has a much more traumatic and abrupt departure from Wales, after being abandoned on a rainy roadside by her lover Marc, yet she chooses to hold on to cautious optimism. The closing scene of 'Nicht morgen, nicht gestern' sees her looking at the only photograph she took in Wales, of the passing lorry driver who came to her aid. The placing of this picture, which shows a lucky encounter with a stranger, a random act of kindness and the transcendental image of the two seagulls flying high in the background, means that the narrative ends with a positive memory of Wales and a sense of hope.[458] It could therefore be argued that the crucial aspect of her return, as for Albert's return to Wales, is that it is open-ended, and on her own terms. Ultimately both authors suggest that it is down to the protagonists to step back from this edge and build the lives they want, and the coast of south-west Wales offers the ideal physical and personal threshold on which this transition can take place. Here, distracting human details, such

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[456] Bernig, interviewed by Les.
[457] Bernig, *Weder Ebbe noch Flut*, p. 178.
[458] Timm, 'Nicht morgen, nicht gestern', p. 46.

as language, culture and the very existence of local people, are suppressed by universal forces and the sheer physical presence of Wales.

The various theoretical strands in this chapter have shown how geography can work on the human mind, and Wales as portrayed by Timm and Bernig seems to present ideal conditions for personal orientation. Following Casey's edge theories, the many 'wild edges' of Wales, particularly its coastlines, are 'deeply orienting phenomena' and synonymous with transition, movement and possibility; for Casey, edges are never limits.[459] White, too, emphasizes the importance of the coast for opening up, orientation and renewal, and is especially drawn to the Atlantic edge of Europe when seeking his own personal sense of direction. For Powys, meanwhile, a focus on Welsh nature and its formative potential bring 'a quivering sense of the earth' and 'a twilight atmosphere of change' to his otherworldly fiction.[460] After long-term restriction, inevitability and lack of choice for Timm's and Bernig's protagonists, discovering the possibility of moving in whatever direction they please is a catalyst for personal 'recentring'. As Bernig has said, his Wales is 'exzentrisch im wahrsten Sinne des Wortes' ['eccentric in the truest sense of the word'], and as such offers a productive edge on which a disparate group of characters can attempt work out where they belong.[461]

Jon Anderson's recent study of Welsh settings in contemporary, mostly Anglo-Welsh fiction identifies a similar emphasis on geography and personal journeys in author Niall Griffiths's engagement with the Welsh landscape, which Anderson refers to as a 'geo-logic'.[462] He writes that:

> [b]y adopting a perspective that is sensitive to the processes and
> practices of nature, Griffiths places his characters not simply in a
> landscape that is wild, but also that exists and lives in geological
> time. In this geographical and temporal location, they lose their

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[459] Casey, pp. 150-51.
[460] Lane, p. 404.
[461] Bernig, interviewed by Les.
[462] Anderson, *Page and Place*, p. 165.

preoccupation with the here and now and find meaningful roots in

something broader — they have substituted the logic of politics

and consumer culture for the logic of the land.[463]

Although both Anderson and Griffiths insist upon Wales's uniqueness as a setting, particularly with regard to its people's deep connection with their local geography, the focus on physical rather than cultural features nevertheless suggests a location which transcends national borders, individual cultures and human relationships. Such an approach seems to site Wales in universal rather than national or cultural terms, and to suggest the desire for a similarly universal sense of belonging, rather than an attachment to place.

The possibility of transcendence in Welsh space seems to present itself often in 'Nicht morgen, nicht gestern' and *Weder Ebbe noch Flut*, suggested by their recurring narrative images and experiences of height, light and reaching beyond. Timm's protagonist notices even the smallest or most distant examples of these, such as a bright egg yolk at breakfast, or the motif of two seagulls in flight. Unsurprisingly, the latter are present in the only image of Wales she takes away with her, as mentioned above. While being in Wales leads to a hellish descent into darkness for her lover Marc, for her it brings illumination in both a literal and figurative sense; in fact, she is described as 'glowing' in anticipation before she had even arrived.[464] Meanwhile, Albert's obsession with edges in *Weder Ebbe noch Flut* leads firstly to a quasi-religious near-drowning and miraculous rescue, with overtones of re-birth.[465] Albert's rescuer, Julian Norton, is a mysterious character who seems merely to facilitate certain events in the narrative; despite saving Albert's life, he does not reappear after their dramatic first meeting. Given this largely symbolic role it is interesting to note that Tenby, where Julian takes Albert after his ordeal, has both a chapel and a church dedicated to St Julian. Later, Albert embarks upon a research trip in his old territory of Bohemia, prompting him to consider the effects of personal obsessions and to wonder, '[f]ührt das lebenslange Nagen des einen großen Wunsches, führt die Besessenheit Stifters, des Kindversagten, notwendigerweise zur Zerstörung?' ['[d]oes the lifelong gnawing of

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[463] Anderson, *Page and Place*, p. 165.
[464] 'Ja, ich strahlte.' ['Yes, I was glowing.'] (Timm, 'Nicht morgen, nicht gestern', p. 38).
[465] Bernig, *Weder Ebbe noch Flut*, pp. 105-07 and pp. 118-20.

that one great desire, Stifter's obsession, the obsession of someone denied children, necessarily lead to destruction?'].[466] This then leads Albert to an epiphany in relation to his own obsessions:

> Was für eine Unverständlichkeit, nicht von Anfang an mit diesem
> Gedanken zu leben! Was für eine Befreiung, alles auch verwerfen
> zu können! All die Stunden, all die Jahre. Sagen zu können 'Na
> und?! Ab ins Vergessen damit!' [467]

> [Incomprehensible, not to have lived with this thought from the
> beginning! How liberating to be able to discard everything! All the
> hours, all the years. To be able to say 'So what?! Off into oblivion
> it goes!']

It is therefore hard not to sense something spiritual in such illuminating and otherworldly Welsh space, and the emphasis on space *beyond* makes for a compellingly transcendental atmosphere. Once again, what Casey has categorised as 'wild edges', which feature so prominently in Timm's and Bernig's Welsh settings, play a significant role here, offering the protagonists an almost out-of-body experience. White uses a description of Brittany by Flaubert to illustrate how the Atlantic coast especially can have such an effect on the mind. Flaubert believed that:

> [t]his is where the old world ends: this is its most advanced point,
> its extreme limit. [...] In this place, thought can travel as fast as the
> wind. From wave to wave it can spread, expand and lose itself in
> the air.[468]

Casey's 'wild edges' can also be mountains, however, and both Timm's and Bernig's protagonists are at times drawn to higher ground, such as clifftops. Niall Griffiths has similarly captured the mind-altering effects of Welsh topography in his fiction. In his

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[466] Bernig, *Weder Ebbe noch Flut*, p. 162.
[467] Ibid., p. 178.
[468] White, *The Wanderer and his Charts*, p. 111.

novel *Grits*, for example, a character wonderingly describes being able to look down on birds in flight from a remote mountain road.[469] Another character, in the same novel, claims that 'horizontal vision is rer inner mountain country, yer can only be a dreamer or someone resigned to your fate'.[470] As we have seen, Timm's and Bernig's protagonists seem to experience both of these states while in Wales, either for the first time or with a newfound intensity, and such experiences are always enabled by their physical surroundings. The resulting aspirations or acceptance thus seem to transcend place and people, leaving behind 'the middle zones of existence' and leading to an elemental, universal space which is truly apart from anywhere else.[471]

Writing in 2009, Regina Weiss suggested that travel with a transcendental element is a theme specific to post-Reunification German literature.[472] Unsurprisingly described as a 'symbol for freedom, individuality and self-determination' for German writers before 1989, when the GDR severely restricted its residents' movement, Weiss describes how travel continued to appear in literature after Reunification and from both sides of the former divide.[473] In this context, it has come to symbolise:

> […] the 'Topos' of discovery of a new world and the search for a
> new identity. The protagonists experience a transformation from a
> state of paralysis to a state of self reflection and self identification
> on their necessary and often grotesque and humorous voyages.[474]

Features which Weiss's corpus have in common with 'Nicht morgen, nicht gestern' and *Weder Ebbe noch Flut* include journeys west, into the setting sun but towards new beginnings, and

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[469] Niall Griffiths, *Grits* (London: Vintage, 2001), p. 21.

[470] Griffiths, p. 339. Griffiths often renders his characters' vernacular phonetically.

[471] Chestov quoted in White, *Across the Territories*, p. vi.

[472] Regina Weiss, '"Then you get on the plane and head west, you just go west, that is how everybody has done it …": The travel topos in post-unification German literature', *Meeting of Minds: Journal of Undergraduate Research*, 11 (2009), 182-88 <https://umich.app.box.com/s/b7e7suatwhytmck493jwypmhagkczysa> [accessed 2 June 2014]. Weiss's corpus spans the years 1995–2003 and includes Timm's 1996 novel *Johannisnacht*, which is set in newly-unified Berlin.

[473] Weiss, p. 183.

[474] Ibid., p. 182.

symbols of transcendence found in nature, such as birds. So far neither text seems to have been read as a response to German Reunification in particular, and other examples of the authors' work have more obvious political themes; this is particularly the case for Timm, as detailed at the beginning of this chapter. However, the physical and spiritual journeys described by Weiss correspond to those undertaken by Timm's and Bernig's protagonists, who are also attempting to resist the restrictions of place and work out where they ultimately belong. After all, Bernig grew up in the GDR just as Albert did, and faced the same sense of entrapment within its stifling borders.[475] Timm, meanwhile, has been affected by the legacy of Germany's twentieth-century history on both a national and profoundly personal level, as his other novels attest. The fact that both authors experienced firsthand the historic fall of the Berlin Wall shortly before visiting Wales could plausibly have inspired the transcendental imagery in their Welsh narratives. The more obvious connection in their Welsh texts, however, is geographical rather than historical, i.e. the decision to set them in Wales in the first place. Moreover, both authors portray their Welsh settings as unique: it is hinted at in both that the protagonists' achievements, such as realisation and self-discovery, would not have been possible elsewhere. Only in this unfamiliar, indifferent location could they have unshackled themselves from past places, and found a hopeful space of their own. Politics undoubtedly play a role in Bernig's novel, for example, which partly explores individual experiences of the GDR, but this is only one of several equally oppressive forces in Leipzig, Albert's original place, alongside social expectations, personal relationships and the very landscape itself.

   Parallels could be drawn here with the 'principle of emancipation' in Powys's elementalist fiction, which draws on the natural world to mark 'the advent of a new and higher evolutionary phase in human fulfillment in defiance of the dark and seemingly implacable powers of theocracy and despotism'.[476] Powys's 'theocracy and despotism', however, take on a more spatial and personal aspect in Timm's and Bernig's texts: in these it seems that place itself is the tyrannical power which needs to be deposed, and a 'new and higher' kind of individual

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[475] Bernig was born in 1964; the Berlin Wall had been built in 1961. Up to that point it had been possible for East Germans to leave the GDR, despite restrictions on emigration throughout the Eastern Bloc. From 1961, however, the border with the West was closed completely, and numbers fell from several million emigrants (between 1945 and 1961) to a few thousand defectors, many of whom were killed in the attempt in the years up to 1989.
[476] Lane, p. 382.

fulfilment found. Similarly, White's geopoetics moves towards a more elemental, essential plane of personal existence, rehabilitating what Walt Whitman saw as 'permanent and democratic: the body, the earth, the sea' as well as Freud's 'ozeanische[s] Gefühl' ['oceanic feeling']:

> In the beginning, [...] the self includes all, later it excludes the
> exterior world. As a result, our present sensation of the self is
> nothing more than the shrivelled residue of a vaster sensation, so
> vast that it contained all, based on a more deeply felt relationship,
> indeed union, between self and environment.[477]

These ideas chime with the liminal, precariously personal nature of the Welsh settings in this chapter, which are at once on the edge and introspective, and which blur and merge individual identities and experiences, as well as humans and nature.

'Nicht morgen, nicht gestern' and *Weder Ebbe noch Flut* thus seem to transcend exact geographical location to deal with questions of place in the universe. For Bernig, this must in part be driven by Stifter, whom Bernig describes as his literary 'Referenzmann'.[478] Stifter's work wrestled continually with man's place in the cosmos and the notions of order and chaos, and his 'imaginative faculty [...] seems to lie on the boundary' between the two; as Francis J. Carmody writes, 'Stifter's whole cosmos is a hierarchy of order and chaos'.[479] Bernig's narrative appears to share this approach, with its liminal Welsh setting containing space very much like Stifter's 'chaos world', in which 'all the disruptive aspects of life — the cataclysm in nature and man, immorality, excessive passion, sterility, and discontinuity in every sense — are grouped together'.[480] Like Bernig's Wales, this space:

> […] lies beyond the boundaries of ordered existence and beyond
> the field of our comprehension; therefore it is an unreal world and

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[477] Freud quoted in White, *The Wanderer and his Charts*, p. 117.
[478] See p. 113, above.
[479] Francis J. Carmody, *The Evolution of Apollinaire's Poetics 1901–1914* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1963), pp. 90-91.
[480] Ibid., p. 91.

one in which a frightening sense of enigma replaces the confidence

in a guiding principle of order behind all things.[481]

Bernig insists that his Welsh setting is not so much unreal as 'anderswirklich' ['real in a different way']. He manages to weave an ultimately positive experience out of its 'endless possibilities', while his 'Referenzmann' Stifter would have found the lack of order 'dangerous' and 'frightening'.[482] Nevertheless, *Weder Ebbe noch Flut* on the whole stays close to Stifter's belief, in Michael Lipkin's view, that:

[i]t is not social, but individual being that is hopelessly strictured,

unfree. It is neither art nor religion that is man's greatest spiritual

achievement, but to be bound to others in a common way of life.

Stifter knew, from bitter personal experience, that the worst thing

is to be trapped inside oneself, alone [...][483]

The sentiment chimes with Bernig's emphasis on space and introspection in Wales, and a retreat from place and other people while Albert works out where he would like to be. The (perhaps paradoxical) difference for Bernig is that the extreme, transcendental 'Abgelegenheit' ['remoteness'] of Welsh space in fact enables a return: to clarity, to solid ground or dry land, and later, as is hinted at in the final scene, even to people and place.

Meanwhile, Timm's emphasis on the Welsh climate and landscape in 'Nicht morgen, nicht gestern' seems to link to the author's own environmental concerns: that the entire natural world has been *vermenschlicht* [humanised], or 'schon durch menschliche Einflüsse kontaminiert' ['already contaminated by human influences'].[484] Although Stifter is not an acknowledged model for Timm's text in the way he is for Bernig's novel, 'Nicht morgen, nicht gestern' seems to touch on Stifter's narrative style and themes. The awe felt by Timm's protagonist on encountering the

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[481] Carmody, p. 91.
[482] Ibid., p. 91.
[483] Michael Lipkin, *Natural History: Adalbert Stifter* [online blog]
<https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2013/05/20/natural-history-adalbert-stifter/> [accessed 14 October 2017].
[484] Timm, 'Die Erde, der Himmel, die Wolken', p. 462.

Welsh landscape, for example, could almost be said to echo Stifter's 'naïve style' of description.[485] As Lipkin states:

> [b]y seeing things as though for the first time, Stifter hoped — in vain — to save them from the forces of industrialization and speculative capitalism, forces that liquidate the world's very materiality.[486]

However, the sheer scale and force of Welsh geography in Timm's narrative, which reduces people to tiny, indistinct and insignificant marks on the physical landscape, suggest a space in which human contamination has been reversed, or has perhaps never taken root at all. If so, then a key role of Timm's Welsh setting could be its ability to offer unfettered access to such raw, powerful nature, and thus to an 'emanzipative [...] Gegenwirklichkeit' ['emancipatory contrasting reality'] which can no longer be found anywhere else.[487]

Using his Welsh setting in this way in turn links to Timm's interest in storytelling, for his 'emanzipative [...] Gegenwirklichkeit', rooted in uncontaminated nature, chimes with Powys's elementalist belief that '[t]he human imagination must never be robbed of its power *to tell itself other stories*, and thus to create a different future'.[488] More recently Westphal has taken up a similar theme for the postmodern age, believing that:

> [w]hen everything is filled, we must remake the place, for if nature abhors a vacuum, man often finds horror in a plenum. Postmodernity is always confronted with the sense of a universal filling-in. Literature, like all forms of mimetic art, becomes in this context the experimental field of alternative realities, aiming to restore the imaginary margins [...][489]

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[485] Lipkin, *Natural History: Adalbert Stifter.*
[486] Ibid.
[487] Timm, 'Die Erde, der Himmel, die Wolken', p. 462.
[488] Quoted in Lane, p. 386, Lane's emphasis.
[489] Westphal, p. 59.

One particular characteristic of our 'too-full world today', according to Westphal, is that it is 'overnamed, saturated with names', and Timm also seems to respond to this in 'Nicht morgen, nicht gestern' with his reluctance to name places and even certain people in the narrative.[490] Another relevant aspect of Westphal's theory is 'transnomination', a process which 'occurs when the author situates the action in a place whose referent is explicit (or named) before undoing the ties which bind it to its representation'.[491] In light of Timm's concerns about human 'contamination' of the natural world, Westphal's assertion that 'space must be transnominated in order to find a new purity' is an especially compelling motivation for Timm's unnaming in his Welsh setting.[492] The distinction identified in this chapter between place and space, applicable to both Timm's and Bernig's narratives, also fits Westphal's notion of 'transnomination'. By clearly choosing a place — i.e. Wales — as their setting, but then focusing on its physical features and prioritising characters' subjectivity, introspection and status as outsiders, both German authors could be said to have 'situate[d] the action in a place whose referent is explicit (or named) before undoing the ties which bind it to its representation'.[493] Wales is thus transformed from a named place which is known to the authors, and potentially relatable to their readers, into a space unlike any other and beyond recognition and comprehension.

Such a transition once again captures the idea of Wales as a threshold, and offering a portal to space at the furthest literal and figurative extreme. Its position on the edge brings heightened perception and great imaginative potential, in large part due to a powerful portrayal of nature and the elements. Such a 'quivering sense of earth', as has been identified in the elementalist fiction of Powys, evokes possibility and suspense in 'a twilight atmosphere of change'.[494] In Timm's and Bernig's texts, coupled with the blending of real and imagined personal narratives, it has resulted in Welsh settings which are 'real in a different way', to use Bernig's term: one feels that anything could happen there.[495] For their protagonists this leads ultimately to personal epiphanies, and thence towards a sense of universal place.

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[490] Westphal, p. 83 and p. 108.
[491] Ibid., p. 106.
[492] Ibid., p. 108.
[493] Ibid., p. 106.
[494] Lane, p. 404.
[495] Bernig, interviewed by Les.

The new emphasis on geography here shows how a Welsh setting is uniquely suited to such private exploration. Their approach marries tangible, spatial difference and distance, in the form of a marginal European location which contains a surprisingly varied and dramatic physical landscape in a relatively small area, with a hazy grasp of place: as for many mainland Europeans, Wales and Welshness are only loosely-defined concepts in the minds of the protagonists. The creative freedom this affords the German authors is therefore rooted in actual, physical, environmental features of Wales as well as in the empty spaces of the imagination. The unique power of Welsh geography is such that it appeals even to British writers, Welsh or otherwise, who know Wales well. Jon Anderson, for example, has identified this in both English and Welsh authors who have set fiction in Wales, two of whom seem to present particular parallels to Timm and Bernig. In spite of a closer personal sense of Welsh place than Timm and Bernig, Niall Griffiths and Iain Sinclair have been equally drawn to the creative potential of Wales's marginality, with its edges, openness and opportunities for renewal.

Griffiths' Welsh settings, which usually centre on Aberystwyth and the surrounding countryside, strike a particular chord with the almost spiritual aspects of Timm's and Bernig's Welsh space such as transcendence and personal epiphanies. Griffiths has described the experience of Welsh space as:

> […] kind of like finding a God — it's got everything to do with calm, and nothing to do with comfort. Rural Wales is a place of mud and death and shit and bone but it's also a place where connectedness is freely available and notions of re-birth declare themselves openly, and in that way, I find it immeasurably hopeful.[496]

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[496] Griffiths quoted in Anderson, *Page and Place*, p. 173. Taken from an interview with Griffiths by Anthony Brockway in 2004.

That Timm and Bernig also seem to have sensed this, allowing their protagonists to find calm but not to get too comfortable, and to sustain optimism at even the bleakest moments, suggests that such an atmosphere might be inherent in the Welsh landscape. Sinclair, meanwhile, set his 2001 novel *Landor's Tower* in the Vale of Ewyas, a Welsh border region. He takes full advantage of his setting's liminality to build 'his own multiverse, splicing his identity with other real and imagined characters' in a way which calls to mind the mingled and merging identities and narratives in Timm's and Bernig's texts. The result for Sinclair is what he has termed 'a new mythology' for that part of Wales and '"a cosmology" for life'.[497] This in turn chimes with Powys's elementalist vision of Wales as a space where one can '*tell [oneself] other stories*, and thus [...] create a different future'.[498] Moreover, the border location and open-ended narrative of *Landor's Tower* imply, for Anderson, that 'we should not aim for conclusion or closure, but for a "permanently transitional status"'.[499] The significance of movement here recalls Casey's notion of 'inherently mobile' edges;[500] we are reminded, too, of Westphal's geocritical emphasis on the openness and 'free crossings' of the threshold between 'referential and fictional spaces'.[501] Lastly, there is Sinclair's overall narrative effect: as Anderson summarizes, '[j]ust as there is no singular plotline, or one means to understand a narrative, there is rather only the view from where you are [...]'.[502] As was shown in the introduction to this thesis, Bianchi also touches on something similar in his comprehensive survey of Welsh fiction, which embraces 'a hybridity that abrogates all centres' rather than any 'sanctioned mode of 'knowing' Wales' or 'privileged centre of authorship.'[503] Hybridity and plurality resonate strongly with the outside perspective of the protagonists in this chapter, both of whom are foreigners in Wales, and their intensely personal yet multi-voiced interpretations of Welsh space.

In conclusion, it could be said that Timm and Bernig were first drawn to Wales as a named and bordered location in which they had lived and worked for a period in the 1990s. Ultimately, however, it is Wales's spatial qualities, and its position on an edge in particular, which seem to

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[497] Sinclair quoted in Anderson, *Page and Place*, p. 311.
[498] Powys quoted in Lane, p. 386, Lane's emphasis.
[499] Anderson, *Page and Place*, p. 312.
[500] Casey, p. xv.
[501] Westphal, p. 98.
[502] Anderson, *Page and Place*, p. 312.
[503] Bianchi, p. 72 and p. 47.

have informed their fictional Welsh settings and which they have turned into a key narrative device. Wales offers not just a physically extreme destination, being right on the fringes of Europe and having an extensive coastline: from south-west Wales in particular, the characters in these texts are able to look out on to the open Atlantic with no other land in sight. For German protagonists and audiences, Wales is also on the fringes of familiarity, knowledge, experience and understanding. This adds a sense of being on a psychological threshold where proportions seem distorted, and where imagination and reality begin to merge. The natural world appears almost hyper-real, while people sometimes fade into their surroundings; there are also hints that anything could happen in this Welsh setting, however implausible elsewhere. The protagonists are even able to push beyond this threshold into a space on the other side of reason, and out of their comfort zone; once in this space they are adrift but unburdened. Arrival in this space is the culmination of their personal journeys, and the point at which they are finally able to see clearly, work things out and reach decisions. The final destination, whether Wales or not, is therefore up to them: what matters is not the choice of place but holding on to their newly-discovered spatial awareness, with its openness, potentiality and free movement. In the next chapter, by contrast, the final two authors — W. G. Sebald and Gerbrand Bakker — plunge back into deepest rural Wales, as evoked by Szerb. Their settings are lost in time, full of claustrophobic imagery and haunted by the idea of being buried, trapped or submerged. Inside space, especially within houses, features strongly. Unlike Timm's and Bernig's protagonists, however, those in the next chapter are unable to ever truly find a way home.

