

Out of Europe: Travel and Exile in Mid Twentieth-Century Wales

Tully, C.L.

Studies in Travel Writing

DOI:

[10.1080/13645145.2014.896077](https://doi.org/10.1080/13645145.2014.896077)

Published: 22/04/2014

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Cyswllt i'r cyhoeddiad / Link to publication](#)

Dyfyniad o'r fersiwn a gyhoeddwyd / Citation for published version (APA):

Tully, C. L. (2014). Out of Europe: Travel and Exile in Mid Twentieth-Century Wales. *Studies in Travel Writing*, 18(2), 174-186. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13645145.2014.896077>

Hawliau Cyffredinol / General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal ?

Take down policy

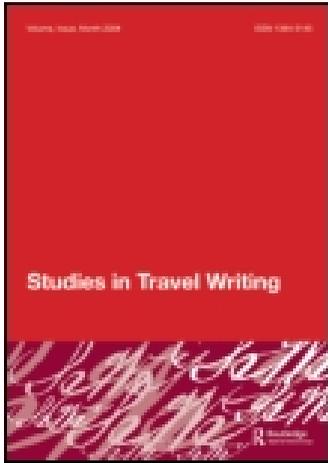
If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

This article was downloaded by: [Bangor University]

On: 06 March 2015, At: 07:05

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



Studies in Travel Writing

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rstw20>

Out of Europe: travel and exile in mid-twentieth-century Wales

Carol Tully

Published online: 22 Apr 2014.



CrossMark

[Click for updates](#)

To cite this article: Carol Tully (2014) Out of Europe: travel and exile in mid-twentieth-century Wales, *Studies in Travel Writing*, 18:2, 174-186, DOI: [10.1080/13645145.2014.896077](https://doi.org/10.1080/13645145.2014.896077)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13645145.2014.896077>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Versions of published Taylor & Francis and Routledge Open articles and Taylor & Francis and Routledge Open Select articles posted to institutional or subject repositories or any other third-party website are without warranty from Taylor & Francis of any kind, either expressed or implied, including, but not limited to, warranties of merchantability, fitness for a particular purpose, or non-infringement. Any opinions and views expressed in this article are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor & Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

It is essential that you check the license status of any given Open and Open Select article to confirm conditions of access and use.

Out of Europe: travel and exile in mid-twentieth-century Wales¹

Carol Tully*

Wales was the destination for a number of exiles from various parts of Europe during the mid-twentieth century. Children from the Basque country fleeing Franco, Polish exiles escaping Nazi invasion and Jews from all over Eastern Europe all made their way to the UK and many then specifically to Wales. Whereas much has been made in scholarship thus far of the reactions of the Welsh themselves to this influx of displaced foreign visitors, often with a celebratory focus on the charitable welcome they received, this essay focuses instead on the reception of Wales and the Welsh by these various groups. Some remained only for a short time, others would never leave. This essay examines the nature of their experiences in Wales as both travellers and exiles. In doing so, it will address a number of key questions relating to their perceptions and understanding of Wales both prior to and after arrival, while exploring also the complex notion of the exile as traveller.

Keywords: exile; child refugees; Wales; W.G. Sebald; H.G. Adler; Josef Herman

In common with other parts of the UK during the war-torn years of the mid-twentieth century, Wales served as a refuge for many European exiles. The Welsh welcomed and cared for various groups, including the children of Basque Republican families escaping the Civil War in Spain, Jewish children fleeing Nazi Germany as part of the *Kindertransport*, Jews from Eastern Europe seeking sanctuary from the advancing German troops before the outbreak of war and, finally, other Jews and Eastern European nationals displaced following the political upheaval of the immediate post-war period. The narratives emerging from this period document experiences of travel to and in Wales from the perspective of a range of what contemporary commentator and travel writer Hoffmeister (1942) termed as “unwilling tourists” in his volume of the same name. Focusing on autobiographical sources such as memoirs, correspondences and journals, as well as fictional reworkings, this article seeks to explore and uncover links between the various travel narratives produced as the result of this intense period of exile encounter with Wales.

These narratives can be subdivided into three categories: childhood, adult and fictional, and the interconnections between them are both implicit and explicit, revealing some synergies but also marked differences in the exile response to Wales. For example, the experiences of the children reveal two diverging pathways. The narratives of the Basque exiles, in the form of contemporary texts and memoirs, reveal a group of exile travellers who effectively exist in cultural isolation at a deliberate distance from the host culture. Conversely, the texts produced by children arriving as part of the *Kindertransport*, such as Susi Bechhöfer (1996), Ellen Davis (2004) and Edith Milton (2005), reveal the opposite with examples of complete and often enforced assimilation with that culture. The adult experience reveals a different set of predominantly positive perspectives on Wales. These are voiced through the journals and memoirs of Polish artist Josef

*Email: c.tully@bangor.ac.uk

Herman ([1975] 2002, 2003) and the letters of the circle around the German-Czech Jewish writer, H.G. Adler, in particular those of his second wife, Bettina Gross. In their case, Wales is presented as a location in which to take stock and negotiate displacement.

Elements of these first-hand narratives also feed into two fictional texts which deal with the experience of exile travel to Wales through (auto)biographically inflected prose, exploring both positive and negative exile responses to Wales. The two writers in question are H.G. Adler, whose own experiences of Wales and those of his wife are recreated in his novel *Die unsichtbare Wand* (The Invisible Wall 1989), and W.G. Sebald, who uses the experiences of Susi Bechhöfer as the basis for the Welsh narrative in his novel *Austerlitz* ([2001] 2003).² These fictionalised travel narratives are central to the working through of the exile experience, mixing observation and aesthetics to produce a mature reflection which sits in juxtaposition to the more straightforward, immediate responses of the child and adult exiles upon whose narratives the Welsh element of these works is based.

By exploring these narratives and the interconnections between them, I also hope to interrogate the prevailing notion that the exile and the traveller can or should be considered separately in relation to the travel accounts they produce. The critical tendency is to see travel writing and exilic writing as having parallel, almost intersecting trajectories, but which nevertheless require discrete analysis. Kaplan (1996), for example, sees exile and travel as “practices of displacement”, within which unencumbered (that is to say “willing”) travellers “may all participate in the mythologized narrativizations of displacement”, whereas exile (and therefore “unwilling”) travellers are “rarely historically recognized producers of critical discourses” (2). The traveller is, therefore, acknowledged as a producer of what we term “travel writing”, the exile, condemned to a perpetual state of dislocation and disengagement, is not. This seems an overgeneralisation, not least when one considers, firstly, that the exile may, through travel, seek and achieve resettlement in a new location, thus ending or at least halting the process of displacement, and, secondly, that the experience of exile is not uniform. Most importantly, the state of exile does not preclude a productive dialogue with the “other”, the notion which Blanton ([1995] 2002) places at the heart of travel and its critical conceptualisation, envisaged as a response to “the reverberations between observer and observed, between self and world” (5).

The exile traveller offers a particular perspective on this dynamic. In their recent volume, *Refugees and Cultural Transfer to Britain* (2013), Stefan Manz and Panikos Panayi argue for a more nuanced understanding of the interaction between “unwilling” travellers, in this case refugees, and their new environment:

The “refugee” is not just a legal category, he or she is also, just like any other migrant, an individual with a specific cultural background. The act of moving from one socio-cultural system to a different one sets in motion a process of mutual restructuring. The refugee has to adapt to a different set of linguistic and semantic signifiers where social differentiations and rituals assume different connotations. At the same time, he or she transforms the cultural context of the host society. (12)

The refugee, forced into a state of exile, is, then, subjected to the reverberations between “self and world” identified by Blanton, an encounter which brings with it new perspectives on both the home and host cultures, thus sharing key aspects of the experience of travel with the “willing” tourist.

In a recent collection of essays on the subject of travel and exile, Evelein (2009), despite largely rejecting the notion of the exile traveller, nevertheless recognises the value of exile as a catalyst for the development of such new perspectives:

Exile [...] yields a different perspective, a new way of seeing. Of course such an epistemological shift isn't procured without cost, and frequently the cost is high, but its advantages may outweigh the pain

that exile indubitably inflicts. Framed as a departure from familiarity, exile begins to show some conceptual overlap with travel, albeit only a certain kind of travel. (14)

This “conceptual overlap” is, however, couched in essentially negative terms. Evelein’s “certain kind of travel” is one grounded in homesickness, a painful estrangement which takes on a permanency in the life of the exiled individual, excluding any likelihood of resettlement or other positive engagement with his or her new surroundings. Evelein provides a definition of “true travel” as comprising “three basic elements: alienation, solitude, and feats of learning” (23). These are voluntary attributes which the exile (“unwilling”) traveller cannot experience in a productive way because “real travel is ultimately an ethical act as it draws its legitimacy from enabling genuine encounters with otherness” (23). The exile’s ability to experience such “genuine encounters with otherness” is thus called into question, robbing that individual of the ability to negotiate a relationship with new environments and to find in them future settlement, inspiration or engagement. Evelein ends by claiming that “the exile’s plight disallows growth, transformation, or redemption”, yet concedes some ground by noting that there is a “relationship between exile and travel as critical categories”, but still emphasising that the relationship is “tense” (31). This tension certainly underpins the experience of twentieth-century exile travellers in Wales, and the exploration of their travel accounts serves to highlight the inherent difficulty in seeking a homogenous reading of the narrative of exile as distinct from that of travel. The encounter with the “other” in the exile experience of Wales is variable, ranging from the permanent isolation predicted by many critics, to a sense of belonging and affinity more readily expected of the voluntary migrant. This range of responses cannot be particular to Wales, but the exploration of these narratives is nevertheless revealing in relation to both the diversity of the exile experience of travel and the recasting of Wales itself in the narratives produced.

This diversity of experience is highlighted in the narratives of child exiles brought to Wales in the late 1930s. Individuals and charitable groups throughout Wales responded to the plight of two groups of children whose lives were torn apart by political developments in their respective countries. In 1937, Wales was the destination for a number of children from the Basque country, who had been sent into temporary exile in order to save them from the upheaval and danger of the Spanish Civil War (see Davies 2011). A year later, they were followed by children from Germany, Czechoslovakia, Poland and Austria, mostly but not exclusively from Jewish families, who came to Wales as part of the *Kindertransport*. Children from both of these groups recorded their experiences as travellers, some through documents written and published at the time, others through memoirs.