Chapter 4 — Welsh Space 'Beyond the Horizon and "Beneath the Skin"'[504]

W. G. Sebald, *Austerlitz*, 2001

Gerbrand Bakker, *De Omweg*, 2010

The two texts to be discussed in this final chapter are the novels *Austerlitz*, by the German author W.G. Sebald (1944–2001), and *De Omweg*, by Dutch author Gerbrand Bakker (b. 1962). *Austerlitz* was published in 2001 and *De Omweg* in 2010, and both were translated into English soon afterwards.[505] The two authors seem to have little in common. Sebald was an internationally renowned academic and writer, while Bakker is a writer, professional gardener and former television subtitler. Moreover, as was the case for Timm and Bernig in the previous chapter, there is a wealth of secondary literature on one author (Sebald) but not the other (Bakker), although both have won prizes for their fiction. What the texts in this chapter do share, however, is a rural setting in North Wales. For Sebald this is the small inland town of Bala, and occasionally the coastal resort of Barmouth. For Bakker it is a farmhouse near Waunfawr, which is a village near the coastal town of Caernarfon. These settings represent a turning away from Timm's and Bernig's coastal locations in Swansea and the South West, and a return to Welsh-speaking north-west Wales, first seen in Szerb's *The Pendragon Legend*. Bala in particular is a town steeped in Welsh culture, being an important location in the history of Welsh Methodism and Welsh-language worship; fittingly, Austerlitz is the only protagonist in the corpus who learns to speak Welsh.[506]

   The Welsh settings discussed in previous chapters represent openness and otherness, contrasting with the protagonists' more familiar places of origin. The attraction of this Welsh space therefore seems to be the possibility of going *beyond* one's everyday environment, both physically and figuratively, and the impression left on the reader is of a marginal, malleable

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[504] Steven Holl, 'Thin Ice' in Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin. Architecture and the Senses* (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Academy, 2005), pp. 6-8 (p. 8).

[505] *Austerlitz* was translated by Anthea Bell in 2001, using the same title, and *De Omweg* by David Colmer (*The Detour*, 2012). Both translations will be used in this chapter.

[506] Bala is known for its former Welsh Calvinist theological college and notable local residents included Thomas Charles, who helped to found the British and Foreign Bible Society in 1804. He was partly inspired by Mary Jones, a young woman who in 1800 had walked around 25 miles to Bala at the age of 15 in order to buy her own copy of the bible in Welsh.

setting where the distinction between the real and the imagined is often unclear. In this chapter, we will see that the Welsh settings for Sebald and Bakker represent a retreat into enclosed and inside space, with a new focus on houses and the body. The protagonists become physically and psychologically entangled in their surroundings, and there is frequent use of imagery relating to submergence and descent. Yet there are also echoes of themes from the previous three corpus texts, even if they have often been developed or diverted in the work of Sebald and Bakker. These include mysterious identities, hidden pasts and literary borrowings, leading once again to blurred lines between fact and fiction and, for the first time, between spaces within and spaces without. Death and the dead, present to differing extents in all the corpus texts so far, are more prominent than ever. Wales's liminality is thus imbued with a new sense of finality, for Sebald's and Bakker's characters must navigate the ultimate threshold between life and death. The resulting experience of Welsh space is more intimate than in previous chapters, but an inability to belong remains. All previous suggestions of openness, expansion and possibility in Welsh space give way here to narrative imagery dominated by walls, limits and constriction, both on the ground and in the mind. The theoretical framework in this chapter will therefore centre on inside and enclosed space, and includes Juhani Pallasmaa's theories of architecture, Gaston Bachelard's work on domestic space and Sigmund Freud's thesis on the uncanny.

Gerbrand Bakker

Gerbrand Bakker, a writer from West Friesland in the northern Netherlands, studied linguistics and literature in Amsterdam before working as a television subtitler and training as a gardener. He has written fiction for children and adults, and his first novel, *Boven is het stil*, has been made into a film.[507] *De Omweg*, henceforth *The Detour*, is Bakker's third novel and set almost entirely in Wales. There are no specific dates given but the mention of mobile phones, computers and satnav suggests a contemporary narrative. Written in the third person, *The Detour* begins in November and centres on a Dutch woman, recently arrived in North Wales, who is living alone

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[507] By Dutch filmmaker Nanouk Leopold in 2013. The English title for the film is *It's All So Quiet*, although the English translation of the novel, by David Colmer (2008), was given the title *The Twin*.

in a seemingly remote farmhouse. The narrative atmosphere encompasses 'past trauma, present dislocation and future threat'.[508] As in *Weder Ebbe noch Flut*, the perspective shifts between people, places and times, as the past is slowly but never quite completely pieced together. We learn that the protagonist, a Translation Studies lecturer in Amsterdam, has lost her job and left her marriage after an affair with a student. Neither her husband nor her parents knew that she was leaving or where she has gone, nor has she revealed the diagnosis of an unnamed illness, which is apparently serious and progressive. When her husband finds this out by chance he comes looking for her, but arrives in Wales just a few hours after she has taken her own life. The narrative ends on Boxing Day, spanning less than two months.

    Bakker is a regular visitor to North Wales and describes Snowdon as 'one of my favourite mountains', so it is clear that he is familiar with the places so vividly described in the novel.[509] However, it soon becomes obvious that the Wales portrayed in the narrative is in fact characterised by strangeness and the unexpected, whether in the form of people, animals, weather or the hilly rural surroundings that could not be more different from the protagonist's Dutch home. During her two months in Wales, she tries to get to grips with these surroundings and her situation. A chance encounter with Bradwen, a young local man checking footpaths for a new long-distance walking route, leads to a brief but tender affair. Otherwise she avoids other people and does not venture far from her rented house. The only other meaningful relationship the protagonist seems to have is with the nineteenth-century American poet Emily Dickinson, on whom she had intended to write a thesis. Similar to the literary threads in 'Nicht morgen, nicht gestern' and *Weder Ebbe noch Flut*, the fate of Bakker's protagonist is thus bound up with the life and work of a famous writer. Her situation is particularly resonant of Albert's experience in *Weder Ebbe noch Flut*, because Dickinson is also the only remaining link to her experiences and relationships left behind in Amsterdam. In a narrative punctuated with quotations and biographical details, protagonist and poet frequently seem to blur and merge. Together with the

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[508] Boyd Tonkin, 'Gerbrand Bakker Interview: Escape to the Strangest Country with Newly Crowned Winner of The Independent Foreign Fiction', *The Independent*, 24 May 2013 <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/features/gerbrand-bakker-interview-escape-to-the-strangest-country-with-newly-crowned-winner-of-the-independent-foreign-fiction-8629583.html> [accessed 28 August 2014].

[509] Tonkin, 'Gerbrand Bakker Interview'. See also Tasja Dorkofikis, 'PEN Atlas Q&A — Gerbrand Bakker, Author of *The Detour*', 28 March 2013 <https://www.englishpen.org/pen-atlas/pen-atlas-qa-gerbrand-bakker-author-of-the-detour/> [accessed 16 February 2017].

use of anonymity and aliases, this gives the impression of multiple voices and ensures that identity and perspective once again remain under question throughout. A key theme arising from this is a battle for authority and control: the protagonist is constantly forced, or forces herself, to face challenges to her own authority in her new surroundings, whether managing her illness, making sense of the landscape or dealing with unpredictable and intimidating local inhabitants. As we will see, her body is at the centre of this struggle, because every instance of confrontation is an attack on her mental and physical resilience and can only be answered with a bodily response, culminating in an almost sacrificial but oddly empowering suicide.

The protagonist's struggle for control in a challenging, foreign environment is underlined by the character of Bradwen. In contrast to the protagonist, he is a local boy who seems to spring out of the very Welsh landscape, and he has a much more natural and confident spatial awareness as a result.[510] Bradwen embodies youth, vitality and virility: when the protagonist disappears at the end of the narrative, for example, he wonders whether he might have got her pregnant, apparently not realising that she was ill. He also represents the powerful, dynamic marginality of this Welsh space, being free to move as and where he wants; at times restless — 'He doesn't want to squat still, doing nothing. He wants to walk, to move' — but never fretful or hurried. It is significant that the narrative perspective switches to Bradwen, and to the present tense, in the closing pages of the novel (pp. 218–30). The Welsh setting is not unproblematic for Bradwen, given that his mother died there and he does not get on with his father, yet his present-tense narration suggests an ability (in contrast to the protagonist) to exist in the moment, completely in tune with his surroundings and accepting of circumstances he cannot control. As he muses in the final lines of the novel, '[i]n ten or twenty years, not much here will have changed.'[511] Stability and constancy are thus attributed to marginal Wales, whose one continuous force is nature, while the protagonist's main yet multi-voiced perspective remains questionable to the last.

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[510] See Bakker, p. 79 for Bradwen's arrival.
[511] Ibid., p. 230.

W. G. Sebald

Multiple voices, questionable authority and complicated belonging are also used and explored in Sebald's *Austerlitz*, particularly in the Welsh setting in which the protagonist spends his formative years. Wales is one of many symbolic European locations used in *Austerlitz,* but, as in Bakker's novel, it seems uniquely suited to exploring questions of identity, belonging and control, and the effect of the environment on characters' bodies and minds. Born Winfried Georg Sebald in Bavaria, the author spent most of his working life in academia in Britain and preferred not to use his German first and middle names, calling himself Max in day-to-day life and using his initial and surname for published work. *Austerlitz* was Sebald's last major work, published very shortly before his untimely death in a car accident in 2001. Its main themes, to be found in all his previous works, also include memory and the legacy of the Second World War, especially the Holocaust. The narrative weaves together both fact and fiction, and is sporadically punctuated by uncaptioned black and white photographs which tend to raise more questions than they answer. *Austerlitz* covers several decades of the twentieth century, starting in the 1960s with an encounter between the eponymous protagonist, Jacques Austerlitz, and an unnamed narrator. They strike up a friendship after meeting at Antwerp's Centraal Station (in, fittingly, the *Salle des pas perdus*). Both are involved in research — the narrator's work is not specified, but Austerlitz is an architectural historian — and are of initially mysterious origins: they seem to have connections with Britain, but neither is British, and to start with they communicate in French.[512] However, Austerlitz's unhappy past slowly emerges through a series of encounters over the next thirty years, retold by the narrator. Born into a Jewish family in Prague, Austerlitz was sent to Britain in the *Kindertransport* in 1939 and brought up under a new name in Wales, totally ignorant of his true identity. Since then he has spent his life literally and figuratively wandering the past in search of his family and himself, and in increasingly poor health. The journey becomes ever more convoluted and ultimately futile, for his circumstances mean that he will never again be 'heimisch [...] in dieser Welt' ['at home [...] in this world'].[513]

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[512] See for example Sebald, *Austerlitz*, p. 50; W. G. Sebald, *Austerlitz*, trans. by Anthea Bell, (London: Penguin, 2011), p. 42.

[513] Sebald, *Austerlitz*, back cover; my translation.

The unusual narrative destabilises perspective from the start. Fragmented, labyrinthine and almost dreamlike, it is based on chance encounters and related second-hand by a narrator who never becomes more than an anonymous, shadowy presence. The narrative style thus mirrors Austerlitz's own confused and precarious grasp of his obscure past. An unintended irony of the text, however, is that this very quest for lost identity is based on identity theft by the author. In an interview for *Der Spiegel*, Sebald said of his protagonist that '[e]s stecken zweieinhalb Lebensgeschichten in ihm, Biografien, denen ich nachgegangen bin' ['There are two and half life stories hidden in him, biographies which I followed up'].[514] One of these stories, he continues, was that of a colleague and architectural historian (as Austerlitz became) who suffered 'eine tiefe Lebenskrise' ['a profound life crisis'] upon retiring, which led him to dig into his past on a painful journey of self-discovery.[515] According to Arthur Williams, there are also echoes of Jean Améry, on whom Sebald had written an essay in 1988 and who provides a basis for one of the characters in his previous work *Die Ausgewanderten* (1992).[516] Perhaps more controversially, Sebald also used parts of the biography of Susi Bechhöfer, a *Kindertransport* survivor, without permission. This was a debt he never fully acknowledged, either in print, interviews or to Bechhöfer herself, despite her repeated requests.[517] The extent and complexity of this narrative layering, using many indistinct and partially-concealed voices, makes for uniquely discomfiting reading in *Austerlitz*.

Bechhöfer's story was first told in a BBC television programme and later in her 1996 biography *Rosa's Child*.[518] In the same interview with *Der Spiegel* mentioned above, Sebald

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[514] Martin Doerry and Volker Hage, 'Ich fürchte das Melodramatische', *Der Spiegel*, 12 March 2001, pp. 228-34 (p. 228) <http://magazin.spiegel.de/EpubDelivery/spiegel/pdf/18700596> [accessed 20 January 2017].

[515] Doerry and Hage, p. 228.

[516] Arthur Williams, '"immer weiter ostwärts und immer weiter zurück in der Zeit": Exploring the Extended Kith and Kin of W. G. Sebald's *Austerlitz*' in *Neighbours and Strangers: Literary and Cultural Relations in Germany, Austria and Central Europe since 1989*, ed. by Ian Foster and Juliet Wigmore (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004), pp. 121-41 (pp. 122-23). Williams writes that 'Sebald had outlined how Hanns Mayer had become aware of the significance of his middle name, Israel, and fled the Nazis only at the last moment — in his provincial home people had drifted along, comfortably oblivious of the significance of political events. He acquired a new name and a new language.' (Ibid.)

[517] Martin Modlinger, '"You Can't Change Names and Feel the Same": The Kindertransport Experience of Susi Bechhöfer in W. G. Sebald's Austerlitz', *Yearbook of the Research Centre for German & Austrian Exile Studies*, 13 (2012), 219-33 (p. 228).

[518] *Whatever Happened to Susi?*, Forty Minutes (BBC2, 3 January 1991, 21:30) and *Rosa's Child*, Jeremy Josephs with Susi Bechhöfer (London: I. B. Tauris, 1996).

claimed to have found inspiration in the TV programme, although he does not mention Bechhöfer by name. Similarly, in a slightly later interview in English, he said that:

> [b]ehind Austerlitz hide two or three, or perhaps three-and-a-half, real persons. One is a colleague of mine and another is a person about whom I happened to see a Channel 4 documentary by sheer chance. I was captivated by the tale of an apparently English woman [Susi Bechhöfer] who, as it transpired, had come to this country with her twin sister and been brought up in a Welsh Calvinist household.[519]

Sebald borrowed directly from Bechhöfer's biography when constructing Austerlitz's upbringing: Austerlitz is also brought to Wales in the *Kindertransport* and fostered by a childless non-conformist minister and his wife, with whom he endures a strict, miserable and loveless childhood.[520] Surprisingly, Sebald describes being struck not by the Welsh element of Bechhöfer's story but by the fact that she had been born in Munich: 'The story struck home; it cast my mind back to Munich, the nearest big city to where I grew up, so I could relate to the horror and distress.'[521] And yet he then chose to intensify the Welshness of this experience in his narrative, while Munich does not feature at all. Firstly, while Bechhöfer's first home in the UK was in Cardiff, Austerlitz is taken to Bala, a small town in the mountainous, sparsely-populated and Welsh-speaking North. According to Carol Tully, this relocation 'has the effect of highlighting the sense of isolation and enabling a deeper engagement with both the landscape and the Welsh-medium culture of Wales'.[522] Bechhöfer's English-speaking foster family do not seem to have had any particular ties to Wales beyond her foster father's work, and they soon move to England when he takes up a new post; he later moves into the Church of England, too.

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[519] Maya Jaggi, 'W. G. Sebald: The Last Interview', *The Guardian*, 21 December 2001; square brackets by the *Guardian* <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2001/dec/21/artsandhumanities.highereducation> [accessed 30 March 2017].

[520] However, Sebald does leave out arguably the most harrowing detail in Bechhöfer's story — sustained sexual abuse by her foster father.

[521] Jaggi, 'W. G. Sebald: The Last Interview'.

[522] Carol Tully, 'Out of Europe: Travel and Exile in Mid-Twentieth-Century Wales', *Studies in Travel Writing*, 18 (2014), 174-86 (p. 180) <DOI: 10.1080/13645145.2014.896077> [accessed 28 April 2014].

Austerlitz's austere and lonely upbringing, by contrast, seems inseparable from the harsh Welsh landscape around him. Arthur Williams, for example, sees in Sebald's Welsh setting the direct influence of R.S. Thomas, and particularly of Thomas's poem 'Welsh Landscape'.[523] Although this connection does not seem to have been made elsewhere, it demonstrates the prominence of Wales in Austerlitz, and its essential narrative role. This Welsh landscape is also innately mysterious, with its local legends and personal ghosts, both real and imagined. In contrast to England, where Austerlitz is educated and where he first encounters significant truths, such as his real name, nothing in Wales is ever quite as it seems. And yet, despite the sense of alienation this brings, bonds form which Austerlitz will never be able to break. His time in Wales seems to be imprinted on his psyche and takes a continuing toll on his physical health, as if he also left a crucial part of himself behind there.

This aspect of Sebald's Welsh setting may have been inspired by H. G. Adler's novel *Die unsichtbare Wand* [*The Invisible Wall*], for which Adler drew extensively on his own experiences of the Holocaust.[524] Born in Prague, Adler was a German writer and academic and produced a famous study of Theresienstadt concentration camp, to which he was initially deported with his family.[525] He also had strong links with South Wales through his second wife Bettina Gross, who had lived there before they were married.[526] Sebald borrows liberally from Adler's Theresienstadt study in *Austerlitz*, so Adler is another plausible model for Sebald's protagonist: Austerlitz too was born in Prague, as we know, and later discovers that his birth mother was sent to Theresienstadt.[527] It is striking that Adler, unlike Bechhöfer but very much like Sebald, describes Wales in terms of its unique landscapes and a complicated notion of belonging. His protagonist in *Die unsichtbare Wand*, uprooted and traumatised, finds temporary comfort in an environment which is 'weltabgeschieden' ['remote'], 'ortlos' ['placeless'], liminal

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[523] Williams, '"immer weiter ostwärts"', p. 131.

[524] H. G. Adler, *Die unsichtbare Wand* (Vienna/Darmstadt: Paul Zsolnay Verlag, 1989).

[525] First published in 1955, the study is entitled *Theresienstadt. 1941–1945. Das Antlitz einer Zwangsgemeinschaft, Geschichte Soziologie Psychologie*.

[526] Tully, 'Out of Europe', p182. Tully reports that Adler had visited Gross in Wales several times.

[527] For Sebald's borrowing from Adler, see for example Peter Filkins, 'Twisted Threads: The Entwined Narratives of W. G. Sebald and H. G. Adler' in *A Literature of Restitution. Critical Essays on W. G. Sebald*, ed. by Jeannette Baxter, Valerie Henitiuk and Ben Hutchinson (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2013), pp. 149-65.

and empty of other people.[528] However, the emotions this provokes are too painful to make it a sustainable living space, and he ultimately craves the 'geheimnisvolle Neutralität' ['secretive neutrality'] of the city:

> Laß mich in der Weltstadt untertauchen. [...] Zu dieser Stadt gehört man nicht, doch ist man in ihr, selbstständig, fast frei, man wird von ihr wenig berührt [...] Ich habe keine Heimat und suche keine Heimat. Würde ich hier [in Wales] leben, dann müßte ich es zu oft empfinden, daß es für mich keine Heimat gibt.[529]

> [Let me sink into the metropolis. [...] One doesn't belong to this city but, rather, lives with it, independent, almost free, hardly touched by it [...] I have no home and seek no home. *Were I to live here [in Wales] I would too often feel that there is no home for me.*[530]]

Wales for Austerlitz also represents remoteness and unbelonging, and these sensations are made all the more acute by the trappings of home such as a house and a family. However, unlike Adler and his protagonist, who visited Wales as adults and after their most traumatic experiences, Austerlitz spends his formative years in this disorientating space, and many of his unhappiest memories are rooted there. When he later travels restlessly around Europe, in fact from *Weltstadt* to *Weltstadt* (Antwerp, London, Paris, Prague), these Welsh experiences follow him around like a curse, neither allowing him back in nor letting him go.

Although much has been written about place and landscape in Sebald's work, relatively little critical attention has been paid to his use of Wales in *Austerlitz*. This is even true of journals with a Welsh focus, which seems particularly surprising given the novel's consciously amplified

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[528] Adler, *Die unsichtbare Wand*, p. 572, p. 576, p. 579 and p. 574.
[529] Ibid., p. 580.
[530] H. G. Adler, *The Wall*, trans. by Peter Filkins (New York: Modern Library, 2015), p. 557. The last sentence of this quotation (in italics) has not been included in Filkins' translation, so the translation used is my own.

Welshness.[531] Mererid Puw Davies has addressed this most recently, arguing that Sebald's 'apparently conventional' Welsh setting, which makes use of pathetic fallacy, 'evocations of familiar Romantic and travellers' tropes of Wales' and 'highly familiar, dark pictures of Non-conformist life', creates the impression that:

> […] there is little here to attract further attention in comparison
> with other, seemingly more surprising aspects of the novel. Thus,
> the novel's early Welsh segment can recede in the reader's
> memory.[532]

Another exception among the critics is Jeremy Gregory, who acknowledges that *Austerlitz* is usually categorized 'as a "European" novel'.[533] Alongside famous European cities such as Paris or Prague and notorious Holocaust sites like Theresienstadt, of which all have been the setting for major historical events, the out-of-the-way Welsh locations of Austerlitz's childhood therefore stand out as being obscure, of lesser importance and potentially unknown to the German-speaking reader. As Peter Filkins has noted with regard to Sebald's borrowing tendencies, a similar lack of context could even lead to a detail or feature being interpreted as 'one of Sebald's fabled inventions'.[534] Indeed the mysterious Welsh setting in *Austerlitz* has been described by Williams as containing 'uncanny echoes of the Rhine of legend and saga' as well as 'mystical exploitation of the *Märchen* model'.[535] Along with the decision to intensify Welshness using language and local culture, this allows Wales in the text to be 'the step to that "Nahtstelle zwischen Dokument und Fiktion [, an der] literarisch die interessanten Dinge entstehen"'

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[531] See for example Stevie Davies, 'Sebald's Austerlitz: A Child of Llanwyddyn' [sic], *New Welsh Review*, 55 (2002), 89-92; or Angharad Price, 'Ar Drywydd Austerlitz: Gwaith W. G. Sebald', *Taliesin*, 118 (2003), 67-73. However, Price does seem to express some bemusement at Austerlitz having grown up 'yn y Bala (o bob man).' ['in Bala (of all places).'] (Ibid., p. 72).

[532] Mererid Puw Davies, 'On (Not) Reading Wales in W. G. Sebald's *Austerlitz* (2001)', *Oxford German Studies*, 47 (2018), 84-102, DOI: 10.1080/00787191.2018.1409512 [accessed 20 March 2018] (p. 88).

[533] Jeremy Gregory, '"I Couldn't Imagine Any World Outside Wales": The Place of Wales and Welsh Calvinist Methodism in Sebald's European Story', *Melilah. Manchester Journal of Jewish Studies*, Supplement 2 (2012), 30-35 (p. 13) <http://static1.1.sqspcdn.com/static/f/784513/21627490/1358096558217/4.pdf?token=FEWsaBXIF%2BO0Pgjy4Hp gRhNI%2Fas%3D> [accessed 19 August 2014].

[534] Filkins, p. 151.

[535] Williams, '"immer weiter ostwärts"', p. 132.