Of the two groups, the experience of the Basque children is perhaps more straightforward and their engagement with and reception of Wales less complex. Following their arrival in Southampton, the children were dispersed across the UK, including to a number of locations in Wales, from Old Colwyn in the north to Caerleon in the south. The Caerleon home produced its own publication, the *Cambria House Journal*, containing contributions from the children describing their experiences. Notable is the simple register, undoubtedly heavily coached and edited in an attempt to emphasise the innocence and worthiness of the child exiles, which conveys the positive responses of the children to their temporary home. The focus is on issues relating specifically to childhood and the enjoyment of life. The following is typical:

On July 10th two years ago, we came to Cambria House, after having spent two months in Southampton. [...] We came to Newport by train, and there were some members of the Committee and some other people waiting for us. They brought us here, where they gave us a splendid reception, as they had already done in Newport. We had something to eat, and then went into the yard to play. There they took several photographs of us, – of the boys playing football, and of us girls playing ring games etc. (2013)

As this narrative suggests, the children are treated well but essentially as curiosities, as “others” and, while the tensions underlying their stay are masked in these contemporary narratives, in reality, their “otherness” is never far from the surface. José María Armolea Bustamente, one of the children, recalls the tense atmosphere:

There was no school, no supervision and some boys misbehaved and were eventually caught in the village shop helping themselves to sweets. The owner gave two of our lads a clip around the ears, but they told a different story to the older boys who then marched into the village to show them not to ill-treat their friends. Unknown to us, especially to the group of boys marching towards the village, the police had been informed by the villagers and a coachload of police had been dispatched from Carmarthen, arriving in time to disperse the boys and stop them from entering the village. We saw boys coming back having been badly treated by the police, some having to cross the river fully clothed. The police also chased us into our huts, where we hid under our beds and then drummed their truncheons on the metal roof to frighten us. (Benjamin 2007, 20–21)

This alarming circumstance is counterbalanced by the positive aspect of his experience in Wales as responses to their presence split across party lines. The result is an uneasy coexistence, marked by perceived difference but also, perhaps understandably, pity on the part of the host society, as Bustamente explains:

Changes soon came about as these events were recounted in the national press: questions were asked in Parliament about the “red” boys and many MPs wanted to send us back to Spain. People from Carmarthen had heard about us and several coachloads of people came to see us to help in whatever way they could. They came with presents and were very helpful in organising our football team and concerts all over South Wales. This continued until it was time to depart as winter was approaching and it was only a summer camp. I remember the last project that made us unhappy to leave. We had damned the river near the camp to make it easier and deeper to swim in, not realising why fishermen were complaining further down river about the lack of fish. It was another reminder of our stay in Wales. (21)

From Bustamente’s narrative, it becomes clear that these children, living as they were in large groups of their own nationality, had limited experience of Wales and Welsh culture. The children were effectively perpetual travellers, often moving from one home or colony to the next, always as part of a group and experiencing their new surroundings as a series of adventures. Their awareness of being in Wales as a distinct cultural entity was limited and related specifically to the people they encountered rather than the place and its culture. This is made explicit by Josefina Savery, who spent time in the colony at Caerleon:

Going to Caerleon was just a matter of luck. They said to us, “You’re going to Caerleon.” “Where’s Caerleon?” “Oh, it’s in Wales.” And somebody said to us – I’ll never forget it – “You’re lucky to be going to Wales.” I know why it was. It was because of the support given by the miners. (Bell [1996] 2007, 92)

The reference to the miners is significant, not only in terms of acknowledging the role that this group played in supporting these children, but also in highlighting the extent to which the children themselves identified with these industrial workers, finding in their occupation and ethos a parallel with their own homes in Spain’s industrial powerhouse. The experience of the children in Wales was in many ways aimed at creating a home from home. They were schooled in English and Spanish, with little reference made to Welsh; they staged performances of Spanish dances and songs; they lived together and interacted with the communities around them as recipients of Welsh charity but without any expressed intention of integration or absorption of the host culture.

The situation for *Kindertransport* children was in many ways quite different. Here the representation of Wales is far more ambivalent, with an emphasis on estrangement and dislocation.³ These children began to arrive in Wales in 1938, following the upheaval of *Kristallnacht*. The children were mostly from Germany, Czechoslovakia, Poland and Austria and were dispersed upon arrival across the UK. Unlike the Spanish children the previous year, these children were largely fostered into private homes. Perhaps to ease the burden on host families, few attempts were made to retain the cultural identity of the Jewish children, who were often placed in Christian homes. As a result, many grew up, having been formally adopted following the tragic demise of their parents, without ever knowing that they were Jewish or from where they had actually come. The experience of *Kindertransport* children followed such a pattern irrespective of destination. In this respect, those who arrived in Wales were no different to counterparts arriving in the south of England or Scotland. What is of interest here is the image of Wales and the Welsh which emerges from their writing.

Initially, the experiences of the *Kinder* as refugees arriving in and negotiating a new culture echo those of the Basque children as they try to come to terms with a bewildering new environment. Thereafter, their responses vary greatly with a far deeper engagement, positive or otherwise, with Wales and Welsh culture. Core issues are linguistic isolation and the alien nature of Welsh domestic habits, especially in relation to faith. The memoirs of three *Kindertransport* children, Edith Milton, sent by her desperate mother from Karlsruhe, Ellen Davis, evacuated from a Kassel orphanage, and Susi Bechhöfer, also sent by her mother, this time from Munich, shed light on this. Davis's account of the confusion upon her arrival in South Wales sets the tone:

What was Swansea? As we entered the train in London, I heard a man who went up and down outside, shouting Swansea, Swansea. I had no idea what he was saying, but I was struck by the word and the funny voice he had. When our long journey ended, there was another man shouting Swansea. He sounded very different. So again, what was Swansea? (2004, 55)

The sense of displacement is palpable here: a foreign country with unfamiliar names and voices, Swansea's significance as a destination is not even clear. Davis recognises the change in accent from London to Swansea but can find no explanation for it. This acute realisation of otherness and isolation continues, in particular in relation to both language and food. Davis's new experience of domestic life becomes impossible to manage due to her lack of linguistic knowledge and she finds herself in what is effectively a state of regression, unable to voice even the simplest request:

That first time, we came into the dining room to a heavily laden table with food I could not recognise. [...] When I looked for something, anything that I could find familiar, I saw bread but even this was wrong. In Germany, bread was black, on this table it was white. Had mother had any understanding of children, she only had to look at my exhausted face to realise how very tired and weary I was. Unfortunately, she had no such understanding. (57–58)

Davis goes on to describe how she is forced to abandon many of the habits she has been taught at home; but perhaps the harshest intervention is her foster mother's insistence that her first name be changed from Kerry (Kärry) to Ellen. As Davis went on to learn English, efforts were made to ensure that the last vestige of her outward German identity was removed. In doing so, in an act of double displacement, the identity of her host country is also overridden:

At school, I learned to speak English quickly for the reason that by this time war had broken out and I did not want to be made to feel different. The few months since my arrival in Wales I had of course been different, but nobody had blamed me for that. They thought I was a bit of a freak, but harmless.

Now, anything German was anathema to all. I was lucky. Mother, though born of Polish parents, had been born and educated in London. Dear father, born in Russia and speaking no English when he arrived in Britain as a very young man, made very sure that he taught himself English without any accent – quite an achievement. So it wasn't very long before I spoke English more like a native of England than of Wales. (65–66)

Both Welsh and German, and in the case of Davis's foster parents, their own Polish and Russian cultural identities, are pushed aside in favour of the dominant English norm. The tension inherent in the "encounter with otherness" highlighted by Evelein thus results in an attempt to render that "otherness" obsolete, as Davis's identity is elided for the benefit of the host culture.

Edith Milton has a similar experience, narrated in the opening chapters of her memoir, *The Tiger in the Attic: Memories of the Kindertransport and Growing up English* (2005). Sent initially to live with a family in Swansea, she feels both welcomed by her friendly host family and estranged, not really aware of the difference between the London she arrived in and the Welsh city of Swansea where she came to rest. As the title of her text suggests, her affinity both as a child and later in life is with Englishness, which is perhaps understandable given the relocation of the family to Leeds in 1940. Yet, her first contact with a new culture was in Wales. Her understanding of Wales as a separate culture only crystallises when she spends time with her host family on holiday in north Wales. Yet, even here, her memory as a traveller is unreliable and falls back on stereotypes to create her narrative:

The owner of the farm is a weathered old man who speaks mostly Welsh – Mr Jones, let us say – who for some reason has taken a fancy to me. Perhaps because I am small and dark, as he is and as his children and grandchildren are, he supposes me among these tall blond paying guests to be the least likely to turn into an imperialist. (9–10)

She is aware, then, of a tension between Wales and England and also of the Welsh language, yet these aspects of her encounter with Wales are only fleetingly alluded to. Once again, the dominant English influence shapes the exile more than the Welsh culture to which they were first exposed. In both cases, this relates to the social and cultural aspirations of the host parents, rather than a conscious choice by the already dislocated child. Nevertheless, both Davis and Milton display a positive attitude towards Wales as a place and to the Welsh as a people.

The issues of identity central to both Davis and Milton's experiences were taken to a far greater extreme in the case of Susi Bechhöfer, who arrived in the UK with her twin sister in May 1939. The twins were taken into the Cardiff home of a childless Baptist minister and his wife, where they were immediately given a new identity. Susi and Lotte became Grace and Eunice and were brought up in the Baptist faith, unaware of their Jewish heritage and encouraged to forget what little they could remember of their German origins. *Rosa's Child* (1996), the narrative of Bechhöfer's arrival and enforced assimilation into Welsh culture, recounted over half a century later, provided the inspiration for W.G. Sebald's 2001 novel, *Austerlitz*. As Modlinger (2012, 228) explains, this was in itself a controversial act which further compromised Bechhöfer's identity. Sebald did not ask for permission to use Bechhöfer's story and was subsequently reluctant to engage in any discussion of the matter, including with Bechhöfer herself.

Sebald's text is a complex construct: Bechhöfer's own account is delivered as a third-person narrative by her biographer, Jeremy Josephs, but Sebald reworks the material to create a hybrid travel narrative comprising a recreated first-hand account blended with fictional prose. The result is at times eerie and often a culturally critical text which draws out the multifaceted aspects of the exile traveller's experience of Wales. Numerous events in the life of Sebald's eponymous character are taken directly from or mirror closely Bechhöfer's account: the adoption into a Welsh non-Conformist minister's household, the uncompromising impact of Methodism, the hidden Jewish

origin, the unfamiliar domestic habits, the change in name (Jacques Austerlitz becomes Dafydd Elias), the journey to a boarding school and the mental instability of the foster father all replicate Bechhöfer's experience. However, Sebald alters the narrative by shifting the scene to north Wales, specifically the area around Bala, with only periodic journeys to the south. This 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. This is heightened by Sebald's choice of profession for his protagonist, which, as Modlinger notes, is where he "departs radically from Bechhöfer's story":

His protagonist becomes an architectural historian and, arguing from his professional perspective, links his personal history to the socio-cultural history of architecture, to the hidden horrors built into and engraved in the defining buildings of our time: fortresses and train stations, libraries and archives. [...] His was a memory filled with the ghosts of the past, the ghosts that still haunt the fateful places of history, and, even though he does not know it yet at this point in his life, the ghosts of his own personal tragedy and trauma. (222)

As an architectural historian, Austerlitz is, then, effectively forced to engage with the history of the places he visits, and his own disposition as an "unwilling" traveller forces that engagement to centre on the "tragedy and trauma" of the past, be it his own or that of his location. Consequently, much of the narrative of Wales as presented by Sebald, via Bechhöfer, is unsettling in tone.