['interface between document and fiction, [at which] interesting literary things happen'].[536] For Gregory, however, Wales's 'vital' presence in the narrative originates in 'Sebald's own "love affair" with the Welsh landscape', forged during his time in Manchester in the late 1960s.[537] Unfortunately Gregory reveals no more about these early visits to Wales, nor do former colleagues appear to have discussed them in relation to *Austerlitz*.[538] Sebald himself seems to have said very little on the subject, confirming in interviews only that he had indeed visited all the locations in *Austerlitz*.[539] A further, tantalising hint of such a visit to Wales can be found in the fact that he placed great importance on connecting a place and its history when he travelled:

> Für mich ist es sehr wichtig, wenn ich irgendwo hinfahre, zu
> begreifen, was für eine Geschichte das Land hat, was für
> Zusammenhänge es gibt zwischen dem walischen, extremen
> Puritanismus und dem Anblick der walischen Berge.

> [For me it is very important, whenever I go somewhere, to
> understand what kind of history the country[side] has, what the
> connections are between the extreme form of Welsh puritanism
> and the sight of the Welsh mountains.] [540]

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[536] Williams, '"immer weiter ostwärts"', p. 127.

[537] Gregory, p. 30.

[538] These include Richard Sheppard, who worked with Sebald at UEA and whose biographical essay 'The Sternheim Years: W. G. Sebald's *Lehrjahre* and *Theatralische Sendung* 1963–75' (in *Saturn's Moons. W. G. Sebald — A Handbook*, ed. by Jo Catling and Richard Hibbitt (London: Legenda, 2011), pp. 42-106) covers the period in which Sebald supposedly fell in love with Wales. Another explanation for the Welsh connection is the possible influence of Bangor-born Idris Parry, who lectured at both Bangor and Manchester universities and supervised Sebald's MA dissertation. Martin Durrell writes that '[i]t is tempting to think that the marvellous portrayal of North Wales in Sebald's last novel, Austerlitz, went back to their conversations'; unfortunately, '[…] Idris doubted this.' Martin Durrell, 'Idris Parry: Scholar of German literature', *The Independent*, 26 March 2008 <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/idris-parry-scholar-of-german-literature-800545.html> [accessed 22 August 2014]. Sebald also applied for, and was offered, a job at Bangor University in 1970 (Sheppard, p. 87), so he may have visited Bangor at least.

[539] See for example Doerry and Hage, p. 230.

[540] Interview with Sebald by Jean-Pierre Rondas, 22 May 2001, quoted in Jo Catling, 'Bibliotheca Abscondita: On W. G. Sebald's Library' in *Saturn's Moons. W. G. Sebald — A Handbook*, ed. by Jo Catling and Richard Hibbitt (London: Legenda, 2011), pp. 265-97 (p. 275). The translation is from the same text.

Elsewhere, however, Stevie Davies suggests that in fact 'Wales supplies a ghostly double for Germany'.[541] Like Bala in *Austerlitz*, Sebald's home village of Wertach, in southern Bavaria, was dominated during his childhood by a 'harsh' climate and agriculture, and '[l]ife moved at a slower, more elemental pace'.[542] Sebald himself talked of Wertach's 'pre-modern silence, its link to an earlier era in human history even as other parts of the world […] had fully entered the modern period. There were no books, no classical music concerts, no cinemas'.[543] This clearly echoes Austerlitz's upbringing in Bala, presented as so remote that he could not even conceive of '[e]ine Welt außerhalb von Wales' ['any world outside Wales'];[544] Williams in turn describes an atmosphere of 'time suspended'.[545] At the same time, the fusion of fact, fiction and different perspectives in Sebald's narrative means that the reader often shares Austerlitz's sense of dislocation and uncertainty. Given that the novel's original audience was German-speaking, it seems likely that the Welsh setting, being also linguistically exotic and culturally unique, was supposed to represent otherness rather than recognition. Directed there partly by the life stories of real people, Sebald may have seen in Wales an opportunity to explore his usual themes, including an interest in stories, memory and how the past manifests itself and is perceived, far more freely and from a new angle. Williams has described Sebald as someone who 'deliberately re-draws the boundary between knowledge and fiction, allowing the creative seasoning of the latter greater scope in *Austerlitz* than in any previous volume'.[546] In this light it seems fitting that *Austerlitz* is also his only work to make imaginative use of Wales.

As suggested above, both Sebald and Bakker make use of other people's writing in order to 're-draw' this boundary in their texts. Bakker, like Timm and Bernig, explores a relationship between his protagonist and a dead literary figure (Emily Dickinson). As in the German texts, in *The Detour* this frequently borders on all-consuming obsession, with the protagonist's life increasingly seeming to merge with Dickinson's. By contrast, Sebald weaves multiple other literary references and stories into his novel, as Szerb did in *The Pendragon Legend*, albeit in

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[541] Davies, 'Sebald's Austerlitz', p. 92.

[542] Mark M. Anderson, 'A Childhood in the Allgäu: Wertach, 1944–52' in *Saturn's Moons: W.G. Sebald — A Handbook*, ed. by Jo Catling and Richard Hibbitt (London: Legenda, 2011), pp. 16-37 (p. 23 and p. 25).

[543] Anderson, 'A Childhood in the Allgäu', p. 25.

[544] Sebald, *Austerlitz*, p. 88; Sebald, *Austerlitz*, trans. Bell, p. 80.

[545] Williams, '"immer weiter ostwärts"', p. 131.

[546] Ibid., p. 123.

Sebald's case to an almost plagiaristic extent. It is therefore unsurprising that the Welsh settings in these last two novels contain many ghosts. That neither protagonist meets more than a handful of locals in Wales initially recalls Timm's and Bernig's 'unpeopled' Welsh landscapes, but the powerful presence of the dead in Sebald and Bakker also brings a new sense of the uncanny to the corpus. There is a certain degree of menace in this, but there is also recognition and communication: both protagonists are greatly concerned with mortality when in Wales, and what little clarity, realisation or sense of intimacy they gain during their time there seems to originate with the dead rather than the living. At the same time, Sebald's and Bakker's protagonists are the only ones in the corpus to have any kind of relationship with Welsh people. Moreover, theirs is a much more involved experience of domestic space, with both dwelling in homes of a sort while in Wales. Despite their own efforts, or those of the people around them, these interior spaces never truly become home*ly,* and remain other people's houses rather than somewhere the protagonists can belong. Nevertheless, they do provide much-needed shelter, even if this is only ever fragile and transient. Consequently, both protagonists become not so much rooted in Wales as unwillingly and hopelessly entangled.

Unlike Timm's and Bernig's Welsh settings, which were dominated by open perspectives and transcendental imagery of the sea and sky, Welsh space for Sebald and Bakker is characterised by claustrophobia and confusion. Moreover, while Szerb's, Timm's and Bernig's protagonists were ultimately able to leave Wales, the protagonists here are unable to ever truly find their way home, and the only certainty for both is death. The focus therefore turns increasingly inward, penetrating much deeper than the introspection discussed in the previous chapter and cultivating a sense of becoming embedded in or enclosed by one's surroundings, rather than breaking out into open space. This goes hand in hand with a focus on the human body in Sebald's and Bakker's narratives. The protagonists' bodily responses to Wales, in the form of illness and injury, suggest that it has a physical and psychological hold on both. For example, the continual ill health suffered by Austerlitz as an adult is often triggered by childhood memories, suggesting that he can never be free of his Welsh upbringing. Meanwhile, Bakker's protagonist chooses to end her life in Wales, and, strikingly, does so in a shelter for animals rather than a human dwelling, with nothing but bin bags and bedding between her and the Welsh ground. Coupled with these bodily responses, the otherworldliness of Wales, which was also present in

all the previous texts, acquires an unmistakable sense of the uncanny. This development seems to be possible here because Sebald and Bakker explore familiarity, intimacy and the domestic to an extent not seen in the other texts, which prioritise Wales's obvious otherness. For example, both protagonist and reader feel constantly uneasy that apparently familiar things do not work or behave in Wales as they should. The curious combination of intimacy and unbelonging offered by relationships and houses, which here bring material protection but emotional vulnerability, also highlights the unwelcome but unbreakable bond between the protagonists and their Welsh space: to differing degrees they neither know it well nor love it, and yet it has become a part of them, and they a part of it. The implied presence of doubles, such as ghosts, false identities and secret former lives, compounds the uncanny effect.

The private and personal themes already encountered in previous texts, such as imaginative freedom, introspection, obsessions and journeys, therefore take on a different character. These final Welsh settings in the corpus, and the protagonists' experiences in them, revolve around enclosed, inside space such as buildings and bodies, recurring labyrinthine imagery, and references to being underground or submerged. It is also a more intimate experience of Wales, involving domestic space, relationships with local people and effects on one's physical and mental health. This leaves us in no doubt that both protagonists are physically and psychologically entwined with their Welsh space, but they do not seem to feel any closer to it in any positive sense. In fact, it could be argued that the opposite is true: there is greater intimacy in these Welsh settings but it is often unwanted and enforced, only serving to highlight that the protagonists will never truly be at home in Wales. This chapter will show that Sebald's and Bakker's Welsh space provides a constant supply of physical obstacles and psychological barriers alongside its enforced intimacy, resulting in a fusion of otherness and interiority. This in turn takes the significance of the Welsh settings both 'beyond the horizon and "beneath the skin"'.[547]

The theoretical framework for this chapter therefore takes its cue from this fusion of the intimate and otherworldly, and the narrative focus on enclosed and inside space. Using Wales as

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[547] Holl, p. 8.

a space beyond the reach of the protagonists' present reality brings to mind Pallasmaa's discussions of time and the built environment. An architect and architectural theorist, Pallasmaa has written extensively on the temporal and sensory aspects of dwelling. What he identifies as a modern temporal problem resonates in particular with the protagonists' experiences of Welsh space: that time is now perceived as fast, disjointed and 'linear', where once it was considered to be slow, even motionless, and 'cyclical'.[548] Pallasmaa cites digital time displays as a cause for this, so it is striking that Bakker's protagonist discards her 'linear' timepiece, a mobile phone, en route to Wales, and once in Wales chooses to rely on 'cyclical' markers of time such as the sun and her own body clock. At the same time, Pallasmaa's reading hints at the unhappy endings to come, for although '[w]e cannot live in chaos', such as the protagonists are trying to move away from and make sense of, 'we cannot live outside of time either'.[549] Attempts to do so only end in physical decay and mental anguish for both protagonists, whatever their intentions. A key aspect of their attempts to exist outside of time is the creation of personal, domestic space: both protagonists inhabit houses, even if they belong to other people and can rarely, if ever, be described as homely. For Pallasmaa, buildings are crucial to any understanding of time and temporal experience, because 'architecture mediates equally our relationship with this mysterious dimension, giving it its human measure' and 'turn[ing] infinite and shapeless space and endless time into our domicile with its specific qualities and connotations'.[550]

  That both protagonists experience this mediation in marginal Wales brings a layer of pathos to their escape from time. Whether imposed in Austerlitz's case or sought out as it is by Bakker's protagonist, the familiarity of domesticity is a poignant reminder of the homes they have left behind, and suggests a connection to the past that cannot be severed completely. Pathos is intensified with the growing realisation that the protagonists cannot in fact shape time or space in Wales, and thus are unable to find its 'human measure', to use Pallasmaa's term: they do not belong in these Welsh domestic spaces, and never will. In both novels, buildings and domestic space therefore provide a complicated kind of shelter. The protagonists dwell in houses, but these

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[548] Juhani Pallasmaa, 'Inhabiting Time', *Architectural Design*, 86 (2016), 50-59 (p. 52) <https://doi.org/10.1002/ad.2001> [accessed 7 February 2017].
[549] Ibid., p. 52.
[550] Pallasmaa, 'Inhabiting Time', p. 52.

are not (their) homes. Domesticity gives a superficial sense of the familiar and universal but is neither reassuring nor truly relatable, not least because the houses concerned stand apart from other dwellings and people. Ultimately protagonist and setting remain foreign and alien to each other, whether the experience of Wales is measured in weeks, as in *The Detour*, or years, as in *Austerlitz*.

It is curious that attempts to maintain an existence outside of time manifest themselves here in profound engagement with and within Welsh space, involving the most intimate connections seen in the corpus so far. The Welsh houses depicted by Sebald and Bakker initially seem to act as a kind of cocoon, cushioning the inhabitants from whatever lurks outside. Again, for Austerlitz, this is imposed and dubious protection, in an attempt by his Welsh foster parents to bury his real identity and family past. For Bakker's protagonist, as before, it is a protective shell of her own making. However, as Monika Shafi writes in *Housebound: Selfhood and Domestic Space in Contemporary German Fiction*, '[t]he house is not an innocent place. It is a place of comfort and of danger, of inclusion and of exclusion, and the desire to go home is both heartfelt and tainted.'[551] The ultimate fragility of these shelters also calls to mind Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* (1994) and his discussion of nests in particular. These, too, offer a paradoxical form of protection, for it is understood that a nest is 'a precarious thing, and yet it sets us to *daydreaming of security*'.[552] More importantly in the context of Sebald and Bakker, a nest offers 'an intimacy that works physically', being so closely connected to its inhabitant's body.[553] In architectural terms Pallasmaa identifies further connections between bodies and buildings in the latter's '[t]races of erosion and wear', which:

> […] remind us of the ultimate fate of the physical and biological
> world — Gaston Bachelard's 'horizontal death' — but [...] also

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[551] Monika Shafi, *Housebound. Selfhood and Domestic Space in Contemporary German Fiction* (Rochester, NY and Martlesham, Suffolk: Camden House, 2012), p. 445.
[552] Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. by Maria Jolas (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1994), p. 102; author's emphasis.
[553] Ibid., p. 101.

situate us concretely in the flow of time. Time turns into a haptic

sensation; duration becomes a perception of the skin.[554]

Certainly both protagonists are hyper-aware of their bodies and senses while in Wales, and are repeatedly compelled to burrow into and be embraced by their Welsh space. However, these attempts to find physical intimacy and protection only expose bodily weakness, and an overall lack of control.

The paradox of a fragile shelter, which exposes the vulnerability of the body it is meant to be protecting, also brings a new element of the uncanny to both texts, as the protagonists feel only unease and discomfort in spaces which should offer the very opposite. Freud, in his famous essay, described the original concept of *das Unheimliche* as being 'in some way a species of the familiar (*das Heimliche*, "the homely").'[555] In other words, the uncanny is ultimately rooted in what is intimate and homelike, and is all the more unnerving as a result. Other markers of the Freudian uncanny proliferate in both Sebald's and Bakker's texts, including concealment, the significance of childhood experience and the presence of *Doppelgänger*. They all converge on the protagonists' unidentified but unstoppable disintegration of body and mind, which recalls Pallasmaa's thoughts on the psychology of architecture:

> Karsten Harries points out the essential mental reality of time in the art of
> building: 'Architecture is not only about domesticating space, it is also a
> deep defence against the terror of time. [...]' Here the notion of
> timelessness implies the encounter of idealised permanence, unaffected by
> the inherent fragility and temporality of life.[556]

As the protagonists' bodies and minds grow increasingly weak and unreliable the more deeply they involve themselves in their surroundings, it seems inevitable that efforts to resist 'the

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[554] Pallasmaa, 'Inhabiting Time', p. 57.
[555] Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny', in *The Uncanny*, trans. by David McLintock (London: Penguin, 2003), pp. 121-62 (p. 134).
[556] Pallasmaa, 'Inhabiting Time', p. 54.

inherent fragility and temporality of life' by wrapping themselves up in Welsh space will be in vain. Liminality is once again a key characteristic of Welsh space for Sebald and Bakker, just as it has been for Szerb, Timm and Bernig. However, the openness, possibility and freedom of movement and of thought evident in previous portrayals of Wales has given way to restriction, encroachment and invasion in Sebald's and Bakker's texts. Similarly, epiphanal clarity at the 'sharp edge of life', as seen in Timm's and Bernig's Welsh settings in particular, has morphed into confusion, disorientation and obscurity in the shadow of death. In both *Austerlitz* and *The Detour*, the irony of the protagonists' efforts to exist outside of time in Wales is that they are driven closer to their own mortality than ever before. As the boundaries dissolve between inside and outside space, and between individual and environment, it seems that a final frontier has been permanently crossed.

Time

Although Wales turns out to be a final destination of sorts for Austerlitz and Bakker's protagonist, it does initially seem to offer them a refuge from time. For Bakker, Wales seems 'timeless'.[557] In Sebald's Welsh setting, meanwhile, Williams has described an atmosphere of 'time suspended'.[558] Austerlitz has this imposed upon him by his Welsh foster parents, so that they can successfully bury his true origins and early years. Thus Bala is described as a place beyond the reach of current affairs and the media, with more dead than living inhabitants and more in common with biblical landscapes than with any other contemporary setting.[559] Even happy memories of Wales, such as holidays spent at a friend's idyllic childhood home in Barmouth, feature people who are now dead and a setting which no longer exists. Consequently, Austerlitz has no knowledge of the recent geopolitical events which sent him to Wales, claiming that '[f]ür mich war die Welt mit dem Ausgang des 19. Jahrhunderts zu Ende' ['As far as I was concerned the world ended in the late nineteenth century'].[560] He also develops a lifelong

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[557] Dorkofikis, 'PEN Atlas Q&A — Gerbrand Bakker, Author of *The Detour*'.
[558] Williams, '"immer weiter ostwärts"', p. 131.
[559] Sebald, *Austerlitz,* p. 88, pp. 82-83 and pp. 85-88.
[560] Ibid., p. 205; Sebald, *Austerlitz*, trans. Bell, p. 197.

obsession with time and its measurement, shunning clocks and watches and preferring '[d]as Außer-der-Zeit-Sein' ['to be outside time'], a mindset which seems especially prevalent in his out-of-the-way Welsh space.[561] Meanwhile Bakker's protagonist, in the midst of a personal crisis, wants to pause time in order to work out her next move. Even in Wales time is a goading, controlling presence: 'When everything was quiet, she could hear [the clock] ticking: sharp, spiteful little ticks. She didn't want it, she didn't want time in her kitchen.'[562] The geography of her new surroundings even makes this seem possible for a while. Hedges and hills keep her world small and largely undisturbed, so that adapting to older and simpler ways of measuring time, such as daybreak and nightfall, seems an entirely natural transition. Encounters with local people only compound the sense that the Welsh setting is anachronistic and odd. Repeated instances of smoking indoors, whether in a hairdresser's salon or GP's consulting room, stand out in particular: given that smoking in such spaces has been frowned upon in Britain for some time, and had been made illegal by the time *The Detour* was published, its narrative presence contributes to a general sense that time happens elsewhere, to other people.

Symbols of time and its measurement appear frequently throughout both narratives, but can be conspicuously absent in Wales. Perhaps most striking is that neither protagonist wears or uses a watch, in Wales or elsewhere. Austerlitz even claims he has never owned any kind of timepiece at all, 'vielleicht weil ich mich [...] gegen die Macht der Zeit stets gesträubt und von dem sogenannten Zeitgeschehen mich ausgeschlossen habe' ['perhaps because I have always resisted the power of time out of some internal compulsion which I myself have never understood, keeping myself apart from so-called current events'].[563] An oversized clock at Antwerp Centraal railway station becomes an oppressive symbol of industrial power, whereas, tellingly, there is no mention at all of seeing clocks while growing up in Bala. Given the silence which reigned in the Elias family home, we might imagine that the ticking of a clock would have been eerily loud and memorable for the young Austerlitz. However, he reveals that his foster parents also shunned other methods of measuring time, such as the radio and newspapers.[564] Bakker's protagonist in

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[561] Sebald, *Austerlitz*, p. 151; Sebald, *Austerlitz*, trans. Bell, p. 143.
[562] Bakker, *The Detour*, pp. 59-60.
[563] Sebald, *Austerlitz*, p. 151; Sebald, *Austerlitz*, trans. Bell, p. 144.
[564] Sebald, *Austerlitz*, p. 88.

turn discards her only timepiece on her journey to Wales, leaving her mobile phone on the ferry, but once arrived is repeatedly confronted by clocks both inside and outside of her Welsh house. Much more than the discarded mobile phone, with its digital display, these clocks serve as a constant visual, aural and material reminder that time marches on, even within her Welsh bubble, and that she is unable to fight it. Equally poignant are the section headings in her copy of Emily Dickinson's *Collected Poems*, which take on a new and painful significance in her current surroundings:

> She'd had this book for more than a decade [...] and now noticed
> for the first time how short the section titled LOVE was and how
> long the last, TIME AND ETERNITY. She started to cry.[565]

To see them thus laid out in the volume of poetry appears as a stark warning that universal forces, such as time, overshadow individual, human aspirations. Authority and control are therefore key factors in the protagonists' resistance to time. It is a force which holds them hostage, containing the past and driving the future, and 'timeless' Wales seems at first to offer the illusion of re-gaining control. The irony here, of course, is that these same timeless characteristics only reinforce individual insignificance and powerlessness. Even at such an extreme literal and cultural distance from their former lives, then, they cannot escape or outrun what they have been through, or what is yet to come.

   Pallasmaa has described how time has come to be perceived as 'a chain of detached moments that disappears at increasing velocity'.[566] We could see this in the fragmented nature of Austerlitz's existence, driven as he is by a seemingly endless quest on which every new discovery, however enlightening, only increases his distrust, disorientation and sense of loss. Equally, in Bakker's narrative, the stilted, discordant and frequently absurd exchanges between the protagonists' parents and husband in Amsterdam, blighted by background noise and devoid of affection or warmth, hint at a previous life of misconnection, disappointment and frustration.

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[565] Bakker, *The Detour*, p. 47.
[566] Pallasmaa, 'Inhabiting Time', p. 52.

Experiences in Wales, by contrast, seem closer to that older sense of time described by Pallasmaa, which is shaped only by the age-old cycles and patterns of nature. As in previous texts, notably Timm's and Bernig's, the real reckoning in Wales for both protagonists seems to be with the physical environment: natural or geographical features, such as plants, animals, mountains or the weather, seem to embody the timelessness they seek. Bakker captures a similar sentiment on the very opening page *The Detour,* when his protagonist stumbles upon some badgers near her Welsh house and is reassured by their promise of continuity: 'She was happy about the badgers, satisfied to know they were at the stone circle whether she went there or not'.[567] Bradwen echoes the sentiment in the final lines of the novel, although nature's constancy is bittersweet by this point because we also know how many people in his life (including the protagonist) have now died.[568]

This close proximity to the natural world, and to time on a grand scale, therefore also suggests the ultimate futility of any individual quest to defy them. Again this is illustrated by the contrast between Bakker's protagonist and Bradwen in their responses to mortality. The protagonist turns her back on her own, fixating upon youth (her student lover; Bradwen) and dead people she never knew (such as Emily Dickinson), while Bradwen is accepting of circumstances and setting, despite having seen three deaths in the same Welsh space. Pallasmaa writes that '[b]eing outside of time is an aspect of the new homelessness of the modern man', which seems to correspond to the fragmented spatial awareness in these corpus texts.[569] Bradwen's frank present-tense perspective at the end of *The Detour*, and purposeful yet unhurried movement through the Welsh landscape, stands in stark contrast, highlighting the fact that timelessness is illusory and the protagonist no nearer to being in control of her personal space.