Initially, this tone is negative. The isolation, both domestic and geographical, of Austerlitz's childhood underpins much of the narrative of Wales and creates a barrier to "a friendlier, more familiar world" (61).⁴ The bewildered child is left to grapple with "hav[ing] to face the knowledge, new every day, that I was not at home now but very far away, in some kind of captivity" (62).⁵ The experience is coloured, not only by the domestic differences also experienced by Davis and Milton, but also by the severity of the Methodist faith, something intensified by the fanatical behaviour of Austerlitz's foster father, Emyr Elias, whose Sunday sermons rained down on his flock with "moving eloquence", threatening "the most appalling horrors", with the result that "quite a number of them went home looking white as a sheet" (65).⁶ North Wales is defined by its religious fervour and the landscape is laid out in the minister's diary: the Tabernacle, Llandrillo; Capel Uchaf, Gilboa; Capel Bethesda, Corwen. In each case, the minister records a line from his sermon, each making reference to isolation, displacement and travel. This evokes the experience of exile which is central to the text, while also underlining the dislocation of the individual in a changing world, represented by Emyr Elias himself. As a backdrop to this, the Welsh landscape is described in great detail, often with an apocalyptic undertone:

I remember, said Austerlitz, how we were once driving through the endless Tanat valley, with nothing on the hillsides to right and left of us but crooked bushes, ferns and rusty-hued vegetation, and then, for the last part of the way up to the col, only grey rock and drifting mist, so that I was afraid we were coming to the very ends of the earth. (68)⁷

Yet, there is hope too in "orchards, meadows and fields", which enable Austerlitz to emerge "from the darkness" (68), into a paradise which helps to mitigate his foster father's bleak world view.⁸ The almost biblical depiction of the landscape of the north is contrasted with the depressing industrial landscape of the south. The tone is equally apocalyptic, presenting "a place [...] where the flank of the mountains had been ripped open on both sides of the road, and the woods mauled and cut down" (69).⁹

The image of Wales as a place of exploitative destruction – of nature in particular, but also of society – is intensified through the narrator's fixation on the fate of the village of Llanwyddyn which was flooded in 1888 to enable the creation of Lake Vyrnwy. Haunted by this, Austerlitz experiences his early years as a constant doomsday scenario, based on "a kind of Old Testament

mythology of retribution” (70) for which Llanwyddyn becomes the cipher.¹⁰ Sebald makes no reference to the partial relocation of the village, including the reconstruction of one of the chapels, an omission which further serves to intensify the apocalyptic atmosphere. Like Austerlitz, the villagers are also displaced, this time by the economic needs of a more powerful neighbour, represented by the aldermen of Liverpool and their plans for a reservoir. The detailed information about the population of Llanwyddyn which follows presents an image of Welsh country life at the turn of the century which is idyllic but, for Austerlitz, also sinister, their imaginary “sub-aquatic existence” (72) evoking a mythical people, shrouded in ancient narrative and belief.¹¹ This is further heightened through Austerlitz’s relations with the village cobbler, Evan, from whom he learns Welsh and who entertains him with tales of ghostly battalions rampaging across the Welsh countryside. Consequently, the mythical is bound up with the religious in Austerlitz’s experience of Wales, creating a sense of alienation for the child who comes to realise just how little he, an “unwilling” and essentially unconscious traveller, is able to relate, not only to his new location, but also to the world beyond.

The negative experiences of Austerlitz’s early childhood in Wales are, however, counterbalanced by a quite different experience during his late adolescence and early adulthood. He is invited several times to spend time with the family of his school friend Gerald Fitzpatrick at Andromeda Lodge near the seaside town of Barmouth, a place which he remembers as his “holiday refuge” (113).¹² He describes in detail the steam train journey from Wrexham, passing through Bala towards the Mawddach estuary. The arrival at Andromeda Lodge marks the temporary attainment of a haven for which the adult Austerlitz still strives. Therefore, despite the initial negative response to Wales and Welsh culture, the novel’s engagement with Wales ends with an evocation of the country as the location for a productive engagement with both self and other as Austerlitz moves from childhood to adulthood. This mirrors an important juncture in the exile traveller’s experience of Wales at this time. Whereas the childhood accounts, often characterised by bewilderment, are either distant, like those of the Basque children, or at best ambivalent, as with Bechhöfer, David and Milton, the adult response is far more positive. This is partly explained by a difference in perspective. Unlike the childhood narratives, which are largely recounted at a distance of many years, the adult travellers’ responses to Wales are conscious, contemporary records of an encounter with the “other”. They reveal an affinity with both people and landscape which plays an enabling role in their coming to terms with both physical and cultural displacement in what emerges as a genuine but also overwhelmingly positive “encounter with otherness”.

The most extensive description of exile travel to Wales is that of a Polish artist, Joseph Herman. He was born into a Jewish family in Warsaw but left his home in 1938, moving to Brussels, then to Glasgow and London before coming to Wales in 1944. He would stay for 11 years before moving on again. During those years, spent in the mining community of Ystradgynlais, he would produce some of his most iconic work, focusing primarily on the miners and their harsh environment. He records his impressions of Wales in his *Journals* (2003) which cover the years from 1948 to 1950, and in his autobiography and travelogue, *Related Twilights* (1975). These texts reveal an engagement with Wales which parallels in more positive terms than that of the fictional Austerlitz in its response to the mythological and mystical aspect of Wales and Welsh culture. However, unlike Austerlitz, this is not dependent upon a rural setting but extends instead to contemporary industrial Wales:

It was in 1944, either a June or a July day, I can no longer remember, but I vividly recall the heat of that afternoon and how deeply I was struck by the quiet of the village around me. There was hardly a soul to be seen. In the distance, low hills like sleeping dogs and above the hills a copper-coloured sky – how often I later returned to the colour and mood of that sky! Its light reddened the stone walls of

the cottages and the outlines of the stark trees. The railing and the cement blocks of the bridge had golden contours. Under the bridge, out of a cold shadow, trickled a pool of water which got thinner and thinner as it ran on amidst the dry stones and glittering pebbles. Then, unexpectedly, as though from nowhere, a group of miners stepped onto the bridge. For a split second their heads appeared against the full body of the sun, as against a yellow disc – the whole image was not unlike an icon depicting the saints with their haloes. With the light around them, the silhouettes of the miners were almost black. With rapid steps they crossed the bridge and like frightened cats tore themselves away from each other, each going his own way. The magnificence of this scene overwhelmed me. (1975, 73)

Not only did this scene, replete with both religious and natural imagery, shape Herman's work for years to come, it also confirmed to him that "this village was the right place": "I felt my inner emptiness filling" (73). Herman's relationship with his new surroundings, spurred on by his artistic epiphany, becomes a close one, earning him the nickname "Joe Bach" (Little Joe), and enabling a mutually rewarding engagement with Wales. This supports the view put forward by Manz and Panayi. As an exile traveller, Herman responds to and enriches the culture and community of his host country, both as an outsider looking in but also, as an individual who is simultaneously "other" and integrated. This is illustrated by his responses to other locations of his exile in a set of comparisons which put Wales at an advantage. London and Paris, while offering a great deal in terms of culture, are found to be oppressive and too full of people. Ystradgynlais by contrast is a haven where he can be at ease and feel part of a community. Nevertheless, there is also nostalgic reference to the past which reveals a continued sense of displacement, once more highlighting the tension noted by Evelein. Herman's nostalgia centres on the natural landscape, in particular the Carpathian Mountains and the river Vistula, which he remembers "like a fairy tale" (2003, 13). This linking of landscape and mythology is carried over thematically into his experience of Wales, highlighted in this description of the arrival of pit ponies in the village:

Ponies came down from the hills. They roamed all over the village grazing where there was grass or standing still on the asphalt roads. People were kind to them. Children were around them with carrots. Suddenly one felt that the village was rich in children and carrots! Look out little pony don't go into a private garden! Stand still just as you are and look through the fence. Then an old man will come to the gate and caress your head. The old men talked to the children. All were gay. The ponies caused a sort of happy commotion. They bring life with them, an extra colour to the village. For the greater part of the day they were an event and in the evening in the Miner's Arms or in the Pen-y-bont Inn, people talked about little else than the "descent of the wild ponies". (20)

Herman's narrative of the "descent of the wild ponies" suggests a mystical atmosphere, once more evoking the folklore of Wales, which is then drawn into the reality of Valleys' life through references to the evening gatherings in the village public houses. The resultant image is one of benign ease: a haven for the artist in an atmosphere of stability and tradition.

The sense of belonging found in Herman's texts is replicated in the correspondence of Bettina Gross, artist and wife of the writer H.G. Adler, who came to Wales in 1937 with her siblings and took employment in a button factory in Merthyr Tydfil. Adler visited Gross in Cefn Coed, near Merthyr Tydfil, several times following his arrival in the UK in 1947. Following their marriage, the couple went on to settle in London but retained close links with south Wales and the community there. In her first post-war letter to her future husband following his liberation from the Langenstein-Zwieberge concentration camp in 1945, Gross demonstrates an understanding of her exile environment which also underlines the haven which Wales has provided:

It rains, I sit by a cosy fire. I think of the quiet, undisturbed life which we here live [sic]. I stay in a small house with a friend, a headmistress. She teaches infants, and is very nice and full of life. The

country is beautiful, very hilly and full of variations. Mostly sheepland, and little agriculture, mining and factories. Unfortunately, many war factories have closed down, and the unemployment begins again. This part of the country has suffered much, it was a “distressed area” for many years, shops, streets, houses were often in ruins, and we are all afraid that may happen again after the rather busy and highly paid years of war.¹³

The narrative, written in English to placate the censors, displays a deep concern for her hosts. The use of “we” places Gross at the heart of a community which has accepted her in a landscape she has come to love. This combination of place and people provokes a sense of belonging which leads her to note in a letter to the couple’s friend, fellow exile and writer, Franz Baermann Steiner that she will find it hard to leave Cefn Coed and the friends she has made there.¹⁴ These exile experiences of Wales are represented in a fictional form in H.G. Adler’s novel, *Die unsichtbare Wand*, which was published posthumously in 1989, a year after the writer’s death. The text was written during the 1950s and 1960s and contains a high degree of autobiographical content. The narrative explores the experiences of sociologist Arthur Landau, who returns to his home town following a period of wartime internment to find his entire family has been decimated. The narrative traces his experiences in trying to re-establish himself in society as both an individual and as a sociologist. Much reflects Adler’s own experience in establishing himself in the UK and these parallels extend to the couple’s experience of Wales which, as in Herman’s case, is depicted as a haven, the scene of reflection and self-understanding.