The obsession with time in the texts demonstrates an increasingly desperate desire for belonging and connection, and Wales plays a crucial but contradictory role once again. Williams has written of *Austerlitz,* for example, that '[t]he Welsh connection, at the very least, is about

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[567] Bakker, *The Detour*, p. 3.
[568] Ibid., p. 230.
[569] Pallasmaa, 'Inhabiting Time', p. 59.

time suspended, disconnected language, loss of identity in the midst of a culture-based community'.[570] In other words, the very 'connection' is made up of broken, often irrecoverable links. Both journeys to Wales are motivated by a desire to connect, whether the protagonist's own longing, in the case of *The Detour*, or the wishes of parents and foster parents in the case of *Austerlitz*. Sebald himself wrote that 'I have slowly learned to grasp how everything is connected across space and time', and it could be argued that the Welsh settings in this chapter both prove this: neither protagonist will physically or tangibly recover what has been lost, but nor will they be able to completely sever psychological ties with past places and people.[571] Previous chapters in this thesis have shown that Welsh settings are readily used to represent thresholds, with geographical and cultural extremes providing a suitable environment for self-examination, realisation and reconciliation. In Sebald's and Bakker's texts, too, it is clear that each protagonist, while in Wales, is teetering on a personal brink, and their physical surroundings similarly reflect, magnify and distort their choices and frustrations. However, in *Austerlitz* and *The Detour* in particular it would appear that it is Wales, more than any other location, which embodies:

> […] the space between lost and found, ruin and construction,
> imprisonment and liberation, blindness and seeing [...] to reveal
> that nothing is divided, nothing is not connected for the good and
> the bad, and nothing can be designated alien to us [...][572]

This description from Ali Smith applies specifically to Sebald's narrative 'liminalities', but it also resonates strongly with Bakker's novel. The sense of inevitable connection in Smith's description, which, when applied to the Welsh settings under discussion, suggests that these could be simultaneously other and familiar, contributes to a new sense of the uncanny in Sebald's and Bakker's narratives. It seems unsurprising, then, that for the first time the threshold

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[570] Williams, '"immer weiter ostwärts"', p. 131.
[571] Sebald quoted in Jon Cook, ed., *After Sebald: Essays & Illuminations* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Full Circle Editions, 2014), p. 12.
[572] Ali Smith, 'Loosed in Translation' in *After Sebald: Essays & Illuminations*, ed. Jon Cook (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Full Circle Editions, 2014), pp. 71-83 (p. 81).

shifts from extreme space, as seen in the previous corpus texts, to spaces which are intimate and enclosed.

House and Home

Houses are an important example of this inside, intimate space, and a key metaphor within both protagonists' engagement with Welsh space. In *The Detour* the narrative is quite literally centred around the protagonist's rented house, guiding her self-awareness as much as her perceptions of space. In *Austerlitz*, architecture in general is a central concern: Austerlitz himself is an architectural historian and both he and the narrator are fixated upon buildings of all kinds. As Naomi Stead points out, however, these tend to be public places and variously large, grand, municipal and fortified (e.g. railways stations, courts, national libraries or fortresses), but 'rarely domestic'.[573] This section argues that Sebald's Welsh setting is the exception, because houses are the only significant structures there. In fact, it is the domestic realm of the house which is key to establishing otherness as well as intimacy in both Sebald's and Bakker's Welsh space. The houses in question are by their very nature enclosed, self-contained and personal environments, which allow the inhabitants to shut out the wider world; Bakker especially acknowledges this limited environment, with repeated references to the protagonist's 'own small world' in Wales, and the central role of the house.[574] At the same time, however, this apparently private sphere resists familiarity, remaining elusive and unsettling and offering only a complicated kind of shelter. Domestic space can therefore be seen as making a key contribution to the liminality of Sebald's and Bakker's Welsh settings, suspended as they are 'between lost and found, ruin and construction, imprisonment and liberation' (to repeat Smith's description).[575] These unhomelike houses also build an accompanying sense of the uncanny.

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[573] Naomi Stead, 'Architecture and Memory in W. G. Sebald's Austerlitz', *Architectural Research Quarterly*, 19 (2015), 41-48 (p. 43) <doi:10.1017/S1359135515000263> [accessed 20 January 2017].
[574] Bakker, *The Detour*, p. 195; see also p. 159.
[575] Smith, p. 81.

As Pallasmaa has said, a building's physical, material presence gives structure and solidity to the 'notion of timelessness', and the desire to dwell 'unaffected by the inherent fragility and temporality of life'.[576] This timeless space in Sebald's and Bakker's Welsh setting is, on the one hand, an intensely private and individualised construction, having been mostly emptied of both animate and inanimate objects, including other people, and left as an apparently blank page for the protagonists who inhabit it. There seems to be an unspoken desire to belong in the houses in question, although not necessarily on the part of the protagonist. On the other hand, these Welsh domestic spaces are equally empty of the personal memories or connections that would tie the protagonists to a common timeline, such as they have left behind elsewhere. The desire to belong is therefore continually thwarted in these spaces, and timelessness ultimately seems to create more problems than it solves. This might explain why the protagonists find themselves drawn to other people's timelines and memories within these Welsh houses. Sebald wrote elsewhere that 'if I get into a house where dust has been allowed to settle, I find that comforting'; he seemed to find reassurance in the unchanged or unchanging, and finding traces of those who had lived there before.[577] More explicitly, the writer Joanna Walsh has said that she:

> […] liked to spend time in other people's homes, the kind where
> people kept things. I liked to float, dateless myself, anchored to
> other people's dates. [...] Distance is the only cure. Getting away is
> a question not only of space, but time.[578]

This seems to capture the liminal nature of inhabiting houses in Sebald's and Bakker's Wales, for their characters are also suspended there, equally 'dateless', between places, people and points in time. Walsh also anticipates the uncanny, ghostly presences in this Welsh domestic space, which can be a comfort or a menace. Bodily connections to Welsh houses strengthen the link between time and domestic space. For Bachelard such a connection could amount to the 'passionate liaison of our bodies, which do not forget, with an unforgettable house'.[579] For

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[576] Pallasmaa, 'Inhabiting Time', p. 54.
[577] Quoted in Smith, p. 73.
[578] Joanna Walsh, *Hotel* (New York and London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), p. 60 and p. 133.
[579] Bachelard, p. 15.

Pallasmaa, meanwhile, it is through '[t]races of erosion and wear' on buildings that '[t]ime turns into a haptic sensation; duration becomes a perception of the skin'.[580] In Sebald and Bakker's texts, 'erosion and wear' are less prominent than signs of decay or neglect such as dust, smells or overgrown gardens. These provide a further connection to previous inhabitants and give them a lingering physical presence in Welsh domestic space.

Austerlitz's Welsh 'home', in Bala with his foster parents, demonstrates how buildings can provide this complicated and paradoxical form of shelter. It is a running theme not just in Sebald's Welsh setting but throughout the text, especially in the context of fortresses, which, although conceived and built to defend against an outside enemy, are so often turned into literal and figurative prisons.[581] Stead has noted this 'uncanny reversal', which sees:

> […] the seemingly most safe and secure constructions turn into the
> most nightmarish places of oppression; as Austerlitz says, 'It is
> often our mightiest projects which betray the degree of our
> insecurity.'[582]

On a smaller scale, the house in Bala initially represents similar protection from the outside world, shielding Austerlitz from the very real horrors of the Holocaust. And yet the cold, bare house seems to possess the cold, bare functionality of a fortress, rather than the comfort and warmth one might hope for in secure domestic space. It, too, quickly comes to represent enclosure and isolation, standing a little apart from an already remote town which is both physically closed-in by mountains, and culturally and temporally cut off: news of the rest of the world rarely, if ever, gets through.[583]

The house's role as a barrier to the outside world is also repeated and reflected inside it. As has been pointed out, it has neither radio nor newspapers, reinforcing its cultural and temporal

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[580] Pallasmaa, 'Inhabiting Time', p. 57.
[581] Sebald, *Austerlitz*, p. 19 and pp. 420-21; Sebald, *Austerlitz*, trans. Bell, p. 24 and pp. 414-15.
[582] Stead, p. 43.
[583] Sebald, *Austerlitz*, p. 88; Sebald, *Austerlitz*, trans. Bell, p. 80.

isolation. In a more physical sense, the windows are never opened, some of the curtains are always drawn and certain upstairs rooms are kept permanently locked.[584] The very purpose of this Welsh domestic space seems to be the suppression of memory, especially for Austerlitz, because it stands between him and his real identity, family and past. What is more, this is imposed upon him by his foster parents, the very people who should be providing nurture and protection. Particularly and chillingly symbolic is a window in Austerlitz's bedroom which 'was walled up on the inside while it remained unchanged on the outside'.[585] At the same time, the many empty, silent and unseen spaces in this too-big, barely furnished house bring a nagging sense that something is missing or 'hidden'.[586] Stead, who sees in *Austerlitz*'s many architectural empty spaces 'the ineffable loneliness of characters tortured by memories only half-remembered', touches on the tension throughout between what is known and what is not, and by whom.[587] By the time Austerlitz begins to describe his upbringing in Bala, for example, the reader knows that much was indeed 'hidden' from him while he was there, even if the details are yet to be revealed in the narrative; at the time, of course, Austerlitz himself felt only an unsettling emptiness he could neither grasp nor place. His foster parents, Emyr and Gwendolyn, are themselves afflicted by this living space: its physical emptiness and lack of warmth reflect the missing pieces of their own relationship. Here both Austerlitz and the reader are kept in the dark, because Emyr and Gwendolyn reveal very little about themselves in the narrative, and at times seem just as lost as their foster son. When Gwendolyn is on her deathbed, for example, Austerlitz overhears a rare exchange between them, in which Gwendolyn asks, 'What was it that so darkened our world?' and Emyr can only reply, 'I don't know, dear, I don't know.'[588] Such cold and unreadable characters seem part of the very fabric of their cold, unreadable house.

Stead also claims that 'Austerlitz has his repressed memories set free by an architectural space. This is memory served by and held in buildings'.[589] And yet the buildings being referred to here, as Stead has also pointed out, are 'rarely domestic. Typically they are public places, and

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[584] Sebald, *Austerlitz*, p. 69; Sebald, *Austerlitz*, trans. Bell, pp. 61-62.
[585] Sebald, *Austerlitz*, p. 71; Sebald, *Austerlitz*, trans. Bell, p. 63.
[586] Sebald, *Austerlitz*, p. 84; Sebald, *Austerlitz*, trans. Bell, p. 76.
[587] Stead, p. 41.
[588] Sebald, *Austerlitz*, p. 97; Sebald, *Austerlitz*, trans. Bell, p. 89.
[589] Stead, p. 42.

thus expressions of collective memory more than of personal memory'.[590] It therefore seems plausible that private, domestic space, standing apart from this 'collective memory', could allow and even facilitate memory suppression; after all, the houses in Wales, where Austerlitz experiences such suppression, are always on the fringes of an already remote location. It should be mentioned that the flat in Prague, belonging to Austerlitz's childhood neighbour and nanny Věra Ryšanová, is exceptional among the domestic spaces in Sebald's text, because Austerlitz does recover many missing links with his past while there. Equally exceptional in this particular dwelling, however, is the fact that Věra herself is there to narrate, interpret and prompt, which makes a more significant contribution to Austerlitz's remembering than the physical space alone. Sound and communication are key here. In another observation which chimes with the Welsh space in *Austerlitz*, Smith has written that 'Sebald is drawn to the word "muted"' as well as to 'dust as substance'; he is quoted as describing the latter as 'a sign of silence, somehow'.[591] The house in Bala, unsurprisingly, is silent.[592] Noise and conversation seem to happen elsewhere, as is the case when the usually taciturn Emyr delivers his passionate Sunday sermons in chapel.[593] Smith's adjective 'muted' is especially fitting for the Bala house, recalling its many locked doors and drawn curtains. There is both a lack of day-to-day conversation, with meals eaten in silence, for instance, and an absence of deeper communication between all who live there, because language is one of the major barriers to intimacy in this strongly Welsh-speaking community.[594] Austerlitz's foster mother Gwendolyn is English, for example, and the painful silence between her and her Welsh husband suggests that she does not speak his native language. Meanwhile Austerlitz is a linguistic alien twice over, speaking neither English nor Welsh on arrival; when he does learn Welsh he is taught by another villager, Evan the cobbler, and not by his Welsh-speaking foster father.[595] At Věra's flat in Prague, however, French gives Věra and Austerlitz an initial means of communication and reconnection, providing a bridge into memory and the past, and Austerlitz soon finds his native Czech returning, 'wie ein Tauber, dem durch ein Wunder das Gehör wiederaufging' ['like a deaf man whose hearing has been miraculously restored'].[596]

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[590] Stead, p. 43.
[591] Smith, p. 73.
[592] Sebald, *Austerlitz*, p. 71; Sebald, *Austerlitz*, trans. Bell, p. 63.
[593] Sebald, *Austerlitz*, p. 72; Sebald, *Austerlitz*, trans. Bell, p. 64.
[594] Sebald, *Austerlitz*, p. 71; Sebald, *Austerlitz*, trans. Bell, p. 63.
[595] Sebald, *Austerlitz*, p. 82; Sebald, *Austerlitz*, trans. Bell, p. 74.
[596] Sebald, *Austerlitz*, p. 227; Sebald, *Austerlitz*, trans. Bell, p. 219.

Linguistic enlightenment, likened to a breaking of silence, therefore goes hand in hand with having a light shed on his mysterious past. Yet it also intensifies the precarious, hybrid narrative and Austerlitz's already fragmented sense of self.

This stilted communication, isolation and the silent, empty house amplify Austerlitz's sense of confusion, alienation and fractured identity. Welsh domestic space thus remains inscrutable and unforthcoming, so that Austerlitz gets no closer to his 'hidden' history but feels increasingly ill at ease. Ironically, the isolated and enclosed space imposed upon him, and the attempt to totally erase his past, seem to stem from his foster parents' longing for a family and an exclusive sense of belonging and intimacy. Several details support this. Firstly, the narrative implies real pity for Emyr and Gwendolyn: although not explicit in Austerlitz's narration, this exists in fleeting glimpses of their own pain, loss and tenderness. It is striking that Sebald also suggests suffering on their part, rather than portraying them as simply cruel. In choosing not to borrow some of the more harrowing experiences of Bechhöfer's childhood, for example (particularly the sexual abuse she suffered at the hands of her foster father), Sebald has refrained from presenting his characters as monstrous and inhumane. Instead they, too, are shown to have been savagely and permanently uprooted, or simply displaced: Gwendolyn an English outsider and Emyr as a native of Llanwddyn, a nearby village flooded to form the Lake Vyrnwy reservoir (a real-life event). Barriers to communication only widen the gulf of intimacy between them, into which Austerlitz brings his own sense of otherness and unbelonging. Language barriers in particular reflect the recurring paradox of Welsh domestic space, maintaining the isolation Emyr and Gwendolyn seem to want for Austerlitz but also ensuring that the three of them will never truly connect as a family. This ultimately proves fatal for the foster parents. Gwendolyn sickens and dies in the house, dwindling physically to almost nothing, while Emyr loses his mind in an asylum. More than ever these supposed protectors seem entwined with the very fabric of the cold, sad and repressed environment in which Austerlitz spends his formative years, and their suffering and demise in such conditions offers a grim premonition of the mental and physical price of enclosure, isolation and a lifelong inability to belong.

It should be pointed out that the miserable house in Bala is not Austerlitz's only experience of domestic space in Wales. Following on from a hellish and disorientating existence in Bala,

time spent in Andromeda Lodge, the coastal home of his schoolfriend Gerald Fitzpatrick in Barmouth, reinforces a sense that Wales lies on the fringes of reality, with both places often veiled or partially obscured by mist, haze or a lack of light.[597] However, holiday visits to Barmouth could not be more different to the dreaded return to gloomy, closed-in Bala, for they are filled with light, warmth, open views and friendly people. And yet these idyllic experiences, in their own way, also contribute to the notion that domestic space provides a complicated form of shelter. At Andromeda Lodge, Austerlitz's experience of home and belonging is profound but fleeting: the inhabitants die or move away, the house becomes merely a shell of the former home, and the old connection is lost as suddenly as it was made. Although Austerlitz feels more at home there than anywhere before or since, Andromeda Lodge feels in some ways a lot less tangible than the cold, stone and greyness of the house in Bala. Barmouth offers eccentric uncles, implausibly exotic birds and plants thriving in a microclimate, games of badminton in the ballroom and obligingly cinematic weather.[598] Each visit brings Austerlitz an intense, almost unearthly happiness, 'dann wußte ich vor Freude kaum, wo ich hinsehen sollte.'[599] [lit. 'then I hardly knew for joy which way to look.'] He recalls that:

> [d]ie Aussicht aus dem Zimmer mit dem blauen Plafond, das Adela
> stets als mein Zimmer bezeichnete, grenzte wahrhaftig ans
> Überwirkliche. [...] Wie oft bin ich am offenen Fenster gestanden,
> ohne einen Gedanken fassen zu können vor diesem niemals sich
> wiederholenden Schauspiel.

> [[t]he view from the room with the blue ceiling which Adela
> always called mine did indeed verge on the unreal. [...] How often
> I stood by the open window, unable to think coherently in the face
> of this spectacle, which was never the same twice.][600]

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[597] For example, in Bala: Sebald, *Austerlitz*, p. 97 (Sebald, *Austerlitz*, trans. Bell, pp. 89-90). In Barmouth: Sebald, *Austerlitz*, pp. 142-43 and p.165 (Sebald, *Austerlitz*, trans. Bell, p. 135 and p. 157).

[598] Sebald, *Austerlitz*, pp. 122-23 (exotic wildlife), p. 165 (badminton) and p. 162 (weather). Sebald, *Austerlitz*, trans. Bell, pp. 114-15, p. 157 and p. 154 respectively.

[599] Sebald, *Austerlitz*, p. 121. In Sebald, *Austerlitz*, trans. Bell, it appears as 'I felt so joyful that I often scarcely knew where to look first' (p. 113).

[600] Sebald, *Austerlitz*, p. 142; Sebald, *Austerlitz*, trans. Bell, p. 134.

On occasion such feelings even elicit 'so etwas wie ein Gefühl für die Ewigkeit' ['something like a sense of eternity'].[601] The bitter irony here is that these feelings never last long, with each visit ending in a return to school or studies away from Wales, and neither do the charmed relationships: it seems Austerlitz visits Barmouth and Wales for the last time in 1957, after which Andromeda Lodge is sold.[602] In fact, eternity and otherness increasingly become sinister and torturous concepts, as Austerlitz is doomed to wander and search, plagued by history and the dead. His friend Gerald, perhaps, gets closest to maintaining that original otherness and sense of eternity encountered at Andromeda Lodge, immersing himself in aviation and astronomy, but even he cannot hold on to it forever, and dies young after crashing his plane in the Savoy Alps.[603]

Of the two Welsh houses in *Austerlitz*, Andromeda Lodge in particular demonstrates the liminality of Sebald's Welsh space, especially its role as a threshold between reality and unreality. The house in Bala also possesses numerous liminal traits, from its literal position on the edge of town to the way it occupies symbolic space between inside and outside, truth and fiction and intimacy and unbelonging. Bala itself is a symbolic midpoint on the memorable journey between Austerlitz's school, near Oswestry, and Barmouth, where he always seems poised, in the train carriage, between past misery and the joy to come, or being drowned and being saved. For example, Austerlitz recalls the legend that the River Dee runs through Bala Lake without its waters ever mixing with those of the lake; moreover, the river (or two rivers, Dwy Fawr and Dwy Fach, as Austerlitz tells it) is named 'nach den einzigen Menschenwesen, die dereinst nicht untergegangen waren, sondern gerettet wurden aus der biblischen Flut' ['after the only human beings not drowned but saved from the biblical deluge in the distant past'].[604] The liminal symbolism of Andromeda Lodge, however, is immediately striking thanks to its physical location on the coast, and compounded by the fact that this is the only coastal setting in the entire text. The house is set apart from and above the nearby towns and villages, and the far-reaching views over the Mawddach estuary and out to sea carry a general sheen of unreality:

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[601] Sebald, *Austerlitz*, p. 143; Sebald, *Austerlitz*, trans. Bell, p. 135.
[602] Sebald, *Austerlitz*, p. 162 and p. 167; Sebald, *Austerlitz*, trans. Bell, p. 154 and p. 160.
[603] Sebald, *Austerlitz*, pp. 172-73; Sebald, *Austerlitz*, trans. Bell, pp. 164-65.
[604] Sebald, *Austerlitz*, p. 120; Sebald, *Austerlitz*, trans. Bell, p. 112.

Besonders aber an hellen Sommertagen lag über den ganzen Bucht

von Barmouth ein solch gleichmäßiger Glanz, daß die Flächen des

Sands und des Wassers, Festland und See, Himmel und Erde nicht

mehr zu unterscheiden waren. In einem perlgrauen Dunst lösten

sämtliche Formen und Farben sich auf; es gab keine Kontraste,

keine Abstufungen mehr, nur noch fließende, vom Licht

durchpulste Übergänge, ein einziges Verschwimmen, aus dem nur

die allerflüchtigsten Erscheinungen noch auftauchen [...]

[But on bright summer days, in particular, so evenly disposed a

lustre lay over the whole of Barmouth Bay that the separate

surfaces of sand and water, sea and land, earth and sky could no

longer be distinguished. All forms and colours were dissolved in a

pearl-grey haze; there were no contrasts, no shading any more,

only flowing transitions with the light throbbing through them, a

single blur from which only the most fleeting of visions emerged

[...]][605]

Equally it comes as no surprise that the view from this house gives a strongly 'unpeopled'

impression of the surrounding space, and a clear sense of the otherness within, for there is 'kaum

eine menschliche Behausung' [lit. 'hardly a human dwelling'] to be seen.[606] Along with the

exotic flora and fauna already mentioned there are also memorable encounters with more

familiar creatures, such as moths or swallows, when the mundane turns into a marvel.[607] Just as

in the view described above, distinctions break down, giving this Welsh space a dreamlike

quality; indeed, Austerlitz recalls that '[m]ir selber ist es in den Wochen und Monaten, die ich im

Haus der Fitzpatricks verbringen durfte, sogar tagsüber nicht selten gewesen, als träumte es mir'

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[605] Sebald, *Austerlitz*, p. 143; Sebald, *Austerlitz*, trans. Bell, p. 135.

[606] Sebald, *Austerlitz*, p. 122; Sebald, *Austerlitz*, trans. Bell, has a 'panorama, which was almost devoid of human habitations' (p. 114).

[607] See for example Sebald, *Austerlitz*, pp. 135-39 and pp. 144-45; Sebald, *Austerlitz*, trans. Bell, pp. 127-32 and pp. 136-37.

[I myself often felt as if I were dreaming during those weeks and months I spent at the Fitzpatricks' house, [...] even in daylight'].[608]

In contrast to Austerlitz's passivity and powerlessness in his Welsh setting, where it could be said that he is being held against his will, Bakker's protagonist in *The Detour* seems at first to be in charge of her own fate in Wales. It is her choice to stop there, even though she had originally been 'thinking of Ireland' as her destination, and she herself builds a new existence around her rented Welsh farmhouse.[609] The places she discovers after that are a result of her gradually moving out from and beyond this modest, walled domestic space. Just as Austerlitz's Welsh home symbolised the attempts of his foster parents to shut out the world and the truth, and to keep him and their precarious bond within, so Bakker's protagonist makes symbolic efforts to create a home of sorts: she buys household items, works on the garden and generally tries to familiarise herself with her new space. The farmhouse is unoccupied and, like the Bala house in Sebald's novel, sparsely furnished. Unlike Austerlitz, however, Bakker's protagonist has some control over her new domestic environment and is able to make her space more physically comfortable, adding soft furnishings, such as rugs and bedding, as well as light.[610] In particular contrast to Sebald's already dark, shut-up and closed-off house in Bala, she actually has to buy curtains for her Welsh house because it does not have any.[611] For psychological comfort she buys a radio and a television, in order to fill the silence, occupy the long nights and 'empty her mind'.[612] Superficially, her attempts seem to yield more positive and successful results than the loveless, isolating and ultimately destructive consequences seen in Sebald's text. Moreover, in further contrast to *Austerlitz*, Bakker's protagonist forms a real if brief connection with someone local, and in some ways settles into her Welsh space the longer she is there.

This impression does not last, however, for it is clearly also her choice to cocoon herself in this empty space. The house itself is not enough and she obviously feels the need for enclosure, and to shut something out. It becomes evident that she is no more able than Austerlitz to make a

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[608] Sebald, *Austerlitz*, p. 142; Sebald, *Austerlitz*, trans. Bell, p. 134.
[609] Bakker, *The Detour*, p. 69.
[610] Ibid., p. 9 and p. 23.
[611] Ibid., p. 14.
[612] Ibid., p. 21 and pp. 78-79.

home in Wales, or to feel a sense of belonging there. Her attempts to do so are characterised by struggle, whether she is trying to tame overgrown plants, navigate the 'narrow, sunken lanes' or simply find the physical and mental strength to cook, dig, fetch and carry in the face of worsening pain.[613] Her relationship with Bradwen does move her closer to a certain homeliness, in that they make plans and progress in the garden together, share domestic duties and spend evenings with wine in front of the fire, making the house seem cosy and comfortable. However, getting close to Bradwen, who is young, healthy and at ease in the house and its setting, only serves to highlight what the protagonist has lost and cannot get back, '[b]ecause this house and garden weren't hers. It wasn't her shelf under the mirror. She was a tourist, a passer-by. A foreigner, a German according to most people here.'[614] Once again, a house in Wales provides a complicated sort of shelter. To a large extent Bakker's protagonist *is* able to '[stick] close' to it and '[keep] her world small' as she had hoped, finding a protective space within.[615] The biggest and most frightening tests do tend to be outside, beyond the walls of the house, where she wrestles with stubborn undergrowth, is weighed up by nosy locals and even, in one freak incident, bitten by a badger.[616] She also watches the geese, which belonged to the previous owner, being picked off one by one, perhaps by a mysterious bird of prey; Bradwen later identifies it as a red kite, and there is temporary confusion as the protagonist struggles to translate what he has said.[617] It is striking that this shadowy overhead presence remains both visually and linguistically beyond her, while Bradwen is able to identify it straight away. Another symbolic and challenging presence is Snowdon, which is not far from the rented farmhouse. It is a landmark she identifies early on in the narrative and which she then cannot ignore, whether as a physical feature by which to navigate or a threatening presence on the horizon.[618] Snowdon presents a particular challenge towards the end of the novel, when the protagonist and Bradwen set out to climb it together: she is forced to stop partway up, while Bradwen continues to the summit alone. Her physical incapacity brings a moment of realisation, when she sees that any true and lasting connection with Welsh space is out of reach or at least

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[613] Bakker, *The Detour*, p. 6.
[614] Ibid., p. 160.
[615] Ibid., p. 159.
[616] Ibid., p. 15.
[617] Ibid., pp. 147-48.
[618] Ibid., p. 32.

out of her hands, and that she is weaker — and closer to the end — than perhaps she thought. It comes as no shock when Bradwen reveals during the climb that Snowdon's Welsh name, Yr Wyddfa, means 'burial place', but by that point she claims not to care, having already resigned herself to what comes next.[619]

As shown in previous chapters of this thesis, however, the nature of this Welsh landscape is that it is indifferent, yet all-pervading. Buildings and their settings are deeply entwined, so that houses seem to be part of the fabric of their surroundings: here, for example, vegetation has been reclaiming the house and paths around it for some time.[620] Sometimes this symbiotic relationship works in the protagonists' favour, with depressions in the hilly landscape or curtains of ivy reinforcing the house's isolation and maintaining 'her own small world'; from the house itself, for example, the local topography means that the looming bulk of Snowdon is just out of sight.[621] At other times, though, it only amplifies her confusion and disorientation, and encroaches on her fragile security inside the house. A key example of the outside intruding is the character of Rhys Jones, who is the protagonist's landlord, a local farmer and an unsavoury 'caricature of a Welshman: a broad face, thick greasy hair, watery eyes, unshaven. She thought she could detect a faint smell of sheep, but it could have been last night's beer'.[622] As such he is rooted in the surrounding landscape and has the upper hand in various ways, possessing local knowledge and familiarity with local people and culture, as well as the power to make her homeless. Jones is also intimately familiar with the house itself and, crucially, has his own key, which he uses to his full advantage. He lets himself into the house on several occasions and always when she is physically vulnerable, for example in the bath or just out of bed, which doubly compromises her security and privacy.[623] Moreover, he leaves physical traces behind him, such as the sheep he grazes in the nextdoor field or increasingly hostile notes, thereby maintaining a constant, menacing presence even when he is not there. Along with his unexpected visits, leering advances and complete disregard for her personal space, this feels like a violation of body *and* mind, and reminds both reader and protagonist of her unnamed and unseen but ever-present illness. While

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[619] Bakker, *The Detour*, p. 198.
[620] Ibid., p. 3 and pp. 26-27.
[621] Ibid., p. 195.
[622] Ibid., p. 39.
[623] See for example ibid., p. 38 and p. 134.

the house is mostly able to provide a barrier to the outside world, then, these breaches underline not only that it is inseparable from its setting, in which local characters like Jones have a stronger presence, but also that the real threat is silent, unseen and *inside* her, not out.

As in *Austerlitz,* Bakker's Welsh house represents a threshold. For the protagonist it is a place to pause, representing a spatial 'standstill' as much as a desire to stop time.[624] She likens her occupancy to an uncle's pathetic suicide attempt many years ago, in a too-shallow pool. Suddenly, 'in this foreign country', she starts to understand what might have driven him to such a point:

> […] because she sensed how vulnerable people are when they have
> no idea what to do next, how to move forward or back. [...] She
> inhabited this house the way he'd stood in that pond.[625]

There is an impression of trying to reconcile the internal and the external: inner thoughts and external realities. As mentioned above, Shafi writes of a similar effect in the German novel *Die Habenichtse* by Katharina Hacker (2006), in which 'houses enact the characters' impasse, their longing for security and meaning and their inability to achieve them.'[626] Bakker's domestic space contains many such contradictions, such as the fact that the protagonist's presence in it is both fleeting *and* permanent. Any physical, material impact will be short-lived, because few of the items inside the house are personal, and even those that once meant something increasingly lose their significance; the protagonist scornfully tells Rhys Jones that '[n]one of this old junk is mine. I don't need a moving van'.[627] What is more, the outside would quickly see to it that her traces were soon obliterated or absorbed by, say, new plant growth. At the same time, it is repeatedly implied, and eventually confirmed, that she will not be leaving the house or Wales in the expected manner, and will never return to the Netherlands and her former home. It is notable that most of the protagonist's memories are from childhood: she replays her uncle's illness, for

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[624] Bakker, *The Detour*, p. 8.
[625] Ibid., pp. 7-8.
[626] Shafi, p. 445.
[627] Bakker, *The Detour*, p. 138.

example, and reminisces about the street and flat in Amsterdam where she grew up, and where her parents still live.[628] On the other hand, the domestic space she created and occupied as an adult, with her husband, is barely mentioned. This lends the idea of home a much more elemental and visceral sense of belonging, as if it is in the blood, dictated by birth, and cannot just be acquired or constructed at will. The Welsh setting, as we have seen, seems to reflect this in a profound and painful way, giving access to a more primitive appreciation of her surroundings through walking, gardening and taking notice of nature. The last, in particular, offers her a new and 'beautiful way of measuring the passing time: the sun that had suddenly leapt forward and was already quite low, a herd of cows that had silently and serenely relocated'.[629] However, this deeper environmental awareness also highlights the foreignness of Wales to her, and underlines the fact that her own roots are deeply embedded elsewhere.

Similarly, Bakker's protagonist seems to have abandoned expectation and to be waiting for something at the same time. Ostensibly, and reasonably, this is a fellow human being: 'She lived in constant expectation of a visitor showing up. The geese belonged to someone, so did the black sheep along the road. Someone would come eventually, if only a lost hiker.'[630] Equally, though, she seems to be waiting for a moment of clarity in the midst of greyness and indecision; in the end, Bradwen emerges out of the mist, bringing both a kind of clarity and some human contact.[631] Then there is apparent acceptance alongside denial, as she dismisses measures such as contraception as being 'for healthy people', yet claims to be ignorant of the details of her illness.[632] She remembers that:

> [s]he hadn't wanted to know a thing. She'd resisted the temptation
> to look it up on the Internet. She'd left. Like an old cat that wants
> to be left in peace. [...] Her uncle had cats. 'If they're gone, they're
> dead,' he said and her aunt nodded.[633]

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[628] Bakker, *The Detour*, p. 28 and p. 44.
[629] Ibid., p. 46.
[630] Ibid., p. 24.
[631] Ibid., p. 78.
[632] Ibid., p. 194.
[633] Ibid., pp. 164-65.

At the same time, she persists in attempting to shut herself in and keep everything else out, persevering in the garden and around the house (even putting up a Christmas tree, for example) and generally seeming reluctant to meet her illness head-on.[634] And yet the outside continues to intrude, shaking any certainty, resolve and illusion of being in control. The intrusions are not entirely negative and threatening: Bradwen's arrival out of the mist and over her wall, for example, brings warmth, affection and company which she seems to appreciate, for all that it derails her plans.[635] Mostly, however, they take the form of recurring, sinister symbols and signs she cannot control, such as the looming bulk of Snowdon, the mysterious goose-snatcher and the lecherous Rhys Jones. Once again, the idea of Welsh space containing multiple thresholds, or being itself a threshold, is never far away, for the domestic environment Bakker has created is decidedly porous. The outside can penetrate even when the house seems at its most secure, as Rhys Jones demonstrates by having, and letting himself in with, his own key. This means that despite her introspection, and the fact that she is mostly alone, the protagonist is never unaware of her surroundings. Sights, sounds and smells all begin to breach the walls almost as soon as she moves in: she can see cows and the sea from her window, hear wind, water and the geese at night, and is left with the lingering smell of sheep and stale beer whenever Rhys Jones has been in the house.[636] The protagonist's sense of smell is particularly keen throughout the narrative, and somehow suggests a more intimate and *interior* perception of the outside world than, say, sight and sound. This is especially evident in the recurring scent of old Mrs Evans, the late owner of the house, which to the protagonist seems increasingly to emanate from her own body. Once more, distinctions begin to break down between inside and out, and even between the living and the dead.

It could therefore be said that the domestic environments in both *Austerlitz* and *The Detour* involve boundaries beyond physical walls, because the hills, valleys, hedges and low cloud of

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[634] Bakker, *The Detour*, p. 121.

[635] Long before she takes her own life, the protagonist is planning to act on her illness in some unspecified way, and Bradwen's arrival temporarily shakes her resolve: 'It was almost time for her to see the doctor. She couldn't go on like this much longer. She wondered if she was up to it. Until yesterday [when Bradwen arrived] she had been almost certain she was.' Ibid., p. 92.

[636] Ibid., pp. 3-4, p. 6, p. 9 and p. 39.

their wider Welsh space also allow for isolation and restriction. These in turn create and reinforce psychological barriers, at times containing and comforting, but at others oppressing and bringing fear. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of these Welsh domestic spaces, however, is that the threshold they represent can be breached or dissolved altogether, so that the outside can get in despite the inhabitants' best attempts to keep it out. As we have seen, a particular combination of protection which verges on imprisonment, the fact that these are *other people's* houses, and repeated breaches of private, inside space, whether implicit and subtle or blatant and aggressive, exposes vulnerability in a sphere usually associated with security. The wider Welsh settings are instrumental here once again, because their strangeness to the protagonists immediately casts doubt on the idea that a house in Wales might offer them a home. At the same time, the often porous nature of Welsh domestic space, which causes the intimate and the external to merge and blend, suggests that inside and outside space is inextricably bound together. The inhabitants of the Welsh houses seem increasingly to be tied by these bonds, even as they move further away from a sense of belonging.

The Uncanny and Doppelgänger

Every such contradiction, confounded expectation and breach of physical or psychological space increases a sense of the uncanny in these Welsh settings. Shafi's summary of the uncanny as an 'inability to maintain boundaries between past and present or self and other', suggesting (quoting Collins and Jervis) 'a fundamental indecision, an obscurity or uncertainty, at the heart of our ontology, our sense of time, place, and history, both personal and cultural', resonates in particular with the two protagonists here: they find themselves poised or forcibly held outside of time, place *and* history, in what seems to be the very spatial representation of indecision, obscurity and uncertainty.[637] Shafi also reminds us that houses themselves can make a key contribution to any sense of the uncanny, and it could be argued that this is especially true of these liminal, haunted, porous Welsh houses and the complicated shelter they provide. As Shafi writes:

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[637] Shafi, p. 436.

> Freud depicted houses as one of the key sites of this ambivalent transition from *unheimlich* to *heimlich*. As safety's opposite, the uncanny ('das Unheimliche') threatens to undermine houses' main purpose and challenge their residents in unexpected and deeply troubling ways.[638]

In her view the doors of a house represent one such material challenge, because they:

> […] refer, as Susan Bernstein has contended, to 'the persistence of a hostile exterior' [...] and thus to the futility of achieving security. Doors not only separate interior and exterior; they also distinguish between who is to be guarded and protected and who is to be left out. Yet these divisions are in flux, continually changing, and the frightening or uncanny cannot be hidden forever.[639]

This liminal confusion captures the protagonists' unease in their Welsh houses, hounded as they are by unknown facts and forces in a space which should feel relatable and safe. Equally, the Welsh settings which contain these houses can be seen as an embodiment of the uncanny, constantly undermining and challenging the protagonists and their supposedly safe spaces. Throughout the corpus we have seen that it is in Wales, in contrast to other locations, that the protagonists encounter circumstances favourable to the uncanny, particularly in situations when:

> […] the boundary between fantasy and reality is blurred, when [they] are faced with the reality of something that [they] have until now considered imaginary, when a symbol takes on the full function and significance of what it symbolizes, and so forth.[640]

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[638] Shafi, p. 436.
[639] Ibid., p. 444.
[640] Freud, pp. 150-51.

In these versions of Wales, extremity and otherness cause disorientation, in which state the characters struggle to negotiate fact and fiction, or distinguish between their own and others' experiences. In the corpus as a whole this undoubtedly culminates in 'the excessive stress that is laid on psychical reality, as opposed to material reality', not least because all five protagonists read, interpret and represent their Welsh settings largely through their own cultural and geographical prism, rather than engaging with what is already there.[641] Using internal markers of familiarity to navigate unfamiliar external terrain surely predisposes the protagonists to indecision, obscurity and uncertainty.

Both Sebald and Bakker make full use of the otherness of their Welsh settings and the unease it brings about. In fact, unfamiliarity here is frequently stretched to the very limits of credibility, and sometimes just beyond. In *Austerlitz*, this probes the unsettling territory of the unidentified or unidentifiable, whether this involves sensing familiarity or unfamiliarity without knowing the cause, believing that the dead walk among the living, or being told that an entire village, along with whole chapters of people's lives, lies submerged and unseen in the waters of a reservoir. Here Sebald combines Welsh folklore involving sightings of the dead with the flooding of Llanwddyn in the 1880s, i.e. a real event specific to North Wales. Meanwhile, Bakker's otherness at first appears more earthly, often centring on wildlife and the weather. But while his Welsh setting initially confounds expectations of the exotic, with his protagonist expressing surprise at the temperate and liveable climate and lack of bears and wolves, other things which appear to be familiar rapidly become strange.[642] This is most obviously demonstrated by the badgers living near the protagonist's rented house. Incidentally these only ever appear at a nearby stone circle, a nod to indigenous Celtic culture which suggests that the animals belong specifically in this Welsh space. The badgers are a startling presence from the opening pages of the novel and their behaviour grows increasingly shocking and sinister, so that they take on an alien and threatening character. This is only reinforced by the fact that the protagonist is the sole witness to their oddness, and all the other characters, whose own knowledge contradicts her reports, refuse to believe her. As such they occupy yet another threshold between the ordinary

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[641] Freud, p. 151.
[642] Bakker, *The Detour*, pp. 3-4 and p. 13.

and unpredictable, or the substantial and the imaginary, and act as a continual reminder that no aspect of the Welsh setting can be taken for granted.

One particularly uncanny feature of both *The Detour* and *Austerlitz* is the repeated presence of *Doppelgänger* or 'doubles'. These figures, which are central to Freud's theory of the uncanny, sometimes materialise as 'persons who have to be regarded as identical because they look alike', while at other times they are to be found in 'the constant recurrence of the same thing, the repetition of the same facial features, the same characters, the same destinies, the same misdeeds, or even the same names, through successive generations'.[643] *Doppelgänger* in Sebald's and Bakker's texts take the more shadowy and implicit form of ghosts, and multiple hidden or entangled identities, through which the authors further explore thresholds, disorientation and authority and control. The use of ghostly *Doppelgänger* follows on here directly from the symbolic use of domestic space. Freud himself seems to have anticipated such a link when he wrote that 'in some modern languages the German phrase *ein unheimliches Haus* ['an uncanny house'] can be rendered only by the periphrasis 'a haunted house'.[644] More recently, J. M. Coetzee has touched on the same connection in the context of Sebald's work, stating that the author:

> […] subjects the concept of home and being at home to a continual
> sceptical scrutiny. One of his literary-critical books is a study of
> the notion of Heimat (homeland) in Austrian literature. Playing on
> the ambiguity of the word unheimlich (unhomelike, unfamiliar,
> hence uncanny), he suggests that for today's Austrians, citizens of
> a notional country whose territory and population have altered with
> each turn in modern European history, *there ought to be something*
> *ghostly in feeling at home*.[645]

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[643] Freud, pp. 141-42.
[644] Ibid., p. 148.
[645] J. M. Coetzee, 'W. G. Sebald, After Nature' in *After Sebald: Essays & Illuminations*, ed. by Jon Cook (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Full Circle Editions, 2014), pp. 85-93 (p. 87). My emphasis.

A similarly disrupted sense of home, as we have seen, is clearly present in the ambiguous form of shelter offered by Sebald's and Bakker's Welsh houses. At the same time, there is more to Wales's otherness in their texts than mere difference: in fact, the Welsh settings seem most unsettling not when they are at their most foreign, but when the protagonists lose their grip on where the foreign ends and the familiar begins. Once again, Smith's description of 'liminalities' in Sebald's work comes to mind, especially her assertion that:

> […] it's in what moves, what shifts between states which seem as
> irreconcilable as fact and fiction, to reveal that nothing is divided,
> nothing is not connected for the good and the bad, and nothing can
> be designated alien to us [...][646]

All the Welsh settings in the corpus exist at the edge of, or even beyond, the protagonists' known worlds, but at the same time they offer space which is universal, elemental and equally indifferent to all human life. This seems to explain the overwhelming emphasis in Wales, in contrast to the other, often urban locations mentioned, on the characters' natural environment, rather than on human systems such as language or culture. Although often bewildering in their detail when seen up close, these natural surroundings are nonetheless rooted in broad, essential and universally recognisable concepts, such as the land and the sea, darkness and light, and life and death. It is surely this troubling, combined sense of connection and unbelonging which leads to the protagonists' constant disorientation. In turn, it highlights a perpetual and largely one-sided power struggle happening in all the corpus narratives: each protagonist is in some way concerned with (re)gaining control over their lives, and time spent in Wales, existing without belonging, shows them their universal smallness and the need to reassess their place in the world. Thus it is clear in these Welsh settings that space, and not the people in it, is the dominant power.

The many and varied ghostly presences in *Austerlitz* and *The Detour* contribute greatly to the protagonists' disorientation, and their struggle for control. Both are hunted and harassed by former lives, whether their own or other people's, and even as they themselves probe and search

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[646] Smith, p. 81.

the past. Crucially, in a way which maintains the imbalance of power between human individuals and Welsh space, the ghosts seem to be able to find the living far more easily than the living are able to find the ghosts. In Sebald's work Coetzee identifies this particular threshold, on which one is both hunter and hunted, as being fundamental to the mindset of Sebald's characters, who are described as 'melancholics': '[i]nternally they are racked by conflict between a self-protective urge to block off a painful past and a blind groping for something, they know not what, that has been lost.'[647] Austerlitz himself would certainly seem to fit this image, for his childhood in Wales is a continual struggle between active suppression of the past by his foster parents, and his own nagging sense that there are gaps in his life story. Other signs accumulate to further suggest a shadowy parallel existence, with a focus on death and the dead which Austerlitz carries with him into adulthood. From Evan, the village cobbler and reputed 'Geisterseher' (literally, 'one who sees ghosts'), he hears legends of the dead who walk among the living.[648] Meanwhile his foster father Emyr reveals that his own childhood home lies in the depths of a reservoir, Lake Vyrnwy, in the submerged village of Llanwddyn.[649] This symbolic image of a past forcibly suppressed by another's hand, all the more powerful because it is the only glimpse of Emyr's own personal history, haunts Austerlitz for some time to come. He imagines the former residents as having been submerged along with their houses and still living there in some kind of underwater afterlife, 'aber ohne sprechen zu können und mit viel zu weit offenen Augen' ['but unable to speak and with their eyes opened far too wide'].[650] He even begins to imagine himself among them, staring desperately upwards through the dark water to catch a glimpse of light.[651]

Both Evan's stories and Emyr's revelation add another layer of ghostliness to the narrative, this time implicating the reader, for they provide dramatic irony in the form of Austerlitz's spectral past. While by this point the reader is aware that Wales merely represents one chapter in

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[647] Coetzee, pp. 85-86.
[648] Sebald, *Austerlitz,* pp. 82-83. In Sebald, *Austerlitz*, trans. Bell, 'Geisterseher' is rendered as '[someone] who had a reputation for seeing ghosts.' (p. 74).
[649] Sebald, *Austerlitz,* p. 79; Sebald, *Austerlitz,* trans. Bell, p. 71.
[650] Sebald, *Austerlitz,* p. 80; Sebald, *Austerlitz,* trans. Bell, p. 72.
[651] Sebald, *Austerlitz,* p. 82; Sebald, *Austerlitz,* trans. Bell, p. 74.

a complex and nomadic biography, at the time Austerlitz himself can only identify a nagging sense of unease about his life there. As he recalls:

> Tatsächlich bin ich während all der von mir in dem Predigerhaus in Bala verbrachten Jahre nie das Gefühl losgeworden, etwas sehr Naheliegendes, an sich Offenbares sei mir verborgen. Manchmal war es, als versuchte ich aus einem Traum heraus die Wirklichkeit zu erkennen; dann wieder meinte ich, ein unsichtbarer Zwillingsbruder ginge neben mir her, sozusagen das Gegenteil eines Schattens.

> [It is a fact that through all the years I spent at the manse in Bala I never shook off the feeling that something very obvious, very manifest in itself was hidden from me. Sometimes it was as if I were in a dream and trying to perceive reality; then again I felt as if an invisible twin brother were walking beside me, the reverse of a shadow, so to speak.][652]

Discovering his real name and ethnicity as a teenager at school raises more questions than it answers, and only seems to magnify his discomfort. Unsurprisingly Austerlitz is told the truth by an authority figure, in this case his headmaster, which reflects the fact that his existence is controlled by other people.

Sebald's characteristic use of photography is an important tool in building and reinforcing this uncanny sense of doubling. The uncaptioned images appear suddenly and randomly in the narrative, and each one seems to correspond to something being described at that point, such as a person, place or situation. These implied connections are sometimes confirmed in the narration, but very often the reader is left to wonder precisely who or what is being portrayed, and by whom. The photographs themselves thus possess an uncanny duality, once again suggesting

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[652] Sebald, *Austerlitz,* p. 84; Sebald, *Austerlitz,* trans. Bell, p. 76.

'points of intersection', in Robert Macfarlane's words, between people, times and places.[653] They also carry a double meaning: for Smith, for example, they are 'a source of evidence and absence at once, the evidence of a world where silence ends up saying more than words'.[654] The superficial role of such images, i.e. providing visual reinforcement of narrative events, exists alongside the fact that they are and remain frustratingly enigmatic. Austerlitz nevertheless studies some of these images obsessively, as if willing himself into the scene, or the people depicted out into the world. Emyr's photographs of Llanwddyn and its residents, for example, become so familiar to him that he starts to feel as if he is one of them, and to believe that he has even spotted their subjects out and about in Bala.[655] Identity is repeatedly called into question as a result, because the same porous and insubstantial thresholds present in Welsh domestic space, whether physical walls or psychological barriers, seem also to exist between Austerlitz and these ghostly doubles. These photographs further blur the line between the living and the dead, the past and the present, and fact and fiction, causing the reader to wonder who exactly is who, who belongs where and which memories or experiences belong to which individual. Shafi has observed that visual images can 'become so powerful that they displace reality, turning the concrete into an abstraction, the real into a representation'.[656] This certainly seems to capture the identity confusion in *Austerlitz*, where displaced reality applies as much to Sebald's photographs as it does to the characters' encounters with the dead. Visions of the latter are always slightly obscured, at times seen through a heat haze or veil, and at others simply blurred about the face or around the edges.[657] The result is that both captured and live images, and observer and subject, constantly interact and overlap.

As with the porous boundaries of domestic space, the blurred lines between individual identities and experiences highlight the fact that, once again, Austerlitz is not in control. *Doppelgänger* and instances of doubling are imposed upon him, particularly during his time in Wales, because it is always other people who suppress or reveal the pieces of his past. The

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[653] Robert Macfarlane, 'Sebald' in *After Sebald: Essays & Illuminations*, ed. by Jon Cook (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Full Circle Editions, 2014), pp. 19-34 (p. 26).
[654] Smith, p. 76.
[655] Sebald, *Austerlitz,* pp. 81-2; Sebald, *Austerlitz,* trans. Bell, p. 74.
[656] Shafi, p. 440. Shafi's reference is to images seen on television news bulletins in the German novel *Die Habenichtse*.
[657] Sebald, *Austerlitz,* pp. 82-84; Sebald, *Austerlitz,* trans. Bell, pp. 74-75.

resulting shadowy presences and ghostly figures are truly uncanny, in that they encompass both the *unheimlich*, and the various connotations of the word *heimlich* from which the term originates. Although *heimlich* can carry the sense of familiar and homelike, as well as concealed or secret, Freud points out that '*unheimlich* is the antonym of *heimlich* only in the latter's first sense, not in its second'.[658] And yet, in Sebald's narrative at least, the *Doppelgänger* encountered by Austerlitz stand for his own flesh and blood, and the family which was once the centre of his world. Sebald's *Doppelgänger* thus bring to mind German philosopher Schelling's definition of the uncanny as 'everything that was meant to remain secret and hidden and has come into the open'.[659] From this perspective, Freud suggests that the uncanny can be thought of as 'actually nothing new or strange, but something that was long familiar to the psyche and was estranged from it only through being repressed'.[660] The suggestion of secrets and concealment, and encounters which unsettle because they are strangely *familiar*, strikes to the heart of Sebald's narrative in a way that mere strangeness could not. Austerlitz only gradually realises how thinly veiled some of these secrets are, later recalling that 'gewiß ist es Evan gewesen, [...] der mir einmal sagte, mehr als ein solches Seidentuch trenne uns nicht von der nächsten Welt' ['it was certainly Evan [...] who once told me that nothing but a piece of silk like that separates us from the next world]'.[661] The fact that there is also no way of telling which secrets will resurface, and which will remain stubbornly out of reach, is disturbing and frustrating for Austerlitz in equal measure, and never lets him forget that his existence is controlled by more powerful forces.

One such force which demonstrates this unnerving paradox is what Freud termed a 'primitive fear of the dead', because Austerlitz is frequently rendered helpless in their presence.[662] He is unable to get closer to the deceased when he wants or needs to, such as when trying to trace his dead parents, but equally cannot seem to avoid ghostly encounters and omens of his own demise. Freud seems to touch on this perceived powerlessness in his suggestion that fear of the dead 'is probably still informed by the old idea that whoever dies becomes the enemy of the survivor,

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[658] Freud, p. 132.
[659] Ibid., p. 132. The reference is to German philosopher Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling (1775–1854).
[660] Freud, p. 148.
[661] Sebald, *Austerlitz,* p. 84; Sebald, *Austerlitz,* trans. Bell, pp. 76.
[662] Freud, p. 149.

intent upon carrying him off with him to share his new existence'.[663] More recently, Rachel Falconer has suggested that 'Austerlitz finds that, not only is it impossible to lay claim to the dead, but also any encounter with their spirits is likely to dispossess the living'.[664] Ultimately, in what seems to be an unbroken link from his tightly controlled childhood in Bala, and despite an inability to form relationships himself, Austerlitz 'remains possessed by others'.[665] This sense is compounded throughout by Sebald's obscure intertextuality and the many other voices and stories entangled in the narrative.

Bakker's novel, too, is haunted by shadowy characters from the protagonist's past whose voices reverberate off the main narrative. Some of these characters are dead, like old Mrs Evans, while others, such as the protagonist's uncle and the student with whom she had an affair, are merely insubstantial. Identity is approached slightly differently in Bakker's narrative, however. While Austerlitz is named from the outset, and every revelation thereafter helps to build a fuller picture of the character (despite his own identity struggles), Bakker's protagonist seems continually to drift in and out of focus. The character portrayed is not much more clearly defined towards the end of the novel than in the opening pages; if anything, identity and experience become increasingly indistinct and confused. Moreover, she leaves the narrative completely before most of the narrative questions are resolved. Another significant contrast to Sebald's text is that, while Austerlitz's true identity was hidden from him by others, Bakker's protagonist chooses herself to conceal who she really is. This is most strikingly done with the suppression of names in the narrative: she is referred to simply as *she* for nearly eighty pages, which constitutes the entire first section of the novel (entitled 'November') and around approximately half of her time in Wales. After that she only reveals a name to her lover, Bradwen, introducing herself as Emilie.[666] Not until the novel's closing pages, however, and just after she has left the narrative, do we learn that her real name was in fact Agnes. In the end this is not a particularly shocking discovery, given the lengths she has gone to isolate herself and '[keep] her world small' in

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[663] Freud, p. 149.
[664] Rachel Falconer, *Hell in Contemporary Literature. Western Descent Narratives since 1945* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), p. 102.
[665] Ibid., p. 109.
[666] Bakker, *The Detour*, p. 79.

Wales.[667] Moreover, by this point, the reader is aware of the protagonist's work on Emily Dickinson, so her sudden use of the name 'Emilie' seems a little suspicious. Bradwen, too, has his doubts, once he has spent more time with her, and from the start his presence inadvertently undermines her disguise.[668] When she gives her name as 'Emilie', for example, she 'pronounc[es] it in the Dutch way' and therefore establishes a certain distance between her and Dickinson.[669] Bradwen, however, uses the 'English' pronunciation 'Emily', which serves as a reminder that her identity is as precarious as the main narrative voice.[670]

The narrative presence of Emily Dickinson also serves as an uncanny *Doppelgänger* in Bakker's novel. As in Timm's and Bernig's texts, intensive research leads to a strong personal association and increasingly blurred lines between the protagonist and her literary subject. The protagonist can be seen railing against Dickinson's weaknesses, reclusive way of life and miserable end, yet it becomes harder and harder not to see parallels in the protagonist's worsening health and increasingly dark thoughts. Even as she shuts herself away, however, she is still trying to establish connections, albeit with the dead rather than those living around her. In fact, the intrusions of the living are mostly negative and unwelcome: the doctor in Caernarfon is hostile and disbelieving, for example, while her landlord, Rhys Jones, sexually harasses her and makes threats of eviction. Meanwhile she barely mentions the husband and parents she has left behind in Amsterdam, and ignores all their attempts to contact her while she is in Wales. Even Bradwen, the only character with whom she has any intimacy and whose company she seems, grudgingly, to appreciate, is kept at a certain distance, and despite his care and kindness increasingly gets in the way of her plans. Their fleeting connection is finally and irrevocably severed during their attempt to climb Snowdon, when the protagonist is unable to accompany Bradwen to the summit.

Bakker's protagonist instead seems more interested in communing with ghosts such as Dickinson, and Mrs Evans, the former owner and previous occupant of her Welsh house. The

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[667] Bakker, *The Detour*, p. 159.
[668] See for example ibid., p. 108 and p. 176.
[669] Ibid., p. 79.
[670] Ibid., p. 80.

ghost of Mrs Evans, according to Bakker, developed spontaneously during the writing process: he has said in an interview that '[s]he just came, and as she was there, her presence got stronger and stronger'.[671] It is almost as if this presence was conjured by the protagonist's attempts to make a home of the old lady's house. However, as will be seen in the next section of this chapter, which considers the role of the body and illness, the relationship which results has more to do with invasion than connection, and is reminiscent of Austerlitz's one-sided power struggle with the dead. Equally it represents further blurring and merging of identities, experiences, times and places. The ghostly presence of Dickinson also threatens to consume the protagonist, rather than allow her to connect. A crucial scene here comes near the end of the novel when the protagonist starts to translate one of Dickinson's poems, prophetically titled 'A Country Burial', in what seems like her final attempt to get closer to both poet and poetry, while at the same time making Dickinson's sentiments and images her own.[672] Her failure to translate the poem to her satisfaction thus confirms an inability to connect with those around her, especially through language. Having to use English while in Wales, a foreign language to the protagonist, leads to frustrated communication as much as it is also a welcome layer of disguise. In this translation episode, however, it becomes clear that even in her mother tongue she is unable to bridge the gulf of understanding between her and Dickinson, both suffering individuals, and thus fails to gain much-needed solace and clarity.

Curiously, in the end, the protagonist's strongest and most enduring connections are with the natural world, from the Welsh landscape in general to animal life in particular. These connections involve no language, and are often hostile rather than harmonious, as demonstrated by the unidentified creature preying on the geese or the aggressive badger. And yet some kind of instinctive bond develops which cannot be defied, so that the protagonists seems to merge or sync with some of the creatures she encounters, much as she does with her human *Doppelgänger*. As her health worsens, for instance, the ten geese which came with the house are picked off one by one by an unseen predator, mirroring her decline. And, strikingly, not only does she shun human company in her final moments, choosing to die in the shelter she built for

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[671] Dorkofikis, 'PEN Atlas Q&A — Gerbrand Bakker, Author of *The Detour*'.

[672] Bakker, *The Detour*, pp. 181-83 and p. 208.

the geese, but the birds themselves decide to join her there. Having kept their distance up to this point, they are suddenly completely at ease in her company and even happy to make physical contact: '[t]he goose that was on the mattress lowered its head until it was resting on her legs. It felt like a rope, a cord pulling her away. I've turned into a goose, she thought.'[673] It is another bittersweet image, showing a moment of connectedness but only achieved once the protagonist is at the very end of her life, having relinquished all human relationships and her individual identity and surrendered to her surroundings.

The final ghostly presence in *The Detour* is the protagonist's illness. In some ways it is the most sinister of all, for we never find out what it is or where it is in her body; it is not even clear how much the protagonist herself knows. All the reader is shown is that her health becomes steadily worse, with increasing pain and exhaustion, yet the cause remains unnamed and invisible. It could be argued that the other *Doppelgänger* in the narrative, whether human or animal, stem from this shadowy, malign presence, for they represent repeated assaults on the protagonist's body, both inside and out. The tone is set early on, when she admits to existing 'in constant expectation of a visitor showing up'.[674] However, given that she is going to great lengths to avoid other people, but cannot seem to do anything about other intruders (such as the local wildlife, or symptoms of her failing health), the signs increasingly suggest that this anticipated visitor may not be human. Instead they converge on her illness, and death lurking in the wings. Andrew Warsop, discussing the uncanniness of illness, has written that, when ill, 'the body is experienced as a "hidden presence" in that, as biological organism, it includes events, processes, and structures over which I have no control and of which I have no awareness'.[675] In the context of Bakker's novel, the protagonist must deal with unknown developments within a space, i.e. her body, which is both fundamentally familiar to her, and to a large extent mysterious. In a similar way, Austerlitz was seen to wrestle with the 'hidden presence' of his real identity, which was deeply embedded in supposedly familiar space, and viscerally experienced, but little known and understood. In all the corpus texts, characters have had to grapple with

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[673] Bakker, *The Detour*, p. 209.
[674] Ibid., p. 24.
[675] Andrew Warsop, 'The Ill Body and *das Unheimliche* (The Uncanny)', *Journal of Medicine & Philosophy*, 36 (2011) 484-95 (p. 488). <https://doi.org/10.1093/jmp/jhr038> [accessed 30 May 2017].

forces in their Welsh settings which are beyond their control, and in all cases these have a strong and dramatic effect on states of mind and even consciousness. In the cases of Sebald and Bakker, however, such forces attack in a particularly intimate way, for they are able to penetrate the protagonists' inside space and even launch their assaults from within. The human body itself is one of these crucial inside spaces and the key battleground between self and surroundings in Wales.

The Body

All the themes explored so far in this chapter lead towards the body as the ultimate threshold in this Welsh space, because each one demonstrates either a physical or psychological connection between space and the body. The protagonists' experiences of Wales begin with the carving out of a space outside of time, then a domestic space constructed within it. There the protagonists discover the liminality and porousness of their space, and as boundaries dissolve they let in the uncanny, as well as constant challenges to the protagonists' authority from both inside and out. Both protagonists demonstrate clear bodily responses to their Welsh space. Austerlitz's response to traumatic childhood repression arguably only emerges later in adulthood, once he has left Wales, in episodes of severe mental and physical breakdown, yet there are strong hints of the bodily suffering to come in his foster parents' decline and death, both of which happen in the Welsh setting. Bakker's protagonist, by contrast, has an immediate physical response to her Welsh surroundings. This is often brought about by unwanted physical contact with local people or animals, whether from the wandering hands of the doctor in Caernarfon or Rhys Jones, or a badger bite.[676] Tellingly, however, the physical contact they most crave is the least forthcoming. For Austerlitz this is parental affection, while for Bakker's protagonist it is Bradwen's sexual advances. Caught between unwelcome contact on the one hand and a lack of it on the other, both protagonists are reminded that the balance of power in this space does not lie in their favour.

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[676] See for example Bakker, *The Detour*, pp. 18-19 and p. 128 (the doctor); p. 136 (Rhys Jones); and p. 15 (the badger bite).

The protagonists' private and intimate bodily suffering is also intensified by their Welsh space, with their challenging and mysterious health issues reflected in a challenging and unknowable environment. The same paradoxes and contradictions present in this space also exist within their bodies, for at times they seem completely overwhelmed by internal sensations, such as physical pain or mental anguish, while at others they seem detached from their own physical features, experiencing them as an outside observer might. Once again, the border separating inside and outside space dissolves, letting the outside in, and vice versa, which leads to disorientation and vulnerability. With each breach of the protagonists' inside space, adversity burrows a little deeper into them and impacts directly on the body, in the form of an unnamed illness for Bakker's protagonist, and lifelong mental trauma for Austerlitz. Several critics have highlighted Sebald's tendency across his work to show how one's personal history can impact upon the body, for example 'when characters are physically disabled by the past, when memory attains an assaulting force'.[677] It could be argued that Bakker engages with similar concerns in *The Detour*. The following comment on Sebald's narratives, made by Coetzee, seems particularly relevant to both texts, and perhaps inadvertently corresponds more closely to Bakker's themes:

> […] the recovery of the past only confirms what at the deepest
> level his people already know, as their steady melancholy in the
> face of the world already expresses, and as, in their intermittent
> breakdowns or catalepsies, their bodies have all along been saying
> in their own language, the language of symptom: that there is no
> cure, no salvation.[678]

Since Sebald and Bakker use their Welsh settings to symbolise this adversity, it could be argued that Wales, along with the disorientation, liminality and lack of control it represents, becomes part of the protagonists. Meanwhile, they themselves are absorbed by *it*, either through literal death, in the case of Bakker's protagonist, or the symbolic burial of Austerlitz's true identity. In

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[677] Macfarlane, p. 33.
[678] Coetzee, p. 86.

an ironic twist, their sense of unbelonging and struggles for control end in them being possessed by their Welsh space, and unable to ever truly leave.

Illness or compromised health plays an especially important role here in focusing the narrative on the body. It provides a continuous link from the uncanny and *Doppelgänger*, and reminds us of the texts' spatiality: that is, the body's presence within Welsh space, and the private, inside space within the body itself. Warsop cites two readings of the uncanniness of illness, both of which touch on the body's relationship with space and how this is shaken when we are unwell. Firstly, for S. Kay Toombs:

> [i]llness [...] is 'fundamentally experienced as a global sense of disorder—disorder which includes the disruption of the lived body (with the concurrent disturbance of self and world) and the changed relation between body and self (manifested through objectification and alienation from one's body)' (Toombs, 1993, 90ff). In health, one's body is unnoticed; it is lived unreflectively. But when illness strikes (say, if I injure my hand), it suddenly becomes an object for me in a peculiar new way.[679]

Meanwhile, the approach of F. Svenaeus is summarised in the following way:

> In illness, we encounter unmeaning, incomprehensibility, a breakdown of our everyday 'totalities of relevance' whereby one's body bestows meaning in its world. This breakdown confirms the way we are, as Heidegger thought, fundamentally uncanny or unhomelike.[680]

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[679] Warsop, p. 487.
[680] Ibid., p. 489.

Freud seems to touch on a similar breakdown of meaning, and subsequent reminder of our own fundamental uncanniness, with regard to mental illness (such as 'madness', in his words) and neurological disorders like epilepsy. He wrote that:

> [t]he layman sees a manifestation of forces that he did not suspect in a fellow human being, but whose stirrings he can dimly perceive in remote corners of his own personality. The Middle Ages attributed all these manifestations of sickness consistently, and psychologically almost correctly, to the influence of demons.[681]

It can hardly be a coincidence, then, that both *Austerlitz* and *The Detour* contain examples of physical and mental decline which seem to complement each other, albeit in grim and morbid terms. Austerlitz experiences both throughout his adult life, while his foster mother suffers from the former and his foster father the latter. Bakker's protagonist's unnamed illness, meanwhile, is implicitly connected to her uncle's equally mysterious mental health problems, which led to his suicide attempt. Both assessments of illness and the uncanny cited by Warsop strike a chord with Sebald's and Bakker's texts, reminding us of the body's place in the world and of space within the body. Their protagonists could certainly be said to have led 'fundamentally uncanny or unhomelike' lives, with a strong aspect of concealment too, which recalls Freud's inclusion of the secretive in his own definition of the uncanny. Neither protagonist seems ever to have belonged anywhere, while so much has been hidden either from them or by them throughout their lives. Moreover, to recall Freud once again, they both experience possession by hitherto unsuspected and apparently demonic forces beyond their control. Setting and environment often provide or even embody these forces, continually asserting universal power and presence while diminishing the significance of human individuals. In bodily terms, illness and death in *Austerlitz* always 'involve a diminished state', for example.[682] The protagonist in *The Detour*, for her part, is repeatedly physically defeated by her challenging surroundings, and ultimately lets them claim her.

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[681] Freud, p. 150.
[682] Williams, '"immer weiter ostwärts"', p. 134. See for example Sebald, *Austerlitz*, p. 83 and p. 98; Sebald, *Austerlitz*, trans. Bell, p. 75 and p. 90.

As both texts turn their focus increasingly inwards, so they both gravitate towards ever more intimate bodily experiences, such as the senses. Some senses seem in the narratives to be sharper or more keenly felt than others: those strongly associated with the world around us, for example, such as sight, are diminished and dampened in favour of particularly internal sensations such as pain. Unclear vision plagues both protagonists, for instance, especially when they are in Wales. They have difficulty making sense of what they see, whether conceptually or literally, with darkness, inclement weather, enclosed labyrinthine surroundings and concealed information all contributing to actual and figurative obscurity. Sight seems to have little use or power in their Welsh surroundings, especially as the prevailing obscurity is often controlled by other people or forces. Weakened vision thus makes internal sensations, and any assault on them, appear even stronger. This could partly be attributed to a sense of the uncanny around 'the idea of being robbed of one's eyes', which makes the rest of the body appear vulnerable and exposed.[683] What is inside could therefore be thought of as less constrained and liable to loom larger than before, while attacks on it can penetrate further and deeper. This therefore constitutes yet another breakdown of boundaries between the internal and external, and a further merging of body and space.

It is striking that Sebald and Bakker explore the senses in this way alongside a strong spatial focus on buildings and structures, which in the Welsh settings are largely intimate and domestic. Such exploration is redolent of an essay referenced earlier in this chapter, Pallasmaa's 'The Eyes of the Skin', in which the author sets out to 'make a conceptual short circuit between the dominant sense of vision and the suppressed sense modality of touch'.[684] Pallasmaa feels that vision has been prioritised in architecture for too long, when in fact other senses, especially touch, play a more crucial role in the way we inhabit space: '[t]he very essence of the lived experience is moulded by hapticity and peripheral unfocused vision. Focused vision confronts us with the world whereas peripheral vision envelops us in the flesh of the world.'[685] Pallasmaa's interest in our 'experience of enveloping spatiality, interiority and hapticity' in buildings thus strikes a particular chord with Sebald's and Bakker's protagonists and their increasingly interior

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[683] Freud, p. 138.
[684] Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin,* p. 10.
[685] Ibid., p. 10.

experience of Welsh space.[686] Here, too, can be found 'the deliberate suppression of sharp, focused vision' in favour of 'peripheral vision, which enfolds the subject in the space'.[687] The obscurity throughout *Austerlitz* and *The Detour*, which can take both a physical and figurative form and which defies any sort of clear delineation, could therefore be seen as a means of enveloping and enfolding the protagonists in their Welsh settings. The tendency in Sebald and Bakker to repress sight but call attention to other senses, allowing a final, bodily threshold to be breached, makes this a particularly intimate and enduring pact.

Bakker in particular invokes senses which take us beyond mere responses to the outside world, and which engage with the interiority of the body. Hearing and smell, for example, are quickly established as especially sensitive in the protagonist's new, Welsh environment, with the coconut smell of gorse and the sound of wind and water noted in the opening pages.[688] By contrast, where sight is concerned, she seems to be at a disadvantage, for the obscure nature of her surroundings seems to defy all attempts at visual comprehension. The area around the farmhouse, for example, consists of entangled and overgrown paths which 'you could find only by looking into the distance' and noticing half-hidden clues, including 'rusty kissing gates, rotten stiles and the odd post with a symbol presumably meant to represent a hiker'.[689] Smell especially seems instrumental in Bakker's text, always refocusing our attention on the body's most intimate spaces. According to Danuta Fjellestad, smell has long been neglected in literary criticism, where '[d]espite the intense critical interest in the body, we remain firmly within the aesthetics that we have inherited from the nineteenth century in which only two senses, vision and hearing, are considered'.[690] To counter this Fjellestad has explored the use of smell in recent literature, and revealed a:

> […] re-coding of the conventional olfactory landscapes: foul
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> smells, constructed throughout the Enlightenment as the sense of

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[686] Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin,* p. 13.
[687] Ibid., p. 13.
[688] Bakker, *The Detour*, pp. 3-4.
[689] Ibid., p. 3.
[690] Danuta Fjellestad, 'Towards an Aesthetics of Smell, or, The Foul and The Fragrant in Contemporary Literature', *CAUCE*, 24 (2001), 637-51 (p. 637).

> unreason, madness, savagery and animality, are reconstructed [...]
>
> as the sense of love and relationship, while fragrant scents become
>
> markers of falsehood and death.[691]

Rather than a simple 'reversal of the traditional coding of smells', however, the texts discussed by Fjellestad instead offer 'a literary smellscape full of tensions and ambiguity' in which we as readers are made 'to wander in the labyrinth of tabooed desires'.[692]

Certainly, odours in *The Detour*, whether fragrant or foul, often overturn expectations for both protagonist and reader. Some are apparently conventional, such as the characteristic countryside smell of cow dung, or the nostalgic and festive fragrance of sweets or candles.[693] Others are more surprising: coconut-smelling gorse, for example, repeatedly lends a pleasantly exotic flavour to the otherness of Wales, while traditionally homely and enticing smells such as roasting meat are nauseating for the protagonist.[694] Bradwen's different odours, on the other hand, are strong and not conventionally pleasant. And yet the 'sweet smell' of his feet, 'the bitter smell of fallen leaves' on him or his bedclothes and 'the rancid pong of his blue and grey socks', just like his very presence, all have positive connotations of human connection, attraction and vitality, rather than the scents of illness, unbelonging and death which hang over the protagonist.[695] Bradwen's appearance in the narrative is as bittersweet as his smell, because although he brings the protagonist care, affection and company, he also unwittingly highlights how little life she has left:

> She could smell herself and she could smell the boy: the smell
>
> from the beginning, the combination of sweet socks and bitter
>
> leaves. [...] She had wanted to fall asleep in that moment,
>
> preferably together with him, doing at least one thing together, but
>
> instead the old-woman smell rose again from the bed or the floor

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[691] Fjellestad, p. 637.
[692] Ibid., p. 645.
[693] See for example Bakker, *The Detour*, p. 27 (cow dung), p. 28 (sweets) and p. 116 (candles).
[694] See for example ibid., p. 3, p. 109 and p. 163 (gorse) and p. 154 (roasting meat).
[695] Ibid., p. 81; p. 86 and p. 91; p. 120.

or her own body. She cried quietly and thought that she should
stop resisting.[696]

Meanwhile, some familiar smells also become oppressive and threatening. The 'old-woman smell' referred to above is the most-recurring odour in the narrative and represents a particularly powerful assault: firstly on the senses, but also, and more aggressively, on the protagonist's authority and her inside space contained in both house and body. From the moment the protagonist first detects it, it is recognised as a threat to her very existence:

> She'd done her best to make something of the living room and the
> rooms upstairs; the kitchen was just as Mrs Evans had left it. There
> was a lingering smell of old woman around the sink and
> cupboards, an odour that, in the weeks she had lived here, she had
> gradually come to associate with herself. It even seemed to have
> impregnated the old-fashioned washing machine: immediately
> after she'd done a load, before she'd hung it out to dry on the rack
> at the top of the stairs, a musty air had already imposed itself on
> the fresh scent of washing powder. Yesterday at the baker's she
> had clearly picked up the smell of the old woman, perhaps because
> the walk had made her perspire, and she had stepped sideways to
> avoid her reflection in the narrow mirror behind the bread rack,
> scared as she was of seeing a different person.[697]

From that point on the smell occurs repeatedly throughout the narrative, each time underlining the protagonist's sense of violation, impotence and proximity to death.

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[696] Bakker, *The Detour*, p. 195.
[697] Ibid., p. 60.

Emphasizing the disruptive power of smell compared to other senses, Fjellestad quotes Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno: 'In the act of seeing one remains oneself, in smelling one dissolves.'[698] Later, having described it as '*the* sense of postmodernism', she concludes that:

> [s]mell, this most liminal of senses, carries a great subversive
> potential in its ability to violate boundaries, assault rationality, and
> evoke powerful emotions of disgust and attraction. [...] since
> odours are invested with cultural values, their cultural coding
> suggests models for marking and interpreting others as Others and
> for writing scripts of interaction between selves and others.[699]

It seems entirely fitting, then, that smell should be so prominent in a narrative concerned with otherness, thresholds and desperate attempts to connect. Unfortunately for Bakker's protagonist, however, it is the overwhelming, invasive odours, such as the 'smell of old woman', which triumph in *The Detour*, steering her towards the ultimate and inevitable. Even here, duality persists until the very end of the novel. Once the protagonist has left the narrative, the perspective shifts briefly to Bradwen, on whom smells have a completely different effect. While the protagonist felt increasingly hounded and oppressed by them, assaulted from within and without, for Bradwen they are self-affirming and confirm his health, freedom and vitality: 'Drying himself, he sniffs. Emily said she could smell Mrs Evans. He can smell himself and he smells good'.[700] Coming in the last few pages of the novel this ensures that the links between body and space, and the contrasting spatial awareness of an ailing outsider and a healthy native, remain strong until the end.

This leads us to the very last frontier between body and space, encompassing burial, submergence and death. In *Austerlitz* and *The Detour*, when a body is weakened and left vulnerable by illness or trauma, the surrounding space is able to invade and overwhelm as the boundary between inside and out collapses. An inability to find ease and comfort in a particular

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[698] Fjellestad, p. 639.
[699] Ibid., p. 650.
[700] Bakker, *The Detour*, p. 225.

space mirrors the protagonists' inability to find peace within themselves, and is made all the more stark by characters who manage this seemingly without effort. In *The Detour*, for example, Bradwen is much more at ease in Welsh space than the foreign protagonist, despite upsetting associations and experiences for him there, such as the death of his mother. Similarly, in *Austerlitz*, Evan the cobbler and *Geisterseher* exudes a comfortable sense of belonging in Bala, in spite of his many eery encounters with the dead. He is the only character to encourage a sense of local attachment in the young Austerlitz, by teaching him Welsh and telling him local stories. It is therefore unsurprising that death is never far from the protagonists' or readers' minds in either Sebald's or Bakker's narrative. Dark, enclosed spaces, haunting presences and an all-pervading sense of powerlessness and persecution suggest that death weighs heavily on both protagonists from an early age. In some ways, this makes it all the more unsettling, as if they are being pursued before their time; frequent experiences of unwanted physical constriction, for example in labyrinthine spaces, also suggests the horrifying motif of being buried alive. Freud acknowledged that '[s]ome would award the crown of the uncanny to the idea of being buried alive, only apparently dead', and in Sebald's and Bakker's narratives this idea certainly resonates with failed communication, the protagonists' lack of control and the breakdown of barriers between the living and the dead.[701] Even the Freudian explanation for this fear of being buried alive, in fact a non-frightening 'fantasy of living in the womb', chimes with the protagonists' desperate desire to belong, and their attempts to carve out a space in Wales where this might finally be possible.[702] The maternal connection seems particularly poignant for Austerlitz, who is effectively buried alive in Wales when taken from his birth parents, robbed of his true identity and enfolded into a new family.

Certainly Sebald's novel is full of imagery relating to burial and submergence. In Wales, Austerlitz is contained by a cold and prison-like house, looming mountains and oppressive valleys, and becomes gradually aware of other buried lives, including his own. This formative Welsh experience is echoed throughout the narrative in later obsessions and encounters with dark, constricted places elsewhere, whether prisons, fortresses, labyrinths, cellars or graves. In

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[701] Freud, p. 150.
[702] Ibid., p. 150.

The Detour, Bakker's Welsh space is similarly obscure and constricted, characterised by 'narrow, sunken lanes', overgrown paths and small, dark spaces such as ponds, cellars and sheds.[703] A key symbol in the novel is Snowdon, whose slightly menacing presence is felt even when hidden from view.[704] And yet such imagery, although often frightening, nevertheless contributes something other than simply a fear of death and dying. The protagonists' responses are ambiguous, and there seems in fact to be a fine line between being *constricted* or *contained* by space, and *enveloped* and *enfolded* as Pallasmaa has described.[705] Burial and submergence in these Welsh settings, and being bound to Welsh space, has as much to do with desire for the latter state as it does with fear of the former. The ambiguity maintains a sense of the uncanny, for the reader as well as the protagonists: Austerlitz and Bakker's protagonists are both drawn to and repelled by buried or submerged space, while the reader never quite knows how the protagonists will respond, nor why.

Bodies of water especially demonstrate this in both texts. Unlike previous corpus texts, in which water undoubtedly played a part, the bodies of water referred to by Sebald and Bakker are usually inland and self-contained, such as lakes, pools or baths. Here, then, even water can focus the mind on *enclosed* spaces, an effect which contrasts dramatically with, say, the openness of the sea seen in the previous chapter. Pallasmaa has made a particular link between water and the way we inhabit space. In fact, he seems to describe it as a sort of threshold within our 'lived experience', in terms that could also be applied to Sebald's and Bakker's Welsh space in general:

> The reflective surface of water hides its depth and projects a
> second, hidden world. The doubled world activates our
> imagination for the duality of past and future. The life-supporting
> suggestion of water also contains the mortal images of deluge,
> drowning and drought. We are suspended between the opposites of
> birth and death, benevolence and disaster.[706]

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[703] Bakker, *The Detour*, p. 6.
[704] Ibid., p. 198.
[705] Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin*, p. 10 and p. 13.
[706] Pallasmaa, 'Inhabiting Time', p. 57.

Being 'suspended' between 'birth' and 'benevolence', and 'death' and 'disaster', could hardly be more apposite here. In *The Detour*, for example, water initially has a dark and morbid significance for the protagonist, because her uncle's attempted suicide took place in a pond, and memories of the event gnaw at her during her own struggle with life and death.[707] But water increasingly takes on positive connotations as she is drawn to it as a place of privacy and peace, and a chance to reconnect with her body, her memories and her future plans. She makes several visits to 'some kind of reservoir' near the farmhouse and takes frequent baths, concluding that '[i]n the end, this was where she felt best: lying back in hot water, aware of her body, which felt flawless and uncompromised, especially with the storm raging outside'.[708] The fact that she is attracted to still water, without currents or tides, is surely linked to her desire to step outside of time. For her, as for her uncle, it is a space which represents a temporal 'standstill' and brings to mind Pallasmaa's liminality of water, with both characters caught between decision and expectation, and ultimately life and death.[709] The protagonist attributes her uncle's inability to drown himself to the very water he was standing in, claiming that 'the place itself had robbed him of the ability to decide' and at the same time left him with 'no sense of expectation'.[710] This liminality is maintained throughout Bakker's text as water remains a 'suspended' space *between* life and death, even when other thresholds in Welsh space have been crossed and death itself is imminent.

Water in *Austerlitz* is very obviously liminal, especially in Wales. The imagery of Lake Vyrnwy perfectly encapsulates Pallasmaa's description of the role of water in lived space: if any space 'projects a second, hidden world' and embodies the 'duality of past and future', symbolising 'birth' and 'benevolence' on the one hand and 'death' and 'disaster' on the other, it is surely the creation of a 'life-supporting' reservoir for one community, brought about by the destruction, through drowning, of another. Here, the future of a distant urban population relies on banishing local and long-established lived space to the past. Water generally has fewer positive

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[707] Bakker, *The Detour*, p. 7.
[708] Ibid., p. 66 and pp. 114-15.
[709] Ibid., p. 8.
[710] Ibid., p. 67 and p. 8.

or even neutral associations in Sebald's narrative than in Bakker's novel. While we saw that Bakker's protagonist finds clarity, heightened spatial awareness and even a greater degree of control when she herself is in the water, particularly in terms of her body, water in *Austerlitz* remains dark, unfathomable and full of uncanny duality. That Lake Vyrnwy, for example, came into being as the result of a flood (albeit a man-made deluge) is a reminder that water can be overpowering and destructive: being in it is synonymous with disaster and death, and it is striking that Austerlitz never enters any water. Equally striking is that Bakker's protagonist, on the other hand, is mostly in a position to control the depth of water, for example when running a bath, and it is always her decision when or whether to get in or out. In this way water seems to be more of a benevolent threshold for Bakker's protagonist, enabling her to reconnect, while for Austerlitz it represents connections which have slipped out of one's grasp, whether just below the surface or hidden in the depths. His foster father Emyr, brought up in Llanwddyn, seems to keep his own memories and connections submerged too, only mentioning this devastating experience once to Austerlitz, when passing the reservoir on their way to somewhere else.[711]

Sebald's bodies of water, such as Lake Vyrnwy or Bala Lake, differ from Bakker's in another fundamental way. Both authors employ symbolism relating to enclosure, but Sebald is also interested in current and flow, whereas Bakker's water is nearly always still. Sebald's interest firstly contributes to the unexpected and uncanny in his narrative: neither the reader nor Austerlitz himself knows what forces might be hidden or revealed with each deluge or drought. More than this, however, it reinforces a sense of dislocation and unbelonging. Austerlitz, in his desire to belong somewhere, is repeatedly drawn to the story of the drowned village Llanwddyn, and to photographs of its former inhabitants. It is hardly surprising that he feels an uncanny affinity with them, firstly as people whose homes and spatial connections were destroyed by more powerful forces, and secondly as the only images of fellow humans in a lonely and loveless house. The full and poignant extent of his desperation can be seen in the way he imagines the villagers, for in his mind they have become like the undead, either still trapped underwater in their drowned village or appearing as ghostly presences on the streets of Bala. It speaks volumes that Austerlitz craves the company of these ghostly images more than the company of his foster

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[711] Sebald, *Austerlitz*, pp. 78-79; Sebald, *Austerlitz*, trans. Bell, p. 71.

parents, who at this point are very much alive and supposed to be his family; Emyr was, after all, a Llanwddyn resident himself. It is also indicative of the futility of Austerlitz's attempts to connect, thanks to a painful lack of instinct in reading other people which apparently leads him to prefer imagined companions to real ones. Apart from Emyr, no other Llanwddyn resident is mentioned as being still alive, and Austerlitz admits that he imagines his foster father as the sole survivor.[712] This is compounded by the fact that he only knows the others through enigmatic photographs, rather than encounters in the flesh.

Water in *Austerlitz* therefore appears to stand for obscurity and disconnection, as opposed to Bakker's clarity and reconnection. In both texts, there is the suggestion of being caught between two states, whether dead or alive, past or future, moving or still. Sebald's water, however, also shows us something about the nature of death in *Austerlitz*, and in this sense (unlike in *The Detour*, where water is liminal throughout) it represents a threshold crossed. The residents of Llanwddyn did not physically die when their village is destroyed, but Austerlitz's imaginings suggest that afterwards they were no longer fully alive: that the flooding drowned a piece of each of them, along with their collective past, and left each one compromised and incomplete. The same kind of symbolic death, which was not meant to harm but which nonetheless has profoundly harmful and lifelong consequences, could be said to have happened to Austerlitz. Being the victim of a grave psychological assault, i.e. the suppression of his identity in an attempt to create a new sense of belonging, seems not only to have destroyed his sense of self but killed a part of him forever.

In her study of domestic space in German fiction, Shafi quotes from one her corpus novels to describe death in the narrative as 'primarily "ein Wechsel der Besitzverhältnisse"' ["a change of ownership"].[713] This strikes a chord with *Austerlitz* and *The Detour*, because death within them ultimately revolves around power and control. To face death is perhaps to face the ultimate challenge to one's authority, and on a frightening but barely comprehensible scale. On the one hand, as Freud said, 'our unconscious is still as unreceptive as ever to the idea of our own

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[712] Sebald, *Austerlitz*, p. 80; Sebald, *Austerlitz*, trans. Bell, p. 72.
[713] Shafi, p. 439, quoting from *Die Habenichtse*.

mortality.'[714] On the other hand, Warsop identifies the clear realisation that '[o]ne's whole world is under threat'.[715] As has just been shown, both Sebald's and Bakker's protagonists seem to lose their power struggles with death and cross certain lines for good, whether literally, in the case of *The Detour*, or figuratively for Austerlitz. Shafi's reference to death is based on the fact that, in the novel in question, 'the survivors decide on the deceased's property or treatment of the corpse.'[716] A similar struggle for supremacy over the body and personal, private space plays out in Sebald's and Bakker's narratives, with the final battle taking place in this most intimate sphere. Here, though, the wider Welsh space could be seen as the survivor which assumes power over and ownership of the deceased. In many ways, this triumph of Welsh space over personal space, and with it the triumph of death over the body, is inevitable: the liminal Welsh settings keep the protagonists suspended between life and death throughout but also allow death to keep encroaching on their territory, from their domestic space to the intimate space inside their bodies and minds. Moreover, it is known that neither protagonist is able to properly return to where they have come from. The uniqueness of Welsh space seems, once again, to be this very liminality, keeping the protagonists in what appears to be limbo, but is ultimately revealed to be space beyond the point of no return.

Wales nonetheless also provides an essential spatial duality, offering a complete contrast to the protagonists' original homes elsewhere, and with it an unexpected embrace. Despite familiarity and fond memories, the locations of their past are unable to offer the protagonists their own place in the world. Instead it is in Wales, in enigmatic, sometimes hostile, in-between space, which carries no associations for them, that they feel closest to the sense of belonging they crave. The forfeit, of course, is life, or at least a life worth living. Austerlitz seems to exist in such a state of painful suspense throughout Sebald's text, and indeed to be doomed to it: he has barely known anything other than a liminal life, having been brought to Wales at such a young and formative age. He is therefore moulded by his Welsh space as he grows up, remaining at the mercy of other people and of forces beyond his control. Death has particular power over Austerlitz, although not always or even particularly his own (which, arguably, he experiences

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[714] Freud, p. 148.
[715] Warsop, p. 485.
[716] Shafi, p. 439.

figuratively rather than literally, in the form of his buried identity and permanently maimed sense of self). Rather, Austerlitz's more direct experiences of mortality are the many deaths of those around him, such as his family, foster family and friends. The past weighs especially heavily in Wales and its ghosts are never far away. As we have seen, Austerlitz seems to have more encounters, and even a greater affinity, with the dead in Wales than with the living. Certainly, trapped in a liminal existence, he increasingly resembles one of Evan the cobbler's tortured spirits, doomed to wander in pain.

The experience of Barmouth complicates this somewhat, because although also in Wales it is synonymous with the happiest times of Austerlitz's life, when he felt the strongest sense of affection and inclusion and discovered that there is also light, beauty and wonder in Welsh space (and, indeed, in life). However, the two extremes of hellish Bala and utopian Barmouth are more complementary than they initially seem, symbolising Austerlitz's inner turmoil, entrapment in the middle and the fact that his ghosts and memories are nothing but a torment to him, whether good or bad. Underlying this torment is the knowledge that the past, and its places and people, have been taken from him, and no longer exist as he knew them. It is all the more agonising because many of these bore a sheen of intangibility and unreality, especially in Wales. Austerlitz feels the full, powerful and painful impact of remembering, but from the outside the details seem belittled and diminished because people and places are long gone, and perhaps never seemed solid or fully believable to start with. Even positive experiences in Wales, then, fail to translate to a more settled, stable spatial experience once Austerlitz leaves. It is no coincidence that time spent in distant, mist-swathed Barmouth felt particularly suspended and precarious for him, because the happiness and homeliness experienced there was fleeting and exceptional in an otherwise miserable Welsh childhood, and no more immune to death and destruction than any other state.

In *The Detour*, by contrast, there is a much more direct link between the protagonist's Welsh space and her own death, because she has come to Wales to die. This becomes increasingly clear as her failing health is reflected by her surroundings, echoed in threatening human and animal behaviour, symbols and omens in the landscape and restrictive, labyrinthine topography. And yet this strange and menacing place also brings opportunity, for the whole narrative is concerned

with her (re)gaining control so that she can approach and experience death on her own terms. The suspense here therefore does not centre on *whether* the protagonist will live or die, but on the nature of her death: that is to say when, how and where it will happen, and by whose hand. Crucially, and underlying all the others, is the question of what role the Welsh setting will play. This is the paradox of Wales's liminality: on the threshold, held between states, there is possibility as well as a lack of control. The protagonist understands that death is 'ineluctable and unshareable', in Warsop's words, and therefore distances herself from other people, seeking as little human contact as possible; she even does her best to keep Bradwen at arm's length.[717] But she also makes great efforts to be the mistress of her death, shunning the obvious or expected methods offered to her by the Welsh setting. Bakker's protagonist does not drown herself as her uncle tried to, for example, despite frequent visits to a nearby reservoir and an apparent obsession with water; nor does she fall or throw herself off Snowdon, as Bradwen had feared she might.[718] Instead she mimics the apparently natural death of Mrs Evans, an old woman she never knew but with whom she comes to feel a powerful affinity while living in what was once the Evans' home. The place she chooses — hidden in the goose shelter, guarded by the remaining geese themselves — ensures that she will not be found immediately, and suggests that she does not want to be. The impression given is that the protagonist is doing as much as she can to experience belonging and being in control on her own terms, even if only for one fleeting moment. In a striking but brief reversal of power, she locks Bradwen in an old cellar so that he is now the one contained and restricted, while she, after a narrative spent on the verge of burial and drowning, chooses to die above ground. In her final moments there is hope of transcending even that, as she looks to be released from earthly bonds and transported '[w]ith any luck, all the way to the top of the mountain'.[719] And yet the paradox of the liminal Welsh setting persists, because she also chooses to be as physically close to the ground as possible. The draw of Welsh space, which was strong from the start when she abandoned her original journey to Ireland, is no less powerful now she has reached her end.

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[717] Warsop, p. 494: 'Heidegger recognized that this peculiar impending possibility is ineluctable and unshareable, and we see it in the fragility and finitude of our bodies.'
[718] Bakker, *The Detour*, p. 218.
[719] Ibid., p. 209.

In conclusion, Sebald and Bakker thus explore two different strands of belonging in Wales which involve being enveloped in Welsh space. Hints of this have been seen elsewhere in the corpus, as have encounters with death, but never with the palpable sense of finality to be found in these last two texts. In the previous chapter, for example, Timm's character Marc seemed at risk of being engulfed by his Welsh setting and its ghosts, or of drowning himself in drink, while Bernig's protagonist Albert nearly surrenders to the strong tidal currents off the Welsh coast. Even in Szerb's more playful narrative, discussed in chapter two, the anti-hero Bátky has a disorientating and hallucinatory near-death experience in a terrifying, labyrinthine building with no doors and windows. In these texts, however, there is always the possibility of returning, and life looms much larger than death. The protagonists in the first three texts encounter positive, productive marginality in Wales, and appear to undergo a 'recentring' of perspective through this liminal setting. Moreover, any sense of belonging felt by these characters in Wales is largely attached to the people around them, who are rarely Welsh themselves, and there is none of the strong, bodily attachment to Welsh space seen in Sebald's and Bakker's narratives.

By contrast, it is precisely this physical nature of belonging which underpins *Austerlitz* and *The Detour*. Bakker's protagonist, for example, joins with her Welsh space forever when she chooses to die there; her preferred location, outside and on the ground, suggests a merging with the Welsh earth itself. Coming after a power struggle between individual and environment which lasts almost the entire novel, the setting finally seems to claim her body, and absorb, or even erase, her *self* in the process. She has a premonition of such an ending not long before she dies, during a walk to the nearby stone circle. This is one of the most meaningful sites for the protagonist in Wales and the location for the novel's opening scene, when she first encounters some of the local wildlife. On this last prophetic occasion there are no animals to be seen or heard and she realises that '[s]he was completely alone, as if she too were not there'.[720] In Sebald's novel, meanwhile, Austerlitz states himself that he has 'keinen Platz in der Wirklichkeit' ['no place in reality'], so it is unsurprising that his liminal Welsh space, suspended in time and always on the verge of intangibility, embraces him in its own strange and sinister

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[720] Bakker, *The Detour*, p. 163.

way.[721] In a reversal of Bakker's protagonist's becoming a part of her Welsh setting forever, Wales in fact becomes a permanent part of Austerlitz: he takes his Welsh space, and his experiences there, with him wherever he goes. He seems doomed never to settle, and always to exist in the painful limbo he first experienced as a child in Bala. Although he is able to physically leave Wales, alive and for good, his time there has a lasting bodily impact, thanks to psychological scars and trauma-induced illness. So, while Austerlitz may not die in Wales as Bakker's protagonist does, a part of him — his stolen identity, perhaps — lies buried there. His continuing obsession with labyrinthine, underground and underwater spaces even suggests that this part of him was buried *alive*, and that the hole left within him has, arguably, been filled by the very Welsh space which was complicit in its demise. All in all, this ensures that Austerlitz is haunted as much from within as he is without. In Sebald and Bakker's texts, then, it could be argued that multiple narrative voices and liminal Welsh settings lead to more of a *decentring* for their protagonists, whose spatial awareness becomes ever more fragmented and for whom unbelonging is the only certainty.

Becoming embedded in Welsh space, and having it embed itself in one's body, both go hand-in-hand with greater intimacy and engagement with indigenous culture (in *Austerlitz* especially) and with local people. Despite the more prominent human relationships in these narratives, however, Wales is still defined, above all, in spatial terms. Firstly, Welsh space remains largely unpeopled in both texts, and often seems to contain more dead residents than living ones. Moreover, it is relationships with the dead, who in the end become deeply entwined with their space, which turn out to be more meaningful: they offer the protagonists a greater sense of affinity, belonging and control than relationships with the living, which instead frequently disrupt or thwart attempts to achieve these things. Entangled narrative perspectives and a new focus on the body guarantee significant connections and exchanges between the protagonists and their physical environments; as Pallasmaa has written, '[t]he experience of a place or space is always a curious exchange; as I settle in a space, the space settles in me.'[722] As in the previous

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[721] Sebald, *Austerlitz*, p. 269; Sebald, *Austerlitz*, trans. Bell, p. 261.
[722] Juhani Pallasmaa, 'Space, Place, Architecture and Memory: The Temporal Dimension of Existential Space' in *Nordic Architects Write. A Documentary Anthology*, ed. by Michael Asgaard Andersen (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2008), pp. 188-201 (p. 194).

corpus texts, Sebald's and Bakker's Welsh settings provide a space far *beyond* what the protagonists are familiar with, and this otherness is symbolised most frequently in spatial terms (here, dark, restrictive buildings and thoroughfares; concealment; and burial and submergence). Another similarity is that both protagonists arrive in Wales as outsiders, and remain so throughout their time there. In fact, it is because of this foreign status that boundaries break down between their Welsh surroundings and their private, personal space: as outsiders, they are vulnerable and disorientated, caught between decisions, identities, the past and the present and the real and the imaginary. Their circumstances therefore demand and are sustained by the often hostile otherness of their Welsh settings. Indeed, otherness seems once again to be the main attraction of Wales for these narratives, allowing a uniquely tight bond between protagonist and setting. The sidelining of human distractions and obstructions means that a physical closeness between individual and space, and even a merging of the two, is what prevails.

These Welsh settings, like the others in the corpus, are therefore predominantly shaped by outside perspectives. Welsh space in Sebald's and Bakker's narratives is moulded less by the protagonists' actual encounters with it than by their previous perceptions and experiences, brought with them from elsewhere. This is even the case for Austerlitz, despite his being so young on arrival and therefore moulded himself by his Welsh experience: as the narrative progresses, we learn that everything he encounters there is nonetheless an uncanny echo of the fate of his family, whose suffering ran in parallel to his own misery in Wales. Bodily responses to space, a key development here from previous texts, are crucial to this shaping of Wales from the outside. Through invisible workings deep within, such as the development of an illness, as well as the engagement of more intimate, interior senses like smell, the protagonists' bodies seem sensitive to events before their minds are fully conscious of them. Equally, at times, the physical responses continue even after the protagonists have stopped thinking about the events which triggered them. Bakker's protagonist, for example, reaches a point in Wales at which '[s]he realised that she was no longer thinking about before, her mind was clear of all memories'.[723] Meanwhile her physical health continues its apparently irreversible decline, as if her body has taken over the painful task of remembering.

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[723] Bakker, *The Detour*, p. 116.

The fact that both protagonists revisit childhood experiences and memories is also unique to these last two texts, and reinforces their bodily responses to space. After all, as Pallasmaa points out, it is often the spatial which remains when visual recollection has faded: of his own childhood, he has said that '[m]y eyes have forgotten what they once saw, but my body still remembers'.[724] In the case of Sebald's and Bakker's protagonists, long-buried trauma resurfaces in bodily reverberations much later in life, and the common denominator is Wales. For Austerlitz, Welsh space is an early influence: his formative experience there invades his body like a parasite, and seems to act on his health like an invisible, degenerative illness long after he has left. Bakker's protagonist, on the other hand, feels the effects of Welsh space at the end of her life. She starts to recall her uncle's suicide attempt only once arrived in Wales, and faced with her own failing health in a strange, liminal setting. Her memories shape the way she navigates both her illness and her surroundings, supplying both direction and disorientation and culminating in the decision of when, where and how to die. We are reminded once again of Pallasmaa's perception of a 'curious exchange' between a person and a space, which refers to the impression that 'as I settle in a space, the space settles in me'.[725] Such an exchange is certainly present in Sebald's and Bakker's texts, but the sense of equilibrium implied by Pallasmaa is not. Instead Welsh space clearly dominates and claims individuals permanently: either from the outside, in the case of Bakker's protagonist, or, as for Austerlitz, from within.

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[724] Pallasmaa, 'Space, Place, Architecture and Memory', p. 191.
[725] Ibid., p. 194.

Conclusion

This thesis has argued that twentieth- and twenty-first-century European fiction set in Wales prioritises Welsh space over Welsh people. Geographical aspects of this space are presented as unique, and capable of dwarfing human features such as language, history and culture. There is also tension between space and place in these depictions of Wales. Their coexistence operates at times as a stark binary, with European places of origin pitted against newly-encountered Welsh space, while at other moments there is slippage and interference: for example, Wales represents both a named, known and bordered place *and* an otherworldly, distant and liminal space. The protagonists in this European corpus frequently find themselves caught between these states, with their own foreignness reflected and intensified in a setting which is both culturally and geographically marginal. Narratives incorporating multiple voices reinforce the continual shifting and blurring experiences in Wales, as well as the protagonists' inability to belong.

As suggested at the beginning of the thesis, the attraction of Wales as a setting for fiction seems to have deep roots in the literature of Western Europe, reaching back, for example, to Romantic and Celticist yearnings for otherness, private reflection and personal journeys, and all things rustic, natural and spiritual. Wales was one of several favourite locations for these purposes, and the perfect antidote to Enlightenment reason, scientific rationality and the advancing modern age. There is a rich variety of Welsh settings in English-language fiction in this vein from the eighteenth century to the twentieth, as shown in chapter one, but also a shifting focus from Wales as a setting defined by its (usually stereotyped) inhabitants, to one increasingly shaped by introspective protagonists who are often from elsewhere. As in the corpus, the Welsh settings used in English-language fiction seem increasingly to concern the existential and universal, and to transcend any aspects of Welshness on a human scale. Introducing a European perspective, the analysis continued with an examination of three nineteenth-century German texts set in Wales. These reflect the stronger earlier interest in people seen in English-language fiction, with large casts of colourful local characters and enthusiastic engagement with history, myth and legend. The physical reality of the Welsh settings is of secondary importance here, or barely mentioned at all. The German authors nonetheless introduce themes which reappear in the

corpus, particularly in Szerb's 1934 novel *The Pendragon Legend*, which bridges the gap between people-centric nineteenth-century European narratives and the more recent spatial turn. The most prominent of these themes are distance, acquired through travel to Wales from continental Europe; immediate dramatic possibilities in the Welsh settings' richly-layered history and folklore, not to mention local characters with multiple identities; and, finally, mystery and suspense, encountered in narrative puzzles to be solved as well as in the texts' wider interest in reality, fantasy and points of intersection between the two.

Critical distance seems to be central to the appeal of these Welsh settings. Along with a ready supply of genuine cultural oddities, such as outlandish religious sects, eccentric inhabitants and strange stories of the fairy realm, they also provide the author with an opportunity to comment freely on their strangeness, being so relatively little-known to the intended German reader. Szerb picks up this thread in *The Pendragon Legend*, discussed in chapter two, but develops it much further: his Welsh setting leads a naive Hungarian protagonist, János Bátky, far beyond his intellectual comfort zone of knowledge, history and books, and into a space almost beyond mortal existence. The defining feature of Szerb's Welsh setting is, I would argue, its ability to function as a space for the imagination. It comes across as a 'private universe' both constructed from, and enabling deeper exploration of, the protagonist's 'personal obsessions'. Topics which are unfashionable, controversial and sometimes downright unpalatable in Bátky's usual circles, and which mirror Szerb's own interests, appear to come to life or take shape in this Welsh space. For a time, Bátky is completely cut adrift from his daily reality, in surroundings which defy all the usual rules of space, time and logic; some locations vanish, once he has left them, almost as suddenly as they appeared. Overall, the reader is left wondering whether Szerb's Welsh setting existed anywhere other than in the imagination.

German authors Uwe Timm and Jörg Bernig have also created Welsh settings which seem to fluctuate constantly between reality and fantasy, as discussed in chapter three. Both Timm's short story ('Nicht morgen, nicht gestern'), published in 1999, and Bernig's novel (*Weder Ebbe noch Flut*), published in 2007, are set in extreme Welsh locations and revolve around an obsessive focus on being right on the edge, high above ground or as far away from familiar territory as it is possible to go. The implied liminality in Szerb's Wales becomes physical in

Timm and Bernig's coastal Welsh settings, reinforcing a sense of being always on the verge of credibility and caught between the real and the imagined. The protagonists here exist on a knife-edge of indecision while in Wales, pulled between people, places and points in time. Ultimately, however, they find themselves out beyond the furthest edge and able to grasp a kind of transcendental clarity, which, on their return, provides the realisation and direction they had craved.

By contrast, the final novels in the corpus, W.G. Sebald's *Austerlitz* (2001) and Gerbrand Bakker's *The Detour* (2010), deal with space beyond the point of no return. Emphasis on intimate, interior space in Wales, including the house and the body, brings to mind the architect Pallasmaa's 'curious exchange' between an individual and his or her surroundings. The protagonists in these texts become literally or figuratively entwined with their Welsh settings, and the disorientation they feel in obscure and labyrinthine surroundings leaves a permanent scar on both their bodies and their minds. Neither is able to ever truly leave Wales behind as a result. The finality of this Welsh destination is reflected in the narrative themes of illness and death. Sebald and Bakker allow their protagonists greater levels of intimacy with local Welsh people and places than we have seen elsewhere in the corpus, but this closeness can be oppressive, turning spaces into prisons or coffins and human relationships into hauntings or harassment. Liminality in these Welsh settings manifests itself in the protagonists' state of limbo and a strong sense of the uncanny. Environmental otherness compounds their physical and mental vulnerability and causes boundaries to break down, allowing the outside to invade private space — whether the mind, the body or a place of shelter — and the past to intrude on the present. The protagonists' experiences of Wales, marked by confusion, unease and a lack of control, bring long-buried memories and thoughts to the surface once again.

This thesis therefore argues that the corpus shows a spatial turn in Welsh settings used by twentieth- and twenty-first-century European authors. Despite increasing global mobility and access to other cultures during this time, Wales is portrayed here in terms of its cultural and geographical marginality. It is shown to be distant, extreme and lacking not just people but human structures, traditions and institutions. The occasional comment on the Welsh language or indigenous culture only makes these seem outlandish and incredible, as if they are mere

symptoms of Wales's literal exoticism and eccentricity. The protagonists' status as outsiders, having in each case travelled to Wales from elsewhere, amplifies the strangeness of their settings. Moreover, each protagonist arrives there at a moment of personal crisis, and their indecision and disorientation are reflected and intensified in such unfamiliar surroundings. The resulting tension between opposing choices, times and places finds spatial reinforcement in the liminal nature of the Welsh settings, whether manifested in physical margins — such as coasts, mountains or moorland — or psychological ones, i.e. the sense of existing on the edge of one's known world. The marginality of Wales in all senses thus makes it an enigmatic space which blurs lines, resists definitive interpretation and both invites and questions individual perspectives. The use of hybrid, destabilising narrative voices in all five corpus texts enhances this effect. As Bianchi has written, Wales in fiction can appear as 'a blind spot which will not let the narrative gaze settle centrally.'[726] That this seems to manifest itself in powerful, physical marginality in the European texts chimes with Bianchi's sense of positive, conscious hybridity in Welsh fiction, and suggests less of a negative status imposed on Wales than an active rejection of centrality.

From a geographical perspective, Anderson has identified spatial concerns similar to those above in contemporary English-language fiction set in Wales.[727] Themes in his corpus include the closeness of wild nature, the symbolic presence of the sea, the unique remoteness of the Welsh borders and a sense, especially on the western coast, of being at the end of the line or on the edge of the world.[728] In these Welsh settings, too, lines are easily blurred between the real and the imagined. The characters, who have all been uprooted in some way, form and are formed by such surroundings while grappling with their identity and a lack of connection with modern, mainstream society. Their marginalisation is often attributed to Thatcherite politics and consumerism, so these distant parts of Wales offer an alternative existence to a life ruled by money and goods. Similar themes are not entirely absent from the European corpus: once in Wales, the protagonists are all aware (and frequently relieved to find) that financial worries, modern science and political oppression now seem very far away. Instead, as in Anderson's

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[726] Bianchi, p. 45.
[727] Anderson, *Page and Place*, 2014.
[728] The authors Niall Griffiths, Richard Collins, Owen Sheers and Malcolm Pryce are shown in particular to demonstrate these themes.

corpus, they are compelled to take notice of universal themes, such as life, death, nature and love, which loom larger in their new, elemental surroundings than they ever did in their old, urban lives. These protagonists' journeys to Wales from mainland Europe are all triggered by feelings of helplessness. Welsh space does not shield them from this — in fact they are confronted by their own insignificance in Wales more forcefully than ever before — but it does not seem to matter here in quite the same way. These European travellers thus find that it is possible in Wales to find comfort in indifference, direction in disorientation and liminality, and a sense of place in universal (if not geographical) terms. Again, the powerful marginality encountered in Wales reinforces this sense of paradox, as *peripheral* Welsh space is given a *central* narrative role: it is brought to the fore, made visible and shown to be a dominant, dynamic force.

However, a crucial difference in Anderson's reading is its basis in the particular ties between Welsh people and their land, which offer stability and meaning for the lost and drifting protagonists in his corpus. Examples of these, according to Anderson, include unique landscape vocabulary in the Welsh language, a Celtic cultural tradition of stories rooted in place, and a powerful sense of local belonging, the last especially embodied in the notion of *hiraeth* or allegiance to one's community or *bro*.[729] These are precisely the cultural, man-made markers which are largely absent in the European texts. Moreover, while the protagonists in Anderson's corpus are primarily social misfits, the European protagonists are also geographical outsiders. Their Welsh settings thus seem doubly foreign and distant, thanks to significant physical journeys but also a cultural gulf which is sometimes larger than expected: local features, from landscape to language, are portrayed as uniquely incomprehensible. Indigenous culture and customs therefore represent a barrier to belonging in the European texts, whereas for the protagonists in Anderson's corpus they can offer a way in. Anderson's final author, Iain Sinclair, writes of needing a personal sense of connection to space — through 'place and memory', say, or some kind of map — in order to work out who we are and where we belong.[730] As we have seen,

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[729] There is no single English word which captures the many nuances of *hiraeth*. Anderson quotes Simon Elmes, who summarises it as 'that sense of belonging or homesickness that Welsh people feel in their hearts when a long way from the Valleys of the south or the mountains of the north.' (Anderson, *Page and Place*, p. 35).
[730] Anderson, *Page and Place*, p. 313.

when the European protagonists travel to Wales they leave all such personal markers of place behind them. Despite their jaded responses to modern-day existence, not dissimilar to those seen in Anderson's corpus, the European protagonists in this thesis overwhelmingly seek stability in Wales's spatial features, such as nature and the elements, rather than in community or culture. They seem to find comfort in the universal, and in their own smallness when measured on such a scale. Walter Benjamin famously wrote that '[t]o dwell means to leave traces', but what unites the Welsh settings in this European corpus is the possibility of spending time in them without leaving any trace at all.[731] Even the protagonists who are most tightly entwined with their Welsh space fail to leave a mark, as in Sebald or Bakker's novels, despite losing a part of themselves to Wales's embrace and the setting maintaining a permanent hold on *them*. The powerful marginality of these Welsh settings is further confirmed by that fact that their presence endures in the narrative even after the protagonists have left them.

For Szerb, Timm, Bernig, Sebald and Bakker, Wales thus offers access to space which transcends human life, whether on an individual, national or universal level. For Szerb, this was space beyond knowledge, received wisdom and even rational consciousness. For Timm and Bernig, it was space above and beyond the earth-bound and landlocked. Lastly, Sebald and Bakker encountered space which symbolised and invaded, and caused lasting damage to, the protagonists' bodies and minds. The last example in particular shows how distance can breed closeness, but an unwelcome kind, as the narrative emphasis on impersonal, indifferent space in Wales nevertheless elicits from the protagonists a deeply personal, subjective and often painfully intimate response. It also demonstrates the contradictory and complementary nature of Wales's appeal as a setting, established in *The Pendragon Legend* and echoed in all the corpus texts. For all the universal aspects of Wales, the protagonists are drawn into their own private universes and personal obsessions while there, and the resulting tensions can be seen in the many, merging narrative voices, as well as a focus on storytelling and imagination. Equally contradictory is the use of impersonal, universal Welsh space in order to re-establish a sense of self, bringing to mind Sinclair's 'cosmology'. For the European protagonists this involves severing ties with previous

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[731] Walter Benjamin, 'Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century (1935)', in *The Arcades Project*, transl. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, Cambridge, MA and London: Belknap Press at Harvard University Press, pp. 3-13 (p. 9).

places, and all the memories and personal meaning they hold, and (re)connecting with broader, cyclical and elemental themes of existence which seem to be woven into the very fabric of Wales.

There is further justification here for the spatial focus of this thesis. As we have seen, Wales itself has very recently been described as Janus-faced, relating to the modern, outward-looking and pioneering characteristics of contemporary Welsh society on the one hand, and ancient, rooted and strongly regionalised traditions on the other.[732] This thesis argues that such plausible yet striking opposition and liminality is to be found in the European texts set in Wales, but it is different and decidedly spatial in nature. The Welsh settings discussed contain both the unfamiliar and the universal, belonging and never belonging, embrace and obliteration; in some cases, as in Sebald and Bakker's novels, they cause harm *and* enable healing, protecting life while at the same time ensuring death. Rather than reinforcing a certain cultural status, marginal Wales could in fact be seen as a setting in which to question, destabilise and challenge notions of centrality, as demonstrated by the fact that this peripheral country plays an unmistakable, central role in all these European narratives wherein human characters are subordinate. We are strongly reminded of Westphal's recentring or geocentring of places in literature, and his call to 'restore the imaginary margins'.[733] Westphal's goal is to refocus literary criticism on place itself, looking beyond the overrepresentation of famous texts and authors and the overly-narrow bounds of the canon.

In the context of Wales, as we have seen, this has much in common with Bianchi's critical approach. Bianchi rejects the idea of any 'totalizing narrative' in favour of 'a hybridity that abrogates all centres', which he identifies as key to the production and study of Welsh fiction.[734] The unfamiliar and liminal Welsh settings encountered in the corpus to this thesis could therefore be seen not as meaningless blank space to be written over, but rather, being empty of canonical perspectives and expected narratives, as inherently challenging centrality; as Bernig has said of

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[732] Anderson, *Page and Place*, pp. 30-36. See also 'Introduction' to this thesis, p. 22.
[733] Westphal, p. 59.
[734] Bianchi, p. 47 and p. 72.

Swansea, it 'often feels like the real centre of the universe'.[735] In Wales the protagonists discover a power and significance hitherto unknown in places which are closer to geographical and cultural centres. The Welsh space in the European corpus texts is thus unexpectedly disruptive, even *de*centring: there is a sense not just of shifting perspectives but of overturning an accepted order of things, and embracing a new, hybrid spatial awareness. This in turn challenges some of the spatial theories referenced in the introduction to this thesis, with their long-established relationships between space and place (see Lutwack, Tuan, Hooker and Escobar, for example). The corpus texts frequently present these as opposing forces in a way which supports such critical readings, exploring the tension between, say, places of origin and unfamiliar territory, real places and imagined space, dynamic coastal edges and continental stasis, and spatial margins and centres.

However, the constant blurring of boundaries in these narratives also problematizes this same space-place binary, showing clearly that places might be 'humanized' (Tuan) and 'inhabitable' (Lutwack) yet utterly unliveable, and that being 'embedded in the communal and familiar' (Hooker) is not synonymous with belonging.[736] For example, the texts' destabilising narrative voices, which include intertextual references rooted in specific places (such as the work of Dylan Thomas or Adalbert Stifter), succeed only in disrupting the characters' relationships with space and with each other. Moreover, these European texts do not seek to promote Wales to the status of place in their narratives, but instead strive to maintain its liminality and openness: it remains on the edge and suspended between meaning and oblivion, but somehow more visible and vivid than anywhere else. Such a position makes it a particularly malleable literary setting, but far from being written out of these narratives it is illuminated and brought to the fore.

A welcome consequence of this would be greater visibility for Welsh settings and Welsh space in other literature, from Europe and elsewhere. An encouraging trend in German-language literary engagement with Wales since 2010 is the use of Welsh settings in popular romantic

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[735] Kevin Sullivan, 'Swansea, "the Real Centre of the Universe" — New Work by Visiting German Poet', Swansea University website, 12 November 2013 <http://www.swansea.ac.uk/press-office/news-archive/2013/swanseatherealcentreoftheuniverse-newworkbyvisitinggermanpoet.php> [Accessed 15 November 2016].
[736] See introduction to this thesis, p. 15.

fiction by female authors, often categorized as 'chick lit'. Dörthe Binkert, Julie Peters and Ella

Simon have all set a novel in Wales, while Constanze Wilken has set an entire series there (five

novels, published between 2014 and 2018).[737] Each narrative features a female protagonist

dealing with life's complications, including illness, family secrets, past lovers and new

relationships, in various picturesque Welsh locations such as Tenby, the Llŷn Peninsula and

Portmeirion. This shift to genre fiction, with its well-known Welsh tourist destinations and

formulaic plotlines, could at first be seen as a narrowing of the field opened up by this thesis: a

re-Romanticisation of Wales, perhaps, and a return to Welsh settings as a backdrop for tropes

and cliché. On the other hand, it could also be considered as further hybridisation of portrayals of

Wales in fiction, and expansion of a hitherto limited corpus in Wales-related criticism. Wales

certainly seems to remain visible in these more recent texts, notably in paratextual terms such as

cover photography, titles and summaries, and accompanying explanatory material in the text

(e.g. afterwords) or on the authors' websites. This is a particular contrast to the corpus texts for

this thesis, whose cryptic presentation mirrors the authors' motivations for choosing Wales as a

setting.

Another striking feature in the more recent Welsh settings is that all the authors and

protagonists are women, compared to the all-male corpus authors and a majority of male

protagonists (and indeed characters) in their texts. This is another reason to view this European-

Welsh 'chick lit' in a positive light, and suggests that Wales's powerful marginality is capable of

influencing other often-marginalised areas such as female authorship or representations of

women in literature. Moreover, these German-language authors have created protagonists of

different nationalities, including Welsh, which give scope to further challenge expectations and

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[737] Their texts are as follows: Dörthe Binkert, *Jessicas Traum* (Munich: dtv, 2016); Julie Peters, *Der vergessene Strand* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, 2013); Ella Simon, *Ein Gefühl wie warmer Sommerregen* (Munich: Wilhelm Goldmann Verlag, 2016); Constanze Wilken, *Der Duft der Wildrose* (2014), *Ein Sommer in Wales* and *Sturm über dem Meer* (both 2015), *Das Erbe von Carreg Cottage* (2017) and *Die Klippen von Tregaron* (2018) — all Munich: Wilhelm Goldmann Verlag.

perspectives of Wales. Future research might continue in this vein by seeking out portrayals of Wales by, or which feature, other marginal social groups besides women, such as ethnic minorities, those with disabilities or LGBTQ people. Could it be that the pull of physical, elemental space is particularly strong for those struggling to find their place among people, offering an alternative to social belonging in the form of spatial awareness on a larger, universal scale?

From another angle, it might be useful to apply the findings of this thesis to other spatially and culturally marginal locations which have been used as settings in fiction by non-native authors. Examples of these might include Brittany, or Spanish regions such as Galicia. Such a line of enquiry might consider whether edges and liminality hold a clear attraction in other marginal places, or whether Wales continues to possess unique appeal in comparison. Are there other attempts to challenge marginal status and destabilise perspectives by downplaying human aspects of the landscape, and bringing the powerful spatiality of life on a geographical edge to the fore? As has been shown in this thesis, far from erasing the location in question this can result in welcome visibility for an under-represented place. In the case of Welsh settings in European fiction since 1900, it has brought new access to Wales not just for the general reader but also for the researcher, in Welsh studies and beyond.

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