Adler’s text is culturally aware, engaging with Welsh language and culture, both of which provide a point of reference for the attempted, but ultimately unsuccessful, resettlement of the main protagonist. The Welsh element of the novel is set around the village of Vaynor near Merthyr Tydfil. The warm welcome Landau and his new wife Johanna receive there is enhanced by the villagers’ uncomplicated acceptance of their situation:

In Vaynor, which is comprised of a few scattered houses, we didn’t need to tell anyone anything about ourselves, we were free, and yet the people we met – one soon got to know everyone – showed a caring sympathy for us, so that we were happy to smile at anyone who looked our way and chatted with almost everyone. (572)¹⁵

Encouraged by the welcome received, Landau further endears himself to his hosts through his inquisitive exploration of their culture and his enthusiasm for the Welsh language. This emphasis on the exile traveller’s engagement with Welsh culture, underpinned by Adler’s own careful exploration, the fruits of which are evident in the topographical and linguistic accuracy of the novel, plays a key role as, like Herman, Landau is drawn into the cultural matrix of language, history and literature. By focusing on this cultural “encounter with otherness”, Adler’s narrative highlights the tension between exile and travel identified by Evelein, but demonstrates also the flaws inherent in reading the exile as a suffering, “unwilling” traveller at an emotional and intellectual distance from his new surroundings. Here, Landau may be displaced but, like Adler, despite everything, his scholarly drive remains intact. Hungry for new knowledge and a positive negotiation of his new environment, he seeks to place himself intellectually within that environment just as productively as the “willing” traveller would.

Yet, despite the positive engagement with his Welsh haven, Landau remains displaced. Consequently, the narrative of place takes on a crucial, mitigating role as the exile traveller seeks to renegotiate his status. This is emphasised by the precise topographical description of the area around Vaynor, which is overlaid with a detailed description of the natural environment and, importantly, its impact on the exile observer, who seeks both new encounters and points of familiar comparison. This leads to an almost simultaneous sense of difference and belonging in Adler’s narrative, as the positive engagement with Wales is juxtaposed with the negative

aspect of exile displacement. Reflecting on his encounter with Wales as a haven, Landau is very clear about where he is and its positive impact in the context of his attempted resettlement, but he is also acutely aware of the limitations regarding what that haven might bring. In conversation with Johanna, his dilemma is made clear. Fleeting, he entertains the idea that Wales might provide a permanent home: “We are close to a border here, and borders have always meant a great deal to me. But this time I want to stay on this side of the border” (579).¹⁶ However, the reality of his limited employment prospects renders this impossible. In an ironic twist, this is further compounded by the realisation that the welcome they have received and the affinity they feel for Wales render the prospect of staying there almost too painful to bear:

Let me vanish into the cosmopolitan city. It is unpredictable, confused, alien, I am far from understanding its essence. [...] I can be unhappy in its chaos but there I will feel the unhappiness less than if I were to live in Vaynor and be able to climb Twyn Croes with you every week. I have no home and seek no home. If I were to live here, then I would be reminded too often that there is no home for me. (580)¹⁷

The tension between exile and travel identified by Evelein is laid bare in Landau’s words. He has found a haven and has fully engaged with his new location in a “genuine encounter with otherness”, yet cannot find resettlement.

The fact that, for Landau, the state of exile cannot be overcome, would seem to justify Evelein’s claim that “the exile’s plight disallows growth, transformation, or redemption”. Yet, the accounts of exile travellers in Wales demand a more nuanced understanding of the exile experience as a whole. The engagement with Wales and Welsh culture, as the manifestation of the “other”, ranges from the distant, parallel existence of the Basque children, through to the more negative experiences of the *Kindertransport* children and then to the almost wholly positive adult narrative of Wales found in Herman and Gross. The two fictional narratives synthesise these first-hand experiences to underline the complexity of the exile experience of travel and the extent to which that experience can be both limiting and productive in terms of the exile traveller’s engagement with the “other”: both Austerlitz and Landau experience Wales in this way. Through this, the image of Wales which emerges is one which oscillates between the benign solidity of community, tradition and security and the dark, uncompromising location of myth and religious restraint. This reception of Wales has parallels in what one might term as more conventional travel writing, highlighting the fact that it is possible for the exile to respond as a traveller, albeit with a heightened sense of “otherness” induced by their situation, where the “other” adopts diametrically opposing characteristics as either threatening and exploitative or sympathetic and sheltering. The exile experiences this as a negotiation of displacement which nevertheless allows for observation, self-development and understanding of new environments. The exile is, then, an involuntary traveller, but a traveller nonetheless.

Notes

1. This work was funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council. AH/K001817/1.
2. The two fictional works referred to here share a further intertextual dimension. Sebald’s novel references both Adler himself and his monumental study of the Terezín ghetto, *Theresienstadt 1941–1945: Das Antlitz einer Zwangsgemeinschaft* (1955).
3. There is a large body of research on the *Kindertransport*. For a useful contextual analysis with a focus on intercultural transfer, see Kushner (2012, 119–138).
4. “Eine freundlichere, weniger fremde Welt” (69). Quotations from the German original are from Sebald ([2001] 2003); translations are from Sebald (2001).
5. “Jeden-Tag-von-neuem-Begreifenmüssen, daß ich nicht mehr zu Hause war, sondern weit auswärts, in einer Art von Gefangenschaft” (70).

6. “Erschütternde Wortgewalt”; “die entsetzlichsten Dinge”; “nicht wenige von ihnen [...] mit einem kalkweißen Gesicht nach Hause gingen” (72–73).
7. Ich erinnere mich, sagte Austerlitz, wie wir einmal durch das endlose Tanat-Tal hinaufführen, rechts und links an den Abhängen nichts als krummes Holz, Farne und rostfarbenes Kraut, und dann, das letzte Stück zu dem Joch hinauf, nur noch graues Felsengestein und treibende Nebel, so daß ich fürchtete, wir näherten uns dem äußersten Rand der Erde (76–77).
8. “Obstgärten, Wiesen und Feldern”; “aus der Dunkelheit” (77).
9. “Eine Gegend, in der die Flanken der Berge zu beiden Seiten der Straße aufgerissen waren und die Wälder zerfetzt und niedergemacht” (77).
10. “Eine Art von alttestamentarischer Vergeltungsmythologie” (78).
11. “subaquatischen Existenz” (80).
12. “Ferienasyll” (121).
13. Bettina Adler (née Gross) to H.G. Adler, 21 October 1945. The correspondence referred to here is part of the literary estate of H.G. Adler, held in the Deutsches Literaturarchiv, Marbach am Neckar, Germany. The letters are catalogued under the correspondents’ names. The texts are reproduced with the kind permission of Jeremy Adler. All translations from Bettina Adler are my own.
14. Bettina Adler (née Gross) to Franz Baermann Steiner, 22 June 1947.
15. In Vaynor, das nur aus wenigen lose gestreuten Häusern besteht, mußten wir niemandem von uns etwas erzählen, wir waren frei, und doch zeigten die Menschen, denen wir begegneten – man war schnell mit jedem bekannt -, eine liebe teilnahme für uns, so daß wir gern allen Gesichtern, die uns anblickten, zulachten und einige Worte mit fast jedem wechselten. (572)
- All translations from H.G. Adler are my own.
16. “Wir sind hier einer Grenze nahe, und Grenzen haben mir immer viel bedeutet. Aber diesmal möchte ich auf diese Seite der Grenze bleiben” (579).
17. Laß mich in der Weltstadt untertauchen. Sie ist unabsehbar, verworren, unheimlich, ich kenne ihren Grund noch lange nicht. [...] Ich kann in ihrem Gewühl unglücklich sein, aber dort werde ich das Unglück weniger empfinden, als wenn ich in Vaynor leben würde und mit dir jede Woche den Twyn Croes besteigen dürfte. Ich habe keine Heimat und suche keine Heimat. Würde ich hier leben, dann müßte ich es zu oft empfinden, daß es für mich keine Heimat gibt. (580)

References

- Adler, H. G. 1989. *Die unsichtbare Wand*. Vienna: Paul Zsolnay.
- Bell, Adrian, ed. [1996] 2007. *Only for Three Months: The Basque Refugee Children in Exile*. Norwich: Mousehold Press.
- Benjamin, Natalia, ed. 2007. *Recuerdos: Basque Children Refugees in Great Britain. Niños vascos refugiados en Gran Bretaña*. Oxford: Basque Children of '37 Association UK.
- Blanton, Casey. [1995] 2002. *Travel Writing: The Self and the World*. New York: Routledge.
- Cambria House Journal*. 2013. Accessed February 2, 2014. <http://www.caerleon.net/cambria/basque/>
- Davies, Hywel. 2011. *Fleeing Franco: How Wales gave Shelter to Refugee Children from the Basque Country during the Spanish Civil War*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press.
- Davis, Ellen. 2004. *Kerry's Children: A Jewish Childhood in Nazi Germany and Growing Up in South Wales*. Bridgend: Seren.
- Evelein, Johannes F. 2009. “Traveling Exiles, Exilic Travel – Conceptual Encounters.” In *Exiles Traveling: Exploring Displacement, Crossing Boundaries in German Exile Arts and Writings 1933–1945*, edited by Johannes F. Evelein, 11–31. Amsterdam: Rodopi.
- Herman, Josef. [1975] 2002. *Josef Herman: Related Twilights. Notes from an Artist's Diary*, edited by Tony Curtis. Bridgend: Seren.
- Herman, Josef. 2003. *The Journals. Joseph Herman*, edited by Nini Herman. London: Peter Halban.
- Hoffmeister, Adolf. 1942. *The Unwilling Tourist*. Translated by D. Perris. London: John Lane.

- Josephs, Jeremy, and Susi Bechhöfer. 1996. *Rosa's Child. The True Story of One Woman's Quest for a Lost Mother and a Vanished Past*. London: I. B. Tauris.
- Kaplan, Caren. 1996. *Questions of Travel. Postmodern Discourses of Displacement*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Kushner, Tony. 2012. *The Battle of Britishness: Migrant Journeys, 1685 to the Present*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Manz, Stefan, and Panikos Panayi, eds. 2013. *Refugees and Cultural Transfer to Britain*. New York: Routledge.
- Milton, Edith. 2005. *The Tiger in the Attic: Memories of the Kindertransport and Growing up English*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Modlinger, Martin. 2012. "'You Can't Change Names and Feel the Same.' The Kindertransport Experience of Susi Bechhöfer in W. G. Sebald's *Austerlitz*." In *The Kindertransport to Britain 1938/39: New Perspectives*, edited by Andrea Hammel and Bea Lewkowicz, 219–232. Amsterdam: Rodopi.
- Sebald, W. G. 2001. *Austerlitz*. Translated by Andrea Bell. London: Hamish Hamilton.
- Sebald, W. G. [2001] 2003. *Austerlitz*. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer.