CULTURAL TRANSLATIONS:
A COMPARATIVE CRITICAL STUDY OF
KATE ROBERTS AND VIRGINIA WOOLF

FRANCESCA RHYDDERCH

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DECLARATION

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

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STATEMENT 1

This thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated.

Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes giving explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

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This thesis offers a comparative critical study of Virginia Woolf and her lesser known contemporary, the Welsh author Kate Roberts. To the majority of readers in the 'English-speaking world’, the name of one of these writers is so familiar that it may be considered a literary touchstone, while that of the other is still almost entirely unknown. Written from the perspective of a minority culture, this thesis traces the faultlines—that is, previously unexplored sites of tension—within the respective cultural identities of the writers under discussion.

Scrutinising such faultlines helps to illuminate the more paradoxical aspects of the work of both Roberts and Woolf. For example, a focus on Roberts’s cultural positioning forces a significant reassessment of Woolf’s relationship with English literary traditions and a more informed consideration of her attitude towards the British Empire. Conversely, the large body of criticism on the gendered aspects of Woolf’s writing provides a highly relevant framework within which to explore the hitherto neglected sexual politics of Roberts’s work, together with the ways in which her identity as a woman intersects with, and in fact conflicts with, her cultural identity.

Drawing upon Frederic Jameson’s notion of genre as a social institution, I explore the generic forms deployed by Woolf and Roberts in terms of their cultural specificity. The question of genre can in fact be seen as a crucial aspect of the issues discussed in this thesis—cultural positioning, gender and writing, aesthetics and politics. In this study I examine the output of Roberts and Woolf in five different genres—autobiography, short stories, the war novel, drama and journalism. In each case such questions—of community and audience, literary tradition, gendered engagements with that tradition, and the forging of a self-conscious cultural aesthetics—are uppermost.
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NOTE ON TRANSLATIONS

Where possible, I have used published translations of Welsh texts, and sources are indicated accordingly. Elsewhere, I have provided my own translations, in which case the source is cited in Welsh and no translator credited.
INTRODUCTION

Cultural translation

Mae caeau i mi yr un fath â phobl.
Mae rhai a adwaen yn dda a rhai nas
adwaen o gwbl. A meddwl am gaeau
yn gyffredinol nid oes imi ddim
diddordeb ynddynt, ond y mae caeau y
bydd yn eu gweled fel gweled hen
ffrindiau na welais mohonynt ers
blynynnoedd. Mae gan y caeau a
adwaen bob un ei bersonoliaeth, ac fel
popeth a chanddo bersonoliaeth mae
iddynt enwau. Dyma hwy: Cae Cefn
Tŷ, Cae Bach, Cae 'Flaen Drws, Y
Weirglodd, Cae Hetar, Cae
Pennabyliaid. Nid oes angen dywedyd
'ac yn y blaen', oblegid nid oes ragor.
Dim ond imi gau fy llygaid, a gwelaf
bob congl o'r caeau hynny ar wahanol
adegau o'r flwyddyn.

Kate Roberts, 'Caeau' [Fields], 1928
(for translation see footnotes)

No one perhaps has ever felt
passionately towards a lead pencil. But
there are circumstances in which it can
become supremely desirable to possess
one; moments when we are set upon
having an object, an excuse for
walking half across London between
tea and dinner. As the foxhunter hunts
in order to preserve the breed of foxes,
and the golfer plays in order that open
spaces may be preserved from the
builders, so when the desire comes
upon us to go street rambling the pencil
does for a pretext, and getting up we
say: 'Really I must buy a pencil,' as if
under cover of this excuse we could
indulge safely in the greatest pleasure
of town life in winter—rambling the
streets of London.

Virginia Woolf, 'Street Haunting: A
London Adventure', 1930

Kate Roberts’s ‘Caeau’ [Fields] and Virginia Woolf’s ‘Street Haunting’ were
written just two years apart, by two British women writers who were born
within a decade of each other.¹ And yet, to the majority of readers in the
‘English-speaking world’, the name of one of these writers is so familiar that it
may be considered a literary touchstone, while that of the other is still almost
entirely unknown. An author who wrote solely in her mother tongue, a
language spoken today by some 800,000 of the Welsh population, Kate
Roberts’s work remains invisible to many, despite the fact that within her own

¹ Kate Roberts (1891-1985), 'Caeau' [Fields] (1928), reprinted in Erthyglau ac Ysgrifau
Llenyddol Kate Roberts [Articles and Literary Essays by Kate Roberts], ed. David Jenkins
(Swansea: Gwasg Christopher Davies, 1978), p. 27. Translation: 'Fields are to me the same as
people. There are some I know well and some I don’t know at all. And considering fields in
general they hold no interest for me, but seeing certain fields is like seeing old friends whom I
haven't seen for years. Each field that I know has its own personality, and like everything that
has a personality, they have names. They are: Cae Cefn Tŷ, Cae Bach, Cae 'Flaen Drws, Y
Weirglodd, Cae Hetar, Cae Pennabyliaid. There is no need to say 'and so on', since there are
no more. I have only to close my eyes and I see every corner of those fields at different times
of the year.'

Virginia Woolf, (1882-1941), 'Street Haunting: A London Adventure' (1930), The Death of the
culture she holds an iconic status comparable to that of Virginia Woolf in the anglophone Western world. To set them side by side, Kate Roberts and Virginia Woolf, 'Caeau' and 'Street Haunting', the Welsh and English languages and cultures, is to give voice to such disharmonies. To become attuned to such dissonance is to embark upon the complex process that is cultural translation.

'Caeau', a short, autobiographical piece published in *Y Llenor* in 1928, when Roberts was thirty-seven [...] is an 'essay' in more than one sense. Although by the time it was written, she was making her name as a short story writer, Roberts was still a relatively new literary figure, and her uncertainty about this piece—she wrote to her friend and mentor Saunders Lewis, for example, that 'sometimes I think that it is very good and at others that it is babyishly bad'—reflects her sense of vulnerability about her standing as an author. However, it is also one of the more interesting and telling of her earlier pieces, in that Roberts can be seen here trying her hand at a different form, and testing her developing technique as a writer. She writes in the personal, meditative register with which she was experimenting in her political journalism at that time, and to which she would return much later in her autobiography, published in 1960. 'Caeau' is a piece which, although it represents a generic departure from the short stories and novels which Roberts wrote during the 1920s, nevertheless bears early traces of many of what were later acknowledged as hallmarks of her work. The clearest examples of these are her nostalgic evocation of her native 'square mile' and an emphasis on the simple, honest lifestyle and values of the *gwerin*, rural working-class tradition in which she was raised. Despite this, as in so many of Roberts's novels and short stories, such remembered scenes of her native village are also repeatedly scored through with muted references to a subsequent series of dislocations from that Edenic childhood. In the brief passage quoted above, for example, Roberts tells us that she has 'only' to close her eyes in order to see once more

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every corner of the beloved fields of her childhood, fields which are now like
friends whom she has not seen for years. These dislocations include the loss of
her brother in the First World War, her own displacement from rural to urban
Wales, and the increasing anglicisation and urbanisation of Wales generally as
the century progressed.

Virginia Woolf’s ‘Street Haunting’, by contrast, was written in 1930
when Woolf was almost fifty, an established and respected experimental
essayist as well as novelist. Whereas in ‘Caeau’ Roberts asserts the imaginative
reality of the few fields that form her neatly bordered ‘cynefin’, or native patch
of land (Cae Cefn Tŷ, Cae Bach, Cae ‘Flaen Drws, Y Weirglodd, Cae Hetar, Cae
Pennabyliaid [...] There is no need to say “and so on,” because there are no
more’), Woolf asserts only the validity of the individual’s subjective
imaginative experience of an unreal, surreal city space. As the title of the essay
itself suggests, the speaker becomes a shadowy ghost, her experience merely a
vessel for Woolf’s imaginative urban rambling, while for Roberts it appears
that, within the boundaries of the ‘cynefin’, individual identity is empirical and
existential. Her environment is one which can be known and named, and the
individual’s experiences are rooted in the land and the cycle of the seasons
which dictates the rhythm of life on a poor smallholding. The fluid boundaries
of Woolf’s ‘I’, by contrast, permit the dreamy and dream-like speaker to
become inhabited by a series of different street characters, and the essay itself
to become a stream of consciousness narrative reflecting multiple experiences
and personalities: ‘what greater delight and wonder can there be than to leave
the straight lines of personality and deviate into those footpaths that lead
beneath brambles and thick tree trunks into the heart of the forest where live
those wild beasts, our fellow men?’ 3 This fluid, ‘multi-personal’ style is of
course one of the much lauded characteristics of Woolf’s writing, particularly in
such experimental novels as To the Lighthouse and The Waves. 4 Similarly,
there are several other aspects of ‘Street Haunting’ which point to other

4 Virginia Woolf, To the Lighthouse (London: The Hogarth Press, 1927); The Waves (London:
The Hogarth Press, 1931).
concerns central to the main body of Woolf’s work, both fiction and non-fiction. First, there is her preoccupation with writing as a profession and the product of the writer as an economic commodity: the very act which enables the writing of the essay itself, as well as the imaginative journey it describes, is the desire to buy a new pencil. Second, the reader is repeatedly made aware of Woolf’s profound concern with women’s status in relation to both politics and literature, particularly in their complex interrelation—hence the fine line, it seems, between the nocturnal street haunter and any solitary streetwalker who tramps the streets of London with an equally necessary economic purpose in mind. In fact, who is to say Woolf’s first person speaker is—or can be—an unchaperoned woman of her social class? Woolf betrays an avid fascination with societal, particularly class relations: thus her street haunter eagerly leaves behind her a world peopled by foxhunters and golfers, and plunges with ‘delight’ into the world of the ‘washerwoman, [the] publican, [the] street singer’.5

To draw attention to such contrasts is, of course, merely to touch upon the apparently enormous cultural and class divisions between these literary figures. Most obviously, Virginia Woolf was a metropolitan writer of the upper classes situated at the heart of a crumbling Empire, while Kate Roberts was a provincial writer from a rural working-class background steeped in a Welsh Nonconformist tradition, which became increasingly inimical to British imperialism following the First World War. One of the purposes of this thesis, however, is not only to point to the contrapuntal narratives and cultures which emerge when their work is placed side by side, but also to acknowledge a certain critical rootedness: that is, that this thesis is itself written from the perspective of the minority culture under discussion. As such, it aims to go beyond a straightforward comparison in which Woolf would retain her central position, while Roberts could only hope to remain a satellite, infinitely other. Writing from a Welsh cultural perspective, I attempt to rescue Roberts from the cultural otherness bestowed upon her and writers like her by a Western critical

academy which, for all its current fascination with post-modern relativity and post-colonial literature, seems, in literary critical terms at least—however unwittingly—to remain bound up in a power-added discourse of self-and-other which prioritises the speaker and alienates minority cultures. As a consequence, the current fascination with the ‘cultural margins’ and ‘non-metropolitan perspectives’, for all its liberating potential, can serve to ‘other’ and exoticise even further. Such theoretical discourses can have an insidiously globalising impulse, a ventriloquistic urge which, ironically, seems to flatten out cultural and linguistic differences, to disregard individual vocabularies, and to relegate all ‘post-colonial’ experiences to the same pigeonhole, whether they be chicana or native Indian, black or white, Jewish or Welsh. To employ the jargon of post-colonial theory is, I would argue, to write in one’s second language for a critic from a minority culture, whatever one’s mother tongue. While, as I pointed out at the outset, this thesis is intimately involved in the process of cultural translation, it is a thesis which is committed to its own critical idiom.

Having said this, critics working in the field of Welsh studies have been quick to note the limitations of post-colonial models, or at least to stress the need to qualify them when applying them to Welsh literature. M. Wynn Thomas, for example, while recognising the resonance of Homi Bhabha’s notions of cultural hybridity, reminds us that Wales’s economic situation is just one aspect of a Welsh ‘post-colonial’ literary tradition which needs to be treated in its own specific context. And, as might be expected, the most frequent and successful examples of post-colonial critical approaches to Welsh literature are to be found among commentators on Welsh writing in English, such as Kirsti Bohata’s recent commentary on ‘Welsh gothic writing in English’. Such criticism provides an often subtle analysis of the cultural schizophrenia

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6 Coco Fusco explores such ambiguities in her volume English is Broken Here: Notes on Cultural Fusion in the Americas (New York City: The New Press, 1995).
7 M. Wynn Thomas, Corresponding Cultures: The Two Literatures of Wales (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1999), e.g. p. 45.
experienced by the English-medium Welsh writer under the British Empire. Bohata, for example, acknowledges that Wales was itself ‘part of the metropolis of the British Empire’, while arguing that:

[...] in Welsh writing in English, the colonial status of Wales as peripheral nation within the United Kingdom is reflected in the way the Welsh are themselves often cast in the role of the racial Other. The Welsh reader, then, is faced with the somewhat schizophrenic experience of functioning/responding as the implied (metropolitan) audience usually assumed by the texts—that is we recognize and respond to the literary motifs of the fearful other—while simultaneously realizing that we are excluded from the implied audience, from the metropolis, and thus actually belong to the group being represented as grotesquely other.9

Suggestive as such criticism may be, however, one of the difficulties facing a critic writing in English on Welsh-language literature is that the cultural positioning of a Welsh writer writing in Welsh in an increasingly nationalist environment following the First World War is quite different. Saunders Lewis’s rejection of the notion of such a thing as an Anglo-Welsh literature is a good example of the way in which the Welsh-language literary community of that period refused any identification with an an anglicised ‘post-colonial’ literature in their own country.10 ‘Anglo-Welshness’ was itself regarded as alien, other, and frequently threatening in the eyes of a Welsh-language writer. Indeed, it was at a relatively late stage in her career that Kate Roberts herself adopted a more forgiving attitude towards, to use her own term, ‘the English writers of Wales’.11 In critical terms, post-colonial literary theory seems never to have found a foothold in the Welsh-language academy, presumably because criticism written in Welsh for the Welsh reader has an audience which obviously shares the same cultural and linguistic background and, as a consequence, the same historically informed critical assumptions. There is no sense of, and no need for, any kind of cultural translation. However, as a thesis written in English on a Welsh writer writing in Welsh, the critical discussion

119-143.
9 Ibid., 138.
11 In 1969, for example, Kate Roberts wrote a favourable review of Glyn Jones’s seminal volume, *The Dragon Has Two Tongues* (London: Dent, 1968), reprinted in *Erthyglau ac Ysgrifau Llenyddol Kate Roberts*, op. cit., pp. 280-284.
which follows necessarily bridges notions of Welshness and 'Anglo-Welshness', inside and outside, the Welsh and English languages in Wales, and the bilingual identities they have incurred during the course of the twentieth century. It is the very act of bridging these notions which takes precedence in this thesis, the process that is cultural translation, and the painful 'inbetweenness' of cultural and critical identities forged in such circumstances.

Such a self-consciously problematized approach can in fact have fruitful consequences. Rather than placing Roberts and Woolf in simple opposition and referring only to the straightforward and, indeed, more obvious contrasts between their work, I attempt in the critical study which follows to trace the faultlines in their respective cultural identities. Writing from the perspective of a minority culture, for example, helps to point up the contradictions between Woolf's hostile attitude towards a patriarchal British Empire, and her emotional and literary attachment to her own English culture. It also leads to a necessarily complicated appreciation of Woolf's own cultural inbetweenness, her personal cultural and creative schizophrenia, as it were, in terms of the tension between the summer sojourns of her childhood at St Ives in Cornwall and her winter existence in London. Homing in on such sites of tension similarly helps to illuminate the more paradoxical aspects of Roberts's situation as a Welsh woman writer. For, while a focus on Roberts's cultural positioning forces a significant re-assessment of Woolf's relationship with English culture, and a more informed consideration of her attitude towards the British Empire, it is clear that the large body of criticism on the gendered aspects of Woolf's writing provides a highly relevant framework from within which to explore the sexual politics of Roberts's work, and the ways in which her identity as a woman intersects with, and in fact conflicts with, her cultural identity. Virginia Woolf and Kate Roberts were, after all, contemporaries, whose lives were shaped and circumscribed by the same patriarchal British constitution. They both witnessed, and were personally affected by, events of great importance to women all over the British Isles, such as enfranchisement and improved access to education. Their responses to such events were not necessarily the same or
even similar, and were determined by issues such as class. Kate Roberts, for example, due to the Education Acts of the late nineteenth century, had access not only to a formal secondary education but also to a university degree course. Woolf, by contrast, spent her youth ensconced in her father’s library in the solitary pursuit of some kind of education, and, latterly, under the tutelage of privately employed tutors, in what she saw as a vain and constantly thwarted attempt to gain an education on a par with that of her brothers, who were sent to Cambridge. It is clearly due to her lifelong feeling that she was something of an educational interloper, indeed an ‘outsider’, that Woolf’s non-fiction writing on such questions developed into increasingly forthright and feminist polemic. Roberts, in the meantime, although she appreciated her good fortune in obtaining an education (recognising all the while that its invasive anglocentric bias was part of the British imperialist project), was profoundly attached to the Welsh-language culture and community despite its deeply-rooted patriarchalism, and never developed a feminist approach comparable to that of Woolf. Nevertheless, an exploration of the sexual politics of Roberts’s work—of her largely neglected plays and early political journalism, for example—brings to light some of the most radically proto-feminist works among Roberts’s oeuvre. Seminal essays by Delyth George and Katie Gramich have begun the crucial process of re-assessing Roberts’s fiction in terms of its gender politics: Gramich, in particular, while she acknowledges the sexually conservative nature of Roberts’s environment, argues that her treatment of women in her novels and short stories is far less conventional than has previously been acknowledged. This thesis attempts to extend such explorations to a far greater range of work by Roberts, and across the several different genres in which she worked, and as such, offers the first book-length study of Roberts to be written from a feminist perspective (in either Welsh or

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The concentration in this thesis upon issues of genre in the context of the gender politics of writing is, however, no coincidence. Feminist criticism on the interaction of gender and genre has, I would argue, provided some of the most valuable and lasting contributions to the field of feminist literary scholarship. Feminist folklore critic Amy Shuman, for example, provides a pertinent and succinct summary of the critical connections between gender and genre:

Theories of gender and genre converge in their exploration of the problems of classification and the disruption of boundaries. Genre is often gendered, and a great deal of feminist scholarship concerned with cultural texts (literary, political, traditional) has focused on the ways gender boundaries have been reinforced by generic ones. Generic boundaries, the systems for classifying different sorts of texts, are never fixed, and our investigations usually tell us more about the edges and crossovers than they do about the centres. Gender scholarship questions how cultural categories are reproduced and under what conditions women are complicit with or resistant to the reproduction of conventions. Among other possibilities, women can be seen as the bearers of tradition, or the women's domains can be seen as separate, as standing outside of or in competition with what is identified as 'the culture'.

Christine Froula, in her essay on 'Joyce, Woolf and the Autobiographical Artist Novel', has similarly pointed out that 'our [literary culture is] asymmetrically gendered', and emphasises that 'men and women writers, as cultural sons and daughters, stand in radically different relation both to the laws of cultural inheritance and to the texts they inherit'. Issues of tradition and literary inheritance, and the woman artist's personal engagements with those issues were, as I shall show, of primary importance to both Kate Roberts and Virginia Woolf as writers. However, Froula's own complicity, like that of many other critics, with the false notion of the homogeneity of 'our' literary culture is one that I shall be at pains to deconstruct in this study. For if, as Frederic Jameson

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argues, genre is in itself a social institution, then it is also, a cultural, and culturally specific institution.\textsuperscript{15} Genre can in fact be seen as the nexus of the cluster of issues which are central to this thesis—cultural positioning, gender and writing, aesthetics and politics. In the chapters which follow, I shall be examining Roberts’s and Woolf’s output in five different genres—autobiography, short stories, the war novel, drama and journalism. In each case such questions—of community and audience, literary tradition, gendered engagements with that tradition, and a self-conscious cultural aesthetics—are uppermost. I do not attempt to provide a full picture of aesthetic politics in England vis-à-vis Wales during the period in question. This is a study of two exceptional, iconic individuals, and as such it considers them primarily in terms of their individual, artistic responses to movements such as modernism from within their own cultural contexts. Similarly, I do not attempt in this thesis an exhaustive study of the oeuvre of either Woolf or Roberts. Within the parameters outlined above, this is a comparative study which has a very specific area of interest, and it is for this reason, for example, that the reader will find that I have chosen to focus upon war novels in particular, rather than novels more generally. Similarly, both Woolf and Roberts were incredibly prolific journalists, and it is impossible in a study of this scope to attempt to cover their entire output in this field. In each case, the work discussed is chosen with the specific parameters of the project in mind. Quite often, I am interested in comparing the output in particular genres from earlier and later periods. Thus for example, I compare Roberts’s earlier and later war novels, \textit{Traed Mewn Cyffion} [Feet in Chains] and \textit{Tegwch y Bore} [The Fairness of Morning] with Woolf’s \textit{Mrs Dalloway} and \textit{Between the Acts}.\textsuperscript{16} In each case (apart from that of journalism, for reasons which will be made clear at the beginning of the relevant chapter), and bearing in mind that both Roberts and Woolf were prose writers who practised modern genres, I attempt to trace the

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\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{15} Frederic Jameson, \textit{The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act} (London: Methuen, 1981).
  \item \textsuperscript{16} Kate Roberts, \textit{Traed Mewn Cyffion} (Aberystwyth: Gwasg Aberystwyth, 1936); \textit{Tegwch y Bore} (Llandybie: Gwasg Christopher Davies, 1967); Virginia Woolf, \textit{Mrs Dalloway} (London: The Hogarth Press, 1925); \textit{Between the Acts} (London: The Hogarth Press, 1941).
\end{itemize}


culturally specific development of each genre and to place my exploration of their engagement with that genre in its cultural context.

By way of presenting Kate Roberts and Virginia Woolf to my reader, I begin in Chapter 1 with a comparative exploration of their own representations of themselves in their autobiographies. One of the most striking similarities between Woolf’s *Moments of Being* and Kate Roberts’s *Y Lôn Wen* [The White Lane], I argue, is one which reminds us that these women writers were contemporaries, who were reared in the shadow of Victorian ideologies of femininity. While I point to the culturally specific permutations of the English female role model of the Angel in the House, and the ways in which she was appropriated and propagated in Wales in the shape of her rural counterpart, ‘Angyles yr Aelwyd’ [the Angel of the Hearth], I emphasise the similarly inflected textual repressions effected in the autobiographical texts of both Woolf and Roberts by such feminine stereotypes. Nevertheless, I argue, while the gendered similarities of their texts show how Victorian ideologies of femininity permeated Britain’s Celtic fringes as well as its metropolitan centres, it is important to remember that, in generic terms, Roberts and Woolf were engaging with vastly differing traditions. While Woolf’s ‘Reminiscences’, as has been widely documented, needs to be considered within the parameters of the Stephen family tradition of autobiography, Kate Roberts was writing from within a tradition of biographical and autobiographical writing which had its roots in the deeply religious and confessional Nonconformist *cofiannau* of the nineteenth century. Ironically, while Woolf’s later autobiographical writings demonstrate how she freed herself from the patriarchal patterns of her forefathers, they also show how she became subject to the requirements of her Bloomsbury contemporaries (particularly in the three pieces which she wrote for Bloomsbury’s intimate and candid Memoir Club). Thus one set of readerly expectations and shared assumptions is replaced by another. Similarly, while

17 Full bibliographical details of the critical material to which I refer in passing in the summary which follows will be provided in the relevant chapter of this thesis.
Roberts’s memoirs constitute a daring re-assessment, if not quite a critique, of Nonconformist spirituality, it seems ironic that that reassessment is written in the form of what is arguably the most Nonconformist of Welsh ‘modern’ genres, that is, the hunangofiant which grew out of the religious cofiannau of the previous century. The autobiographer is bound to her community of readers, therefore, by an aesthetic contract which has a cultural, as well as a gendered, emphasis. All the same, I conclude, Woolf’s and Roberts’s engagements with that contract tell us a great deal more about the ‘edges and crossovers’ of a woman’s engagement with literary tradition than they do about the ‘centres’ of that tradition itself.

Chapter 2, in its critical re-reading of the cultural and generic assumptions of modernism, is perhaps the clearest example of the culturally oblique approach taken in this thesis. Influenced by Raymond Williams’s insistence that modernism should be re-assessed by means of a strategic defamiliarization of the modernist metropolis, I attempt in this chapter a dual defamiliarization. Geographically, I reconsider modernism from the ‘hinterlands’ of Wales, while aesthetically, I upset its generic hierarchies by choosing to focus upon the short story rather than the novel. Thus the connections between the English woman writer renowned for her modernist experimental novels and the Welsh woman writer labelled ‘the mother of the short story’ are explored from the peripheries, as it were, of both culture and genre. I scrutinize the formally conservative aspects of Roberts’s short stories in relation to the cultural context in which the modern short story in Wales took shape, and argue that Roberts’s choice of an apparently unfashionable realism was in fact the expression of a politically motivated and self-conscious rejection of a metropolitan ‘English’ modernism, and of a concomitant attempt to establish a specifically Welsh tradition of the short story. While this formal approach seemingly sets her at odds with Virginia Woolf, whose short stories are in fact even more experimental than her novels, a critical emphasis upon Woolf’s relationship with modernism as inherently and consistently a negotiation with tradition suggests that she is perhaps more of a classical high
modernist than feminist criticism has previously allowed, with a deeply felt commitment to her English literary heritage. However, the short story during this period is an especially interesting genre in both cultures simply because it was not accorded the status long since held by poetry and even the novel. As has so often been the case for women writers, a younger, less prestigious genre provided them both with the opportunity to try out new forms and voices. While for Roberts, this gave her the opportunity to establish a Welsh political aesthetics of the genre, it also allowed her to forge a specifically feminine voice within it. It likewise gave Woolf the opportunity to experiment even more radically than she did in her novels, in a way which evidently fed into the high modernism of her novels of the 1920s. For both writers, the short story was a generic 'no man's land' which enabled them to pull back from the more patriarchal restrictions of Welsh anti-modernism and English modernism alike.

In Chapter 3, I consider further the tensions between gender, genre and culture through a comparative reading of Woolf's and Roberts's war novels, acknowledging the extent to which the war novel has itself become a widely contested generic category in recent years. Criticism of some of Woolf's novels as war novels has come about, for example, as a result of a feminist push to expand masculine notions of the genre to include women's experiences of war and women's voices. In Wales, critics have similarly argued that it is time to redefine generic boundaries by reading the Welsh war novel as a culturally specific genre, pointing, for example, to the prevalence in Welsh of politically motivated novels about conscientious objection. Woolf's Mrs Dalloway is arguably among the most significant pieces of war writing to have been produced by a woman between the two World Wars because its form and subject matter themselves pose a significant challenge to narrowly gendered definitions of the genre. Critics of the several 'doubles' in Mrs Dalloway have stressed Woolf's evident sympathy with Septimus Smith, the male 'hysteric' suffering from shell-shock, and demonstrate how she uses the play of double characters—in this case Clarissa Dalloway and Septimus himself—to

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parody British imperialist chauvinism which results in the oppression of women, and men of the lower classes, alike. However, the role of Mrs Dalloway’s only entirely voiceless character, Smith’s friend Evans, seems, by contrast, to have attracted little, if any, critical comment. In this chapter, I give voice to Evans’s character for the first time, through a reading of Kate Roberts’s war novels Tegwch y Bore [The Fairness of Morning] and Traed Mewn Cyfflon [Feet in Chains], and show how they are typical of the Welsh war novel of the twentieth century in that they reflect peculiarly Welsh notions of nationhood and resistance. However, I also show how, just as Mrs Dalloway is a self-consciously female engagement with the genre of the war novel, Roberts writes about the Welsh experience of war from a female perspective, especially in the second of her two war novels, Tegwch y Bore. In fact, the long gap between Roberts’s two war novels also leads to a consideration of the historical as well as the cultural variability of the genre in this context. Traed Mewn Cyfflon is the earlier, more conventional of the two, and as such has received numerous plaudits and accolades; Tegwch y Bore, by contrast, was written at a time when Roberts was becoming increasingly daring in her exploration of the female voice. Tegwch y Bore is in fact as much a romance as it is a war novel, and as such it has been neglected by critics, despite (or perhaps because of) the formal as well as the more obviously thematic challenge it provides to gendered notions of the war novel. Finally, bearing in mind the historical variability of the genre, it is inevitable that such a comparative reading of the war novels of Roberts and Woolf should conclude with a consideration of Woolf’s final novel, Between the Acts, written at a moment of profound anguish for Woolf, as she slowly discovered the depth of her attachment to England while Sussex was on the brink of invasion, and was forced to confront and reconsider her previously hostile attitude towards English nationhood. One final, evocative similarity between Woolf and Roberts emerges at this juncture: just like Virginia Woolf’s protagonist in Between the Acts, Miss La Trobe, Kate Roberts’s young heroine in Tegwch y Bore, Ann Owen, is a budding dramatist. In both novels, Welsh and English,

20 Kate Roberts, Tegwch y Bore, op. cit.; Traed Mewn Cyfflon, op. cit.
21 Virginia Woolf, Between the Acts, op. cit.
the development of these central characters results in a focus on the more problematic aspects of a woman artist’s relationship with an often uncomprehending audience within a repressive society.

In view of this concentration on the figure of the playwright, it seems odd that neither Woolf nor Roberts has attracted much attention, even posthumously, as a dramatist. In Chapter 4, I turn, therefore, to their plays, mindful once again of the complex connections and tensions between gender and genre, this time in the extremely localized contexts in which both Woolf and Roberts produced their dramatic work. Nevertheless, despite my emphasis on issues of locality, and exploration of the collaborative process that playwriting engendered for both Roberts and Woolf within their writing communities, I note at the outset the significance of the broader British context in which both were writing—and especially the importance of plays produced by radical suffragist collectives concerned both to dramatize their political arguments and to record the lives of inspiring women (in the form of the ‘chronicle play’, for example). In this context, the work produced by the writing collective to which Roberts belonged from the period of the First World War to the late 1920s is especially fascinating. While, in terms of their treatment of women, the collective’s dramatic output is uneven and contradictory, reflecting the complex nature of collective authorship but also the requirements of the different audiences for which they were writing, the proto-feminist aspects of one of the plays produced at this time provides an important precursor for Roberts’s own plays written alone after she left the collective, and also for the more rebellious female protagonists of her later novels, most notably Bet, the ‘hysterical’ minister’s wife in Tywyll Heno [Dark Tonight].22 Woolf, by contrast, never seriously undertook the writing of plays, producing only what she called her ‘skit’, Freshwater, written on a whim and by way of relaxation in 1923 and revised in 1934 for an exclusive Bloomsbury performance.23 What emerges from my comparative reading of both versions

22 Kate Roberts, Tywyll Heno (Denbigh: Gwasg Gee, 1962).
of *Freshwater* is the extent to which Woolf was removed from the front line of the suffragist writing collectives. While Woolf's play explores in some depth and with evident interest the lives of her great-aunt Julia Margaret Cameron and the actress Ellen Terry, it ultimately restricts them to a somewhat one-dimensional existence on the stage, concerned as she was to make the members of the Bloomsbury Group snigger, as ever, at their amusing Victorian elders. Ironically, then, it is Kate Roberts who, empowered by the sisterhood of her writing collective, dares to subvert the popular form of the Welsh community play in order to project a proto-feminist message, while Woolf's feminist interests become warped in *Freshwater* in order to please her audience, leaving very little common ground between it and the chronicle plays produced by her suffragist contemporaries. However, Woolf's position as a post-war British chronicler is complicated by her instinctive and lifelong anti-imperialism, and, in the final section of this chapter, I explore the extent to which *Freshwater* might be read, not as a failed chronicle play, but rather as the enactment of Woolf's personal refusal of an imperial identity.

Both Kate Roberts and Virginia Woolf have received much approbation from critics for the profoundly democratic urge of their writing in one genre or another, and in the final chapter of this study, I turn my attention to what is arguably one of the most democratic forms of writing: journalism. While Roberts and Woolf were extremely prolific as journalists, I confine myself to a comparative exploration of their earlier and later output in this genre, in order to attain a sense of their relationship with the readers for whom they were writing, of how that relationship shifted and evolved, and of how their growing status and power as writers affected the democratic character of their journalistic writing. In the case of Roberts, this involves a comparison of the first phase of her career as a journalist as the author of the 'Women's Column' of Plaid Cymru's newspaper, *Y Ddraig Goch*, during the late 1920s, with contributions to a similar column which she wrote during the 1950s for *Y Faner*, the newspaper which she owned, managed and printed at her publishing house, Gwasg Gee in Denbigh. Her work as a journalist has received very little
attention to date, and her journalism for women even less. Her women’s columns show a movement from a relatively radical proto-feminism (which is unsurprising, considering that they were written at a time when she was still loosely affiliated to her playwriting collective) towards an apparent conservatism with regard to women’s issues. However, I argue, while the later articles for and about women may appear less radical, they are arguably more democratic and inclusive, and she certainly received many more positive responses from her readers. Virginia Woolf, by contrast, was first and foremost a literary journalist, and a comparison of work drawn from the early years of her career as a journalist with her Common Readers, arguably the apotheosis of her career as a literary critic, shows her to have been extremely concerned with a democratic critical revisionism in general, and not only with women’s writing, as the selective nature of some posthumous anthologies of her essays might suggest. However, while critics point to the democratic nature of both volumes of Woolf’s Common Reader series, many have failed to take into account the extent of Woolf’s personal ambition as a literary journalist, and also the way in which she used her own press, the Hogarth Press, in order to help her achieve that ambition. While this does not deny the critically democratic nature of Woolf’s Common Readers, it does point to the autocratic channels deployed by Woolf in order to produce them. It also highlights the importance of acknowledging that Woolf was herself not a common reader at all, that she was in fact an extremely ‘uncommon writer’ who knowingly wielded her rhetorical power in the formulation of her democratically revisionist critical arguments. I conclude that, in terms of her career as a literary journalist at least, Woolf can be seen to have been far more individualist than Kate Roberts, who only agreed to write newspaper articles in the first place for the good of Plaid Cymru.24 For Woolf, writing—and literary journalism in particular, especially during the early years—was a profession. For Roberts, her journalism was unpaid voluntary work undertaken as a necessary means to a political end, namely the survival of the Welsh language and culture. This final chapter, more than any other, emphasises the significance of the material

24 Plaid Cymru was then the Welsh Nationalist Party, now know in English as the Party of
aspects of a writer's relationship with her audience, and demonstrates how material circumstances can in fact shape and influence a writer's output in a certain genre at a profound level.

Finally, I conclude this study with a brief consideration of some of the more evocative connections between the individual chapters, which have together formed a cohesive picture of two iconic British writers who lived worlds apart on the same island, and yet occasionally inhabited common ground.
CHAPTER I

A portrait of the artist as a young girl: the autobiographies

Recent criticism on ‘life writing’ has taken as its raw material various forms of self-representation, including fiction, letters, diaries and even interviews, as well as works which can be more strictly defined as autobiographies.¹ In this first chapter I shall be considering only the latter, for reasons which will become clear as I examine the cultural parameters of the genre itself, and consider how autobiography varies in terms of content, form and self-representation from culture to culture, through a comparative exploration of Virginia Woolf’s *Moments of Being* (1907-1940) and Kate Roberts’s *Y Lôn Wen* [The White Lane] (1960).² At a glance, two more different autobiographies could not be imagined. Virginia Woolf’s memoirs consist of two highly personal and self-searching unpublished fragments, and three papers read to Bloomsbury’s Memoir Club. They trace the history of a Victorian upper-class and highly-educated literary family, and of a young woman’s struggle to escape from its confines in order to fulfil her literary aspirations. At the same time, Woolf can be seen attempting to come to terms with the sudden, repeated and traumatic bereavement which she experienced following the deaths of her mother, half-sister, father and brother, all of which occurred before she reached the age of twenty-five. Kate Roberts’s *Y Lôn Wen*, by contrast, was written in its entirety and published at a relatively late stage in her career, when she was almost seventy, and has been described as an ‘important document of social history during a particular period’.³ Like so many autobiographies written in Welsh, its focus is on the author’s native village, and it is filled with descriptions of the characters who lived there and who

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² Virginia Woolf, *Moments of Being*, op. cit. All subsequent page references will refer to the Triad and Grafton reprint (London, 1988); Kate Roberts, *Y Lôn Wen*, op. cit.
contributed to the special feel and temperament of the place. It is also an elegy for times past, when villages on Britain’s Celtic fringes, such as Roberts’s native Rhosgadfan, were ‘more remote from England than Spain is now’ (as Woolf wrote of Cornwall in 1939), with a particular nostalgia for a time when those villages were peopled for the most part by monolingual Welsh speakers. However, both Moments of Being and Y Lôn Wen show marked similarities in terms of their gendered aspects, which serve as an important reminder of the extent to which English Victorian ideologies of femininity pervaded Britain’s cultural fringes, albeit with certain cultural permutations, which in Wales were closely linked with the Welsh language, Nonconformity, and a predominantly rural working-class identity. It is on these gendered aspects of the autobiographies of Woolf and Roberts that I shall be concentrating in the first instance, primarily because Y Lôn Wen has never been considered in terms of the gender of its author, and the extensive amount of criticism on Woolf’s Moments of Being offers significant and fruitful models for reading twentieth-century British women’s autobiography more generally. Conversely, I shall then consider the significance of Welsh autobiography’s generic roots in the nineteenth-century Nonconformist biographical tradition in order to explore more fully the culturally inflected aesthetic contract which binds the autobiographer to her community of readers, and the positive and negative aspects of that contract as they can be perceived in the autobiographies of both Roberts and Woolf. In conclusion, I shall briefly consider the ‘symbolic topographies’ in Moments of Being and Y Lôn Wen, and their relation to the creative process.

The ‘Angel’ in the autobiography: sexual and textual repression

Of the many commentaries on Moments of Being which have been offered by Woolf critics since it was first published in 1976, one of the most pertinent

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includes the caveat that 'we owe [its] existence at all to skilful editing'. As Linda Anderson reminds us, the contemporary Woolf reader is much indebted to Jeanne Schulkind, who selected and edited the five autobiographical pieces brought together in the volume. Schulkind herself is at pains in her introduction to the collection to emphasise the provisional nature of these memoirs in comparison with other work which Woolf prepared for publication herself:

The material in this collection is in various stages of revision—most of it exists in typescript, a part of one section is in manuscript only—but with the exception of the first memoir the scripts bear signs of 'work in progress', notwithstanding that the last three selections were in fact read by Virginia Woolf to the audiences for whom they were intended. Corrections, additions, deletions, sometimes hastily made and incomplete, are scattered throughout the work and in the case where only the manuscript exists whole passages are revised within the text.

Linda Anderson suggests that what emerges is 'very much a “subject-in-process” [...] a subject constructing herself through writing'. This may be true, in that these are essentially unrevised and provisional pieces of writing, but to emphasise their exposition of a Kristevan 'subject-in-process' is to overlook the highly literary and crafted nature of each of the individual memoirs, from the slightly stilted Victorian 'Reminiscences', written in 1908 during what was still a period of literary apprenticeship for Woolf, to 'A Sketch of the Past', a masterly piece written during the final months of her life. Anderson is closer to the mark when she argues that 'the unfinished nature of this writing has something again to do with [Woolf's] unresolved tensions about public exposure'. Even a brief comparison of 'Reminiscences' and 'A Sketch of the Past' with the three papers which Woolf delivered to the Memoir Club during the 1920s and 30s—'22 Hyde Park Gate', 'Old Bloomsbury' and 'Am I a Snob?'—shows how guarded Woolf became when faced with an audience. The intimate tone of 'A Sketch of the Past', in particular, stands in

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6 Ibid., p. 62. For other critical commentaries see:
7 Jeanne Schulkind, Editor's Note, Moments of Being, op. cit., p. 8.
8 Linda Anderson, op. cit., p. 49.
9 Ibid., p. 62.
striking contrast to the witty satire of the Memoir Club contributions. I shall make further reference to the Memoir Club pieces in the final section of this chapter: in the meantime, it is worth noting that, as far as Woolf herself knew, the two short memoirs under discussion, 'Reminiscences' and 'A Sketch of the Past', were never going to be published.

Although they were produced over three decades apart, 'Reminiscences' and 'A Sketch of the Past' both revisit the main events of Woolf's childhood, namely the loss of her beloved mother and half-sister. The earlier memoir, 'Reminiscences', written when Woolf was still only twenty-six, consists of a strangely compressed narrative, the work of an individual who has still not come to terms with her bereavement. One result of this almost suffocating compression is the seeming inevitability with which Virginia's mother, Julia, is replaced after her death as the female head of the family by Stella, Woolf's half-sister, and then subsequently by her older sister Vanessa following Stella's sudden death. Woolf's father, Leslie Stephen, seemed to take it for granted that a woman should conform to the Victorian image of the 'Angel in the House' propagated by Coventry Patmore as 'so benign/So amiable and womanly', 'full of maiden courtesy', with an 'angelical' countenance and 'devout' disposition: in more practical terms, that she should devote herself unreservedly to his physical and emotional well being. As Ian Anstruther has noted, it was only after Patmore's The Angel in the House was re-printed in a cheap edition in 1887—notably during Woolf's early childhood—that it became a success, and was greeted in fact with open arms by those who saw it as an antidote to dangerous notions of feminism which had been gaining credence as the century progressed. Woolf's mother, Julia Stephen, who busied herself not only with the running of the Stephen household but also undertook innumerable good

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works more generally, evidently fitted the mould of the adorable and adoring Angel. According to the actress, Elizabeth Robins, who had been a friend of Julia Stephen, Virginia's mother was 'a mixture of the Madonna and a woman of the world'. Following Julia Stephen's death in 1895, the 'charge bequeathed [Stella] by her mother' was Leslie Stephen, and, burdened with her demanding stepfather, Stella, too, seems to have become increasingly like Patmore's Angel, looking like 'the white flower of some teeming hot-house, for a change had come over her that seemed terribly symbolical. Never did anyone look so pale'. The death of Julia Stephen—from overwork, according to Woolf—followed so swiftly and cruelly by Stella's own death due to a complication in pregnancy, seems incredible, a case of life vying with fiction for Victorian melodramatic effect. After Stella's death, it seemed no less inevitable that her mantle would be passed on to Virginia's older sister Vanessa; and that she, in keeping with the roles undertaken by her mother and half-sister, should also become an Angel in the House:

People who must follow obvious tokens, such as the colour of the eye, the shape of the nose, and love to invent a melodramatic fitness in life, as though it were a sensational novel, acclaimed her now the divinely appointed inheritor of all womanly virtues, and with a certain haziness forgot your grandmother's sharp features and Stella's vague ones, and created a model of them for Vanessa to follow, beautiful on the surface, but fatally insipid within.

It was clearly expected that Vanessa should automatically and immediately take Stella's place, at which point the young Stephens seem to have resisted their father's emotional blackmail and crippling dependence, supporting Vanessa in her mute refusal to conform to what was expected of her:

[T]here were signs at once which woke us to a sort of frenzy, that he was quite prepared to take Vanessa for his next victim. When he was sad, he explained, she should be sad; when he was angry, as he was periodically when she asked him for a cheque, she should weep; instead she stood before him like a stone. A girl who had character would not tolerate such speeches, and when she connected them with other words of the same kind, addressed to the sister lately

12 Quoted by Virginia Woolf, 'A Sketch of the Past', op. cit., p. 105.
14 Ibid., p. 53.
15 Ibid., pp. 64-65.
dead, to her mother even, it was not strange that an uncompromising anger took possession of her.\textsuperscript{16}

In 'A Sketch of the Past', by contrast, while Woolf takes her reader over the same ground, she is far more inclined to analyse events than to re-live them, demonstrating an even clearer understanding of the feminine traditions in which she and Vanessa were reared. She was evidently well aware that a certain ideology of perfect femininity was reigning supreme in '22 Hyde Park Gate round about 1900' which was in itself, she writes, 'a complete model of Victorian society'.\textsuperscript{17} She draws attention, for example, to her mother's own ladylike upbringing:

Little Holland House then was her education. She was taught there to take such part as girls did then in the lives of distinguished men; to pour out tea; to hand them their strawberries and cream; to listen devoutly, reverently to their wisdom; to accept the fact that Watts was the great painter; Tennyson the great poet; and to dance with the Prince of Wales. For the sisters, with the exception of my grandmother who was devout and spiritual, were worldly in the thoroughgoing Victorian way. Aunt Virginia, it is plain, put her own daughters, my mother's first cousins, through tortures compared with which the boot or the Chinese shoe is negligible, in order to marry one to the Duke of Bedford, the other to Lord Henry Somerset. (That is how we came to be, as the nurses said, so 'well connected'.)\textsuperscript{18}

After her mother's death, as Virginia and her siblings approached maturity, she describes herself and Vanessa as being far ahead of their time ('say in 1910'), while their father and half-brother George were stuck in 1860, and remembers with some bitterness that: 'Society in those days was a very competent machine. It was convinced that girls must be changed into married women. It had no doubts, no mercy; no understanding of any other wish; of any other gift'.\textsuperscript{19} All the same, although Woolf's portrayal of the particular pressures that Victorian ideologies of femininity exerted in the Stephen household is by turns bitterly descriptive and calmly analytical, she never really explores its consequences in adult terms in her autobiography, as she has done in essays

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., p. 65.
\textsuperscript{18} Virginia Woolf, 'A Sketch of the Past', op. cit., p. 102.
such as 'Professions for Women'.

'A Sketch of the Past' does follow its young protagonists beyond their childhood years into their difficult experiences as young adults, forced by their half-brother George Duckworth to take their first timorous steps in London society. Nevertheless, it stops there, and we learn nothing of Woolf the developing woman reaching sexual and emotional maturity. It is true that there are descriptions of the embarrassment of a young debutante and the oppressive restrictions of society etiquette: 'I felt myself struggling like a fly in glue. I felt that if one said things one thought, anything beyond the usual patter, glue stuck to one's feet'. There are also hints at the physical discomfort Virginia and Vanessa experienced having to make the transition from the overalls they wore to work in at home during the day into dinner dress and even, conversely, an intimation of the vaguely appreciated frisson that mixing in society, for all its boredom and difficulty, sometimes brought:

All the same there was the excitement of clothes, of lights, of society, in short; and the queerness, the strangeness of being alone, on my own, for a moment, with some complete stranger: he in white waistcoat and gloves, I in white satin and gloves. A more unreal relationship cannot be imagined; but there was a thrill in the unreality.

Yet, despite this apparent frankness—more evident in the later memoir, it is true—both 'Reminiscences' and 'A Sketch of the Past' stop short of the adult woman. Referring specifically to 'A Sketch of the Past', Linda Anderson argues that:

It is as though the point of the memoir has been to recover the bodily closeness which she associates with her mother; at the threshold of this different world—the world of sexual difference—she holds back, seeing it as a foreign country, distant, only concerned with distances.

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19 Ibid., pp. 148 and 157.
21 Virginia Woolf, 'A Sketch of the Past', op. cit., p. 156.
22 Ibid., p. 151.
23 Ibid., pp. 156-157.
24 Linda Anderson, op. cit., p. 74.
And yet, this does not explain why the earlier 'Reminiscences'—which, as several critics, including Anderson herself have argued, is very much the book of her father, in that it is heavily influenced not only by Victorian biography and autobiography, but more specifically by her father's own *Mausoleum Book*—also ends at almost exactly the same juncture.\(^{25}\) Surely it is not 'sexual difference' itself that Woolf shrinks from, but rather sexual maturity (and, as importantly, from the retrospective textual representation of that sexual maturity), as a woman in a world in which female sexuality is obsessively catalogued, codified and circumscribed by repressive and fatally pervasive ideologies.

The slightest intimation that this may be the case is suggested by Woolf's own comment in 'Reminiscences' that: 'I must have been ashamed or afraid of my own body'.\(^{26}\) Her depiction of her own body, and of the changes that her body undergoes as she reaches puberty, is similarly anxious in 'A Sketch of the Past':

One must get the feeling of everything approaching and then disappearing, getting large, getting small, passing at different rates of speed past the little creature; one must get the feeling that made her press on, the little creature driven on as she was by the growth of her legs and arms, driven without her being able to stop it, or to change it, driven as a plant is driven up out of the earth, up until the stalk grows, the leaf grows, buds swell [...] How immense must be the force of life which turns a baby, who can just distinguish a great blot of blue and purple on a black background, into the child who thirteen years later can feel all that I felt on May 5th 1895—now almost exactly to a day, forty-four years ago—when my mother died.\(^{27}\)

The force of life imposes itself on the passive body of the girl—strangely depersonalised through Woolf's use of the third person—which submits in confusion to this force greater than itself. In addition to such passing hints, the closing passage of 'Reminiscences' suggests more clearly a tension between Woolf's desire as autobiographer to emphasise that the young Stephens are

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\(^{26}\) Virginia Woolf, 'Reminiscences', op. cit., p. 79.

\(^{27}\) Virginia Woolf, 'A Sketch of the Past', op. cit., p. 92.
coping successfully with the process of mourning their mother and half-sister, and an urge to express Virginia’s developing sexual awareness:

Jack [Hill—Stella’s bereaved fiancé] himself could not recognise what we were doing for him in its detail; but he certainly had come to realise the mass of our, say rather of Vanessa’s, endeavour. He began to take regular and unthinking satisfaction in being with her, without I suppose, for I was sometimes jealous, perceiving a single one of the multitude of fine adjustments that composed her presence. But that was proof, like a healthy sleep, that the healing process was well begun [...] Now and again I rebelled in the old way against him, but with an instant sense of treason, when I realised with what silence, as of one possessed of incommunicable knowledge, Vanessa met my plaints.28

The text comes to an abrupt halt before that ‘incommunicable knowledge’ (that Vanessa was in fact conducting an affair with Stella’s former fiancé) can be explained. This repression of sexuality, of her own sexuality as Woolf the autobiographer rather than Woolf the novelist or essayist who can assume whatever persona she pleases, is what Woolf herself must be referring to when she wrote to her friend, the composer Ethyl Smyth, on Christmas Eve, 1940 that: ‘There’s never been a woman’s autobiography’, coming to conclusion that the reasons for this must lie with ‘chastity and modesty I suppose [...] Isn’t the great artist the only person to tell the truth? I should like an analysis of your sex life. As Rousseau did his. More introspection. More intimacy.’29

‘It is almost impossible to be honest’: Y Lôn Wen30

Woolf relates in her essay ‘Professions for Women’ how she eventually killed the Angel in her House by flinging an inkpot at her—‘She died hard. Her fictitious nature was of great assistance to her’.31 And yet it seems that, like the ghosts of Julia and Stella which lurk in the closing pages of both ‘Reminiscences’ and ‘A Sketch of the Past’, the ghost of the Angel in the House lingers still in the necessarily more personal and confessional genre that is autobiography, preventing a more probing and extended examination of

29 Quoted by Linda Anderson, op. cit., pp. 46-47.
Virginia Stephen's sexuality and development into a mature woman. Kate Roberts's concluding comments in *Y Lôn Wen*, by contrast, suggest that she never even did battle with her ghosts: 'Have I told the truth? No. I comforted myself that it's impossible to tell the truth in an autobiography [...] I refrained because I was afraid. Fear is our greatest enemy, young and old'. Somewhat surprisingly, considering the fact that Kate Roberts quite clearly intended *her* autobiography for publication, her text, no less than Woolf's unpublished memoirs, is oddly fragmentary and elliptical. *Y Lôn Wen* is divided into a series of chapters, beginning with 'Darluniau' ['Pictures'], an impressionistic present-tense narrative written from the perspective of Kate as a young girl, and progressing swiftly to anecdotal memoirs of life in the small quarrying village of Rhosgadfan during the late nineteenth century, in chapters such as 'Diwylliant a Chymdeithas' ['Culture and Society'], 'Diwylliant a'r Capel' ['Culture and the Chapel'], 'Chwaraeon Plant' ['Children's Games'], rounding off with a brief postscript, 'Y Darlun Olaf' ['The Last Picture'], in which Roberts suddenly returns to the present, portraying herself as an embittered and failed autobiographer. The concentration of impressions and emotions in 'Pictures' and 'The Final Picture' makes an awkward frame for the rest of the book: in the central chapters the first person is overshadowed by a projection of others into the foreground—mother, father, brother, ministers, quarrymen. In the context of these personal and yet apparently objective descriptions of people and of group activities in a closely knit community, the impressionistic style of the first and final chapters strikes an odd chord.

It appears, therefore, that the 'unresolved tensions' about the process of textual self-revelation experienced by Woolf can also be found in Roberts's autobiography. The reader of *Y Lôn Wen* is only ever allowed a brief glimpse into Roberts's personal life, and even then only into the innocent period of her

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33 Other chapters not listed here: 'Fy Ardal' [My Region], 'Mathau Eraill o Ddiwylliant' [Other Kinds of Culture], 'Fy Nheulu' [My Family], 'Fy Nhad' [My Father], 'Fy Mam' [My Mother], 'Perthnasau Eraill' [Other Relatives], 'Hen Gymeriad' [An Old Character], 'Amgylchiadau'r Cyfnod' [Circumstances of the Period].
childhood, as has been noted by Eigra Lewis Roberts: ‘Apart from this first chapter, and the last chapter of the book, we only get a glance now and again at the child and the young woman’. The majority of these images of the young Kate are found in ‘Pictures’: the chapter consists of brief sections separated by asterisks, often no more than a paragraph or two, relating some childhood memory which appears distantly remembered, but nevertheless brought vividly to life by Roberts’s use of the present tense in each case:

It's a cold, wet Saturday morning, my birthday, six years old. Mam has just cleaned around the fire, and there's a low, glowing fire in the grate. I stand by it, and despite the warmth, I have a chill because of the nasty weather. I am crying and crying, and I don't know why, maybe just because it's a miserable day. I am certain that it is not because I didn't get a present, since we never get birthday presents. Mam says that God Almighty takes care to send rain on Saturday because there's no school.

Not all the childhood memories are this bleak: in fact, many focus on the warmth and comfort of home and hearth, upon the compensations for a hard life to be found in a neighbourly community. Roberts describes, for example, the ‘diwrnod cario gwair’ on which local quarrymen lose a day's work in order to help their neighbours harvest their crop, and the simple pleasures of picking blackberries, preparing good hearty food, and of feeling safe and protected by her parents: ‘But it's mam and dad give us food and a roof that doesn't fall’.

In the postscript to Y Lôn Wen, Roberts argues that ‘[e]verything important had happened to me before 1917, everything that made a deep

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35 Kate Roberts, Y Lôn Wen, op. cit., p. 8.
37 Ibid., p. 4.
impression'. As has been frequently noted by commentators on Roberts, 1917 was the year that her younger brother died in the First World War, and thus became a date which retrospectively both marked the end of her childhood for her and the beginning of her vocation as a writer. Referring to the period prior to that, Roberts writes:

"Yr oeddwn yn fyw y pryd hynny, yn medru mwynhau teimlad fy mwa blewog cyntaf am fy ngwddw yn y gaeaf, yn mwynhau mynd trwy'r llidiart i'r ffordd am mai yno yr oedd y byd mawr llydan. Yr oeddwn yn mwynhau cwffio efo hogiau, yn mwynhau sglefrio dros geunant, yn mwynhau dweud fy adnod yn y seiat."

"I was alive then, able to enjoy the feeling of my first fur boa around my neck in winter, enjoy going through the gate to the road because it was there the big wide world was. I enjoyed fighting with boys, enjoyed skating over a brook, enjoyed saying my Bible verse in fellowship-meeting."

It is certainly this mixture of sensuality and physical freedom which dominates in ‘Pictures’. Descriptions of the young Kate playing on a swing, for example, imply a youthful freedom from physical constraint: ‘I enjoy playing swings, and the further I go the better, because the fear in taking chances sends a thrill of pleasure down my back as I catch my breath.’ This scene is reworked in the later chapter on ‘Children’s Games’, with an interesting and telling addition:

"Nid ein siglo ein hunain y byddem, fel y gwelwn blant mewn parciau-chwarae heddiw, ond byddai rhwun yn gafael yn y rhaff a rhoi hergwd iddi, a’r sawl a fyddai am yr ias hon o ofn, ddeall peth o awydd llanciau ifainc am ehedeg mewn llong awyr."

"We wouldn’t swing ourselves, as we see children doing today in playgrounds, but someone would grab hold of the rope and give it a push, and the one on the swing would feel a shiver of pleasant fear as they went through the air. Remembering that shiver of fear, you could understand some of the desire of young lads to fly in an aeroplane."

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42 Kate Roberts, *Y Lôn Wen*, op. cit., p. 67.
In these sensual terms, the wistful reference to the freedom of the young boy who can dream of flying in an aeroplane creates a significant displacement, of physical and emotional desire for freedom, for movement out and away from one’s environment, onto a male (the ‘young lads’). It is impossible, it seems, to express such desire directly from the body of a female.

Bearing in mind these displacements of the experience of freedom and pleasure onto childhood and onto ‘llanciau ifainc’, it is significant that, ‘Pictures’ comes to sudden stop when Kate Roberts is on the brink of sexual maturity:

I’m restless, discontented, moving from chair to chair, from one corner of the table to the other. I cannot memorize. I’m fifteen years old and in the County School […] Partaking of First Communion weighs heavily on me. I am entering a new world, a serious world, without play; […] My skirt will be lower, and my hair will be higher on my head […] I’m ceasing to be a child and am beginning to become a woman. It’s terrible to feel that anything ceases to exist, forever."

The young girl’s restlessness implies the physical changes which her body is undergoing, while her anxious reaction to them, and to the signs of sexual and social maturity which she will be forced to adopt—she will be considered a woman once she wears long skirts and puts her hair up—suggests that she is fearful of her own developing sexuality and its social significance. However, as with Virginia Woolf’s ‘Reminiscences’ and ‘A Sketch of the Past’, this is an aspect of her development upon which the remainder of the autobiography sheds little light. Once her body begins to change, becoming less controllable and easily defined (unlike the unequivocally ‘innocent’ body of a young child) it appears in the text no more. From this point on Kate Roberts actively figures in the text only occasionally: a fleeting reference is made to her return from

43 Kate Roberts, Y Lôn Wen, op. cit., pp. 24 - 25
college during the holidays, for example, or an even hastier aside concerning her husband: these are the only representations of herself as a mature woman (apart from the picture of herself as an old woman at the very end of the book). 45

While, then, the young child’s innocent body makes an appearance in the first section and is permitted relative freedom of expression in a vividly subjective text, the mature woman’s body is barred from her own text from the second chapter onwards. This movement is paralleled by a narrative retreat from the self, as Roberts withdraws from the first person into a quest for truth and objectivity in relation to places and people other than herself which belies the anecdotal register she deploys. Describing her neighbouring village, for example, she writes:

Mae pentref Rhostryfan dipyn yn hyn, mae yno eglwys, eglwys braidd yn ifanc, mae’n wir, yn ôl fel y maes oed eglwysi. Ond mae yn Rhostryfan heddiw bobl sy’n gallu olrhain eu tras i hen deuluoeudd a fu’n byw yno er o leiaf ddau can mlynedd, megis teuluoeedd y Gaerwen a Chae Haidd. [...] Mae ty o’r enw Rhosgadfan yn y pentref, tŷ hen iawn, a digon posibl mai ar ôl enw’r tŷ y galwyd y pentref, er na ellir bod yn ddigon sicr o hynny. 46

*The village of Rhostryfan is considerably older; there is a church there, indeed, quite a young church, as the age of churches goes. But there are people in Rhostryfan today who can trace their lineage to old families who have lived there for at least two hundred years, such as the families of Gaerwen and Cae Haidd. There is a house named Rhosgadfan in the village, a very old house, and it’s quite possible that the village was named after the house, although one can’t be certain of that.*

Similarly, in her chapter on chapel culture, her reference to what other people have written about the same preachers suggests that her own subjective impressions of them do not count, and are certainly not worth recording: ‘I could write a long essay on the preachers who came to preach in our chapel when I was a child, but as a lot has been written about them by others, I will

45 Roberts refers to her husband in passing, for example, in the chapter on her mother, *Y Lôn Wen*, op. cit., p. 115.
content myself with mentioning only a few of the most original ones'. Elsewhere Roberts refers to historical sources in order to validate her own anecdotal history:

Dywed yr Athro Dodd yn ei lyfr, The Industrial Revolution in North Wales, fod yna gymdeithas o bobl a 140 o dai a thri chapel yn Rhostryfan erbyn y flwyddyn 1826. Mae'n sior gennyf mai són am y tyddwnod bychain, 'lle i gadw buwch' a ddywyd o'r comin, a wna'r Athro, ac nid am y ffarmiodd hyn a oedd yn Rhostryfan.47

In his book, The Industrial Revolution in North Wales, Professor Dodd says that there was a community of people and 140 houses and three chapels in Rhostryfan by the year 1826. I am sure that the Professor is referring to the little smallholdings, 'a place to keep a cow', that were taken from the common land, and not to the older farms that were in Rhostryfan.

Even in the chapters on her parents, she attempts objectivity, acknowledging all the while that 'it is difficult to stand outside such a close relationship'. 49

Not only are the more subjective passages of Y Lôn Wen clustered around apparently innocent, childhood scenes; they are also replete with guilt, shame, fear and disappointment. In 'Pictures', for example, the young Kate’s fears range from being afraid of ghosts to being anxious about not being able to complete a new sum at school.50 She is equally downhearted when the household cat ruins her hat by sitting on it, and her disappointment that her mother has bought her a new hat that she does not like is keenly felt and bitterly self-conscious: ‘I’d better not show my disappointment or someone will put the cat’s nose in the pepper. That’s how it is, you have to hide one thing to avoid another’. 51 In the final chapter, Roberts remembers her embarrassment when she discovered that she had been wearing her hat the wrong way round in chapel:

Dywedodd yr hogyn atgas a fyddai'n llibindio genod ar y ffordd adre o'r practis côr wrthyf ar fy ffordd allan, ‘Wyddat ti fod dy gap di tu ’nôl ymlaen yn y

47 Ibid., p. 49.
48 Ibid., p. 27.
49 Ibid., p. 89.
50 Ibid., pp. 22-23 and 9.
capal? Ef allai na fuaswn wedi gwybod onibai amdano fo. Yr oedd arnaf gywilydd. Daeth y cywilydd yn ôl yn wrid i'm hwyneb am flynyddoedd. Heddiw, ni fuaswn yn poeni. Yn wir ni fuaswn yn poeni petawn i'n mynd i'r Capel Mawr a thair het tu 'nôl ymlaen am fy mhen. Yr wyf wedi marw i gywilydd. The hateful boy who would pester girls on the way home from choir practice said to me on my way out, 'Do you know your cap was backwards in chapel?' Perhaps I wouldn't have known if it weren't for him. I was ashamed. The shame came back and made me blush for years. Today, I wouldn't be upset. Indeed, I wouldn't be upset if I went to the Great Chapel with three hats backwards on my head. I have died to shame.53

And yet this last remark seems somewhat disingenuous in the light of Roberts's own confession, only a few lines later, that she has been afraid of writing the truth. Especially telling is the assertion that she has since 'died to shame', as opposed to her earlier description of her childhood, that period of sensual pleasures and physical freedoms, as a time when 'I was alive'. Such contradictory passages intimate that what has died along the way is not Kate Roberts's shame, but rather, her sexual identity and freedom.

It seems that, even more than Virginia Woolf, Kate Roberts is haunted by the spectre of the Angel in the House, finding it difficult to discuss personal relationships, let alone sexual matters. When she was asked in an interview with J. E. Caerwyn Williams in 1967 to comment on the fact that sex is rarely mentioned or even referred to in her writing, Roberts responded that:

As for the sexual feeling, that's shyness again, a shyness which was nurtured during the period in which I was born. Because of that, it would be difficult for me to discuss it.

However, even if a convincing parallel can be perceived in Y Lôn Wen with the repressive Victorian ideologies which prevent any detailed sexual revelations in Woolf's 'Reminiscences' and 'A Sketch of the Past', it is important to note the

52 Kate Roberts, Y Lôn Wen, op. cit., pp. 152-3.
54 Kate Roberts, in an interview with J. E. Caerwyn Williams reprinted in Erthyglau ac Ysgrifau
significant cultural variations undergone by Victorian ideologies of the ‘Angel in the House’ as they penetrated Wales in the mid-nineteenth century. Indeed, as Jane Aaron has pointed out, this was neither a straightforward nor a one-way process. She notes, for example, that certain qualities were considered characteristics of the good upstanding Welshwoman well before English Victorian ideologies of femininity began to take hold in Wales, and emphasises the importance of Nonconformity as a highly influential factor in the specifically Welsh permutation that was ‘Angyles yr Aelwyd’:

And in the middle of the century the Angel reached the borders of Wales, but her reception there was not unmixed. Within the Nonconformist culture, chastity was impressed upon Welshwomen before the days of the Angel: there was nothing new to Welshwomen in her morality. But the Angel’s way of being moral—through her holy innocence, like the innocence of a child and the passive tenderness which were supposed to be an inextricable part of her femininity—that was something new.  

Aaron also points to the complexities which the Angel in the House, essentially an English middle- and upper-class ideology, held for working-class Welshwomen, especially those based in rural agricultural communities, where the women worked in the fields alongside the men. Taking as an example an article published by ‘Martha, Rhosyfedwen’ in the first issue of the women’s periodical Y Gymraes, in which its author rails against the inactivity and laziness of the English Angel in the House, she comments that Martha’s disparaging views stand as testimony to the main differences between English bourgeois femininities and the realities of life for Welsh women, the majority of whom had to work very hard to make a living.  

It is now widely acknowledged, due to the work of Aaron and others, that Y Gymraes was largely responsible for the propagation of a specifically Welsh image of the Angel in the House. Launched in 1850 by Nonconformist minister

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56 Ibid., pp. 15-16.
Ieuan Gwynedd, *Y Gymraes* was in part a textual reaction to the damning assessments of a government survey published in 1847, the *Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Inquire into the State of Education in Wales*. The report associated the ‘want of chastity in women’ which it found in Wales to their provincial, uncivilized language, intimating that their inability to speak English left them undesirably alienated from the civilizing impetus of imperial advances being made by the British government in its colonies.\(^5^8\) That *Y Gymraes* was founded as a national defence seems certain: it combined the adoption of a didactic tone towards its assumed female readers with staunch praise of the faultless Cymraes, an impeccable icon who served as an example for both young unmarried women, on whose chastity the reputation of Wales now depended, and married mothers, in whose wombs lay the state and fate of the nation. Expression of female sexuality was limited to the most confined terms, and this suppression was harnessed to and propagated by the spread of Nonconformity through the country during the period. One result was the alienation of the Welsh woman from her own sexually desiring body as anything other than the iconized vessel of future morally upright inheritors of the Welsh language and culture.

Bearing in mind that Kate Roberts’s mother, Catrin, was born around the middle of the nineteenth century, it is not surprising that Roberts’s description of her own mother is saturated in all the specifically Welsh idealism of ‘Angyles yr Aelwyd’ in her maternal role. That she writes from the perspective of this idealized mother’s child strengthens the moral and cultural bias of her portrayal. Roberts’s emphasis on the arduous physical labour undertaken by her mother, for example, reminds the reader that the Welsh woman typified by *Y Gymraes* was no English Angel in the House: her body was moulded by heavy physical work. Roberts devotes an entire chapter in *Y Lôn Wen* to her mother, which concentrates on the exhausting and tedious routine of Catrin Roberts’s life, spent maintaining a quarry worker’s cottage, smallholding and family of seven children. In winter, for

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\(^{5^8}\) *Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Inquire into the State of Education in Wales, 1847*, quoted by Siân Rhiannon Williams, op. cit., p. 70.

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example, Roberts’s mother had to tackle many extra tasks out of doors on the smallholding, as night would have fallen by the time her husband arrived home from a day’s work at the quarry. Roberts tells her reader how her mother also used to sew and knit for all the family, bake nine large loaves for them three times a week and make butter. A painstaking description of her mother’s butter-making exemplifies the extremely demanding physical work required daily of Catrin Roberts:

\[\text{Rhoid y llaeth i gyd felly yn y corddwr i’w gorddi, a gwaith trwm oedd, troi’r handlen am dri chwarter awr o amser nes iddo droi’n fenyn. Nid oedd wiw ychwanegu mwy o ddŵr nag oedd yn angenrheidiol, er mwyn ei frysio (gwnâi rhai hynny) neu fè fyddaï’r menyn yn wyn ac anodd ei drin. Wedyn, tri chwarter awr arall neu fwy i drin y menyn, er mwyn cael y dŵr i gyd allan ohono, a’i gael yn bwysi solet i’w rhoi ar y llechen gron.}\]

So she put all the milk into the churn to churn it, and it was heavy work turning the handle for three quarters of an hour until the milk turned into butter. You didn’t dare to add more water than was necessary, in order to rush things (there were some women who did this), because the butter would be white and difficult to treat. Next, it would take another three quarters of an hour to treat the butter, to drain all the water from it and to divide it into good solid pound weights, which would be put on the round slate.

The pride with which Roberts’s recounts her mother’s conscientious completion of each task echoes the images of virtuous and strong femininity generated and iconized by Ieuan ap Gwynedd and his like in the pages of Y Gymraes (and, notably, reproduces the pattern of example evident in the periodical whereby the virtuous Welsh woman was frequently described by means of comparisons with her negative counterpart, the fallen woman or slothful mother: Roberts stresses that her mother never rushed her butter-making, although ‘there were some women who did this’). Her physical strength does not, however, detract from Catrin’s mothering qualities: Roberts relates anecdotes of her mother’s work as a gentle and caring midwife and nurse, which depict her as an angelic figure in the careworn community, who brings a little cheer to households and individuals beset by illness. She recounts one young woman’s admiration of Catrin Roberts: “I almost felt”, she said, “that it would be pleasant to be ill, so that your mother

\[59 \text{Kate Roberts, } \text{Y Lôn Wen, op. cit., p. 100.}\]
\[60 \text{Ibid., pp. 101-2.}\]
would lift me in her arms". Catrin Roberts here becomes the mother not only of her own family but also of the whole community; a heroic character, she represents perfect Welsh femininity, preserving and reproducing a Welsh race uncontaminated by English values. Kate Roberts’s description of Rhosgadfan cemetery stands as an epitaph to her mother as representative of the Welsh language and culture:

Ni welsom erioed gyfoeth, ond cawsom gyfoeth na all neb ei ddwyn oddi arnom, cyfoeth iaith a diwylliant. Ar yr aelwyd gartref y cawsom ef, a’r aelwyd honno yn rhan o’r gymdeithas a ddisgrifiais ar y cychwyn. Yn y fynwent yn Rhosgadfan mae’n gorwedd gymdeithas o bobl a fu’n magu plant yr un Pryd â’r hrien innau, ac yn ymdrechu’r un mor galed. Cymry uniaith oeddent i gyd, a chwith oedd gennyf weld pa ddydd, fod ambell garreg fedd Saesneg [...] wedi ymwthio i'r ardd honno.

We never knew riches, but we had a wealth which no-one could steal from us, a wealth of language and culture. It was handed down to us on our own fireside, a hearth which was part of the community which I described at the beginning [of the book]. In the cemetery at Rhosgadfan there lies a whole community of people who reared children at the same time as my parents, and who worked just as hard. They were all monolingual Welsh speakers, and I was sorry to see the other day that the occasional English gravestone [...] had pushed its way into that garden [...]?

Figurative of all mothers of the Welsh community, Catrin Roberts has propagated Welsh values and preserved the Welsh language in the face of an English cultural invasion. The cemetery in Rhosgadfan is portrayed as a Garden of Eden: the Fall, of course, being represented as the influx of the English language into Wales.

From confession to community: mapping a tradition

While the Angel in the House can be seen as having specifically Welsh permutations, therefore, her role in Y Lon Wen becomes a more broadly representative one. It is representative not only of perfect femininity, but also of cultural motherhood and the nurturing of an increasingly threatened community. Looking back on the work of Kate Roberts and her equally politicised contemporaries, it is evident that the ‘politics of the hearth’ which played such an

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61 Ibid., p. 103.
62 Ibid., pp. 117-118.
important part in early Plaid Cymru rhetoric evidently penetrated literary representations of home, hearth and native village. Kate Roberts was clearly not alone in her nostalgia for the idealized, 'uncorrupted' Welsh-language community that still existed during her childhood. Cultural historian Hywel Teifi Edwards has traced the development of the rural village as an idealised topos of literary Welsh nationhood, suggesting that it became an endemic and Edenic image in the work of many writers during the first half of the twentieth century. Edwards points to its origins in the Welsh appropriation of the English picturesque, and emphasises the deliberately political manipulation of the village topos undertaken by O. M. Edwards in his magazine Cymru [Wales]:

> With his literary eyes and ears opened to the power of nostalgia as a way of nurturing love of the fair country and loyalty to an ideal, O. M. Edwards saw that he had in the Llanuwchllyn of his youth and the countryside surrounding it the raw material of which could be created the sort of community which would be a cornerstone of the beautiful rustic Wales in which dwelt all things good.

O. M. Edwards included in the magazine a regular series on regions of Wales, in which many of the small (and often rural) villages of Wales were lovingly and nostalgically described, frequently accompanied by illustrations. Interestingly, while the series proved a great success with Welsh-language readers, O. M. Edwards's attempt to establish an equivalent magazine in English (Wales) had to be aborted: 'He had to give up Wales due to a lack of support, and he saw in his failure proof of the cultural inferiority of the non Welsh-speaking 'peasants', as compared with the gwerin [Welsh-speaking peasants]'. The village topos can be seen, therefore, as a symbol of cultural and linguistic purity, which harked back to a time when the rural areas of Wales were predominantly and monolingually Welsh. In an article on the problems facing Welsh writers, Kate Roberts herself reveals the extent to which this nostalgia penetrated the literary culture of her generation:

> Ond pa sawl gwaith y clywsoch ddywedyd gan y Sais Gymry fod llenyddiaeth y Cymry Cymreig yn blwyfol am na fedrant ysgrifennu ond am eu pentrefi bychain eu hunain? Petai hi'n mynd i hynny, nid yw'n rhaid inni fedru

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64 Ibid., p. 17.
sgrifennu ond am ein pentref ein hunain. Yr wyf newydd ddywedyd mai ein
teulu ein hunain a adwaenom orau. Ac os oes athrylith mewn llenor, fe all ddal i
sgrifennu am ei bentref ei hun am ganrif, gan fod y pentref hwnnw’n cynrychioli
dynoliaeth iddo ef.65

But how many times have you heard an Anglo-Welshman say that the literature
of the Welsh-speaking Welsh people is parochial because they can only write
about their own little villages? If it comes to that, we do not have to be able to
write about anything other than our own village. I have just said that it is our
own family which we know best. And if a writer has any talent, then he will be
able to continue to write about his own village for a century, because that
village represents humanity to him.

Her remarks certainly hold true for many of her contemporaries, but perhaps the
most outstanding example is to be found not in a fellow northern writer, but in a
writer from Carmarthenshire. D. J. Williams is best remembered for his
autobiographical volumes Hen Wynebau [Old Faces] (1934), Hen Dy Ffarm [The
Old Farmhouse] (1953) and Yn Chwech ar Hugain Oed [Twenty-six Years Old]
(1954). Commenting on D. J. Williams’s work in a contribution to a festschrift
dedicated to him, Kate Roberts herself writes, in a passage which is a fair
description also of her own early stories as well as her autobiography,

Awdur yn cyflwyno trwy ei reddf yw Dr. D. J. Williams. Fel rheol, mae’r cyflryw
awduuron wedi eu gwreiddio’n ddwfn mewn rhyw ranbarth neilltuol o’r wlad, mae
bore oes rywsut yn ddyfach yn eu hisymwybod, ac yn mynnu dyfod allan yn eu
gwaith. Mae rhai beirniaid yn condemnio llenorion am fynd yn ôl i fore oes i gael
defnydd i’w gwaith, a galwant y math yna o lenyddiaeth yllenyddiaeth atgofus.
Gellir amau hynna. Mae llenor o’r math yna ei adnabod ei bobl drwy’r
synhynysrwydd sydd yn ei ffect, ac felly mae’n gallu gwneud gwell chwarae teg
â’i gymeriadau; yn gweld dyn fel dyn, y dyn cyffredinol os mynnwch chi—yn well
ar y cefndir hwnnw nag ar gefndir y daeth i wybod amdano wedi hynny. Mae hyn
yn fwy gwir am D.J. Williams nag odid un awdur Cymraeg heddiw.66

Dr D. J. Williams is an author who works instinctively. As a rule, such authors are
deeply rooted in some particular part of the country, somehow their childhood is
deeper in their unconscious, and insists on emerging in their work. Some critics
condemn writers for returning to childhood in order to find material for their work,
and they call that kind of literature nostalgic literature. I doubt that. A writer of
this type knows his people through the sensitivity that is in his being, and therefore
he can do greater justice to his characters; seeing man as man—universal man, if
you like—better on that background than against the background he came to know

65Kate Roberts, ‘Problemau Llenorion Cymraeg’ [The Problems Facing Welsh Writers],
Erthyglau ac Ysgrifau Lenyddol Kate Roberts, op. cit., pp. 255-6.
66 Kate Roberts, ‘Cymdeithas Bro a’r StorTwr’ [The Society of One’s Native Area and the
Storyteller], D. J. Williams, Abercwm, ed. John Gwyn Griffiths (Llandysul; Gwasg Gomer,
1965, pp. 131-2.
after that. This is more true of D. J. Williams than of any other Welsh author today.

It is clear that Kate Roberts's descriptions of her native village, no less than those of D. J. Williams, are also intimately connected with the village *topos* to which Hywel Teifi Edwards has drawn attention. Many pages of her autobiography are devoted to characters outside her immediate family circle and yet within the boundaries of her small community, as, for example, in the chapter 'Hen Gymeriad' ['An Old Character'], which focuses on her childhood memories of an impoverished family friend. Mari Lewis's story may seem unremarkable—that of an unfortunate woman whose husband commits petty theft and is sent to jail, and who never returns to his wife after he is freed. Alone and poverty-stricken, she survives a period in the workhouse, and spends the rest of her life destitute and dependent upon the charity of friends such as Kate Roberts's mother. Mari Lewis undertakes small tasks for her neighbours, such as 'collect[ing] heather to put on the haystack', for which she would be paid sixpence, and also helps look after Catrin Roberts's children when she is called from home. Remembered from the perspective of a small child, she appears neither pitiful nor pathetic, but entertaining, interesting and amusing. Above all, it is her way of telling a story which attracts the young Kate, and, as Roberts makes quite clear from the beginning of the chapter, it is for this reason that she has felt the need to set aside an entire chapter for Mari Lewis:

Rhaid imi roi pennod gyfan, fer i un cymeriad: ni allaf ei haddasu i unman arall. Ond nid ymddiheuraf am sôn am y cymeriad yma, oblegid mae fy nghof am ei hanes a'i chysylltiad â'n ty ni yn un o'r pethau cliriaf yn fy mywyd ac yn dangos rhwyw reddf a oedd yn'ôr pan oeddwn yn blentyn i fwynhau storfau, heb fod ynddynt ddim byd anturus. Storfau antur sy'n apelio fwyaf at blant. Apelient ataf finnau, ond wrth edrych yn ôl, cofiaf am y plenser a gefais oddi wrth y storfau tawl distwr yn ogystal.

I have to devote a whole, short chapter to one character: I can't adapt it anywhere else. But I make no apology for mentioning this character, since my memory of her history and connection with our house is one of the clearest things in my life and shows some instinct that was in me since I was a child to enjoy stories, without there being anything adventurous in them. It is adventure stories which appeal to children most. They appealed to me, but looking back, I remember the pleasure that I also got from the calm, quiet stories.

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67 Kate Roberts, *Y Lôn Wen*, op. cit., p. 132.
One of the most compelling aspects of this chapter is that Roberts can be seen quite consciously remembering the process of growing up as an inevitable progress towards storytelling, with an emphasis on a talent for storytelling as reflecting an ability to transcend humble material circumstances. She has done this in many of the chapters preceding this one, especially in ‘Culture and the Chapel’ which, far from being spiritual in sentiment, focuses on the ability of the preachers to tell a story. Similarly, the chapters on her mother and father show how, in an age where it was still difficult to obtain books in Welsh, individuals in small communities such as this one were extremely dependent on each other for entertainment. Roberts describes visitors to her parents’ home, for example, in terms of their storytelling skills:

The evening was spent talking like this, and nine times out of ten, people would tell stories [...] These people had a talent for telling stories skilfully, and sometimes it would be the way a story was told and not the story itself that gave satisfaction. I remember how critical my parents would be of those who could not tell a story with skill, and how dull it was listening to them.

What underlies all of the instances referred to here is an emphasis on community, or rather on how the circumstances of the community themselves created the conditions for a storytelling society. At the same time, Roberts’s recreations of such talkative characters lends them a mythological status, suggesting an almost pagan, earthbound connection with their forbears in their seeming inability not to tell stories. It seems that men and women reared on this small patch of land are linked with each other and their long and garrulous past by a penchant for communication, talking, listening—in short, the renowned Welsh

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68 Ibid., p. 52.
69 Ibid., p. 33.
70 Ibid., p. 41.
oral tradition. Roberts herself clearly feels a deep, instinctive connection with the clumps of earth surrounding her native smallholding:


I have some dark corners and light corners in my mind where fields are concerned. I don't know why some fields are like a sunny day to me and others like the darkness of stormy weather. I only have to see some fields and my heart lifts. Another field will make me melancholy.

This attempt to penetrate deep into the land in order to find herself, and the history of her community, accords with Roberts's earlier assertion that there are areas of Wales where the people are 'as if they are from the earth, earthy', and 'as if the mythology of the Middle Ages has not left their constitutions'.  

Coupled with Roberts's depiction of an oral 'folk' tradition not far removed from the Welsh oral traditions of the Middle Ages, such assertions both stem from, and feed into, the 'politics of the hearth' nurtured by Plaid Cymru. All the same, this pagan relationship with the land, and societal rather than spiritual connection with the chapel, point to Roberts's highly individual and ambiguous attitude towards the Nonconformist tradition in which she was brought up. She makes no attempt to conceal this attitude in Y Lôn Wen, although she clearly feels the need to align herself with a highly respected cultural commentator and critic in order to do so:

Efallai mai dyna ddechrau dirywiad y bywyd crefyddol yn yr ardaloedd hon fel mewn ilawer ardal arall, fod rohstoff wyr i sylw a hwnnwedd ac rheithio, i ddeall a rhesymu, yn hytrach nag i wir ysbryd crefydd. Dywedodd Mr. Saunders Lewis yng 'Nghwrs y Byd' yn Y Faner, rywdro mai diwylliant a gaem yn y capel ac nid addysg crefyddol, a chytunaf yn llwyr.  

Perhaps that's when religious life began to degenerate in this area as in many other areas, when more attention was paid to eloquence and speechmaking, to understanding and reasoning, than to the true spirit of religion. Mr. Saunders Lewis once said in 'The Course of the World' in Y Faner that we received culture, not religion, in chapel, and I agree completely.

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71 Ibid., p. 80. (Readers might like to note the similarities between this passage and the extract from Roberts's essay 'Caeau' quoted in the introduction to this thesis.)
72 Ibid., p. 41.
73 Ibid., p. 43.
Despite this ambiguity, however, in generic terms Roberts was deploying a literary form which was born out of Nonconformity, and as such, the religious aesthetics of that form and the tradition in which it evolved cannot be ignored. During the nineteenth century, the majority of prose works written in Welsh were intimately related to Nonconformism in one way or another. The roots of autobiography as a modern genre in Welsh can in fact be perceived in the primarily religious cofiannau [biographies] produced between roughly 1830 and 1870, about which Saunders Lewis wrote in a seminal lecture on ‘Y Cofiant Cymraeg’ delivered in 1935.74 It is Saunders Lewis who draws attention to the fact that, until the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the cofiant was the most important form of creative prose.75 The cofiant, according to Lewis, was a mirror held up to nineteenth-century Welsh society, much as the hymn had been in the eighteenth century.76 The subjects of these cofiannau were ‘revivalists, ministers and preachers’, and although it was a genre not without its English influences (such as John Bunyan’s Pilgrim’s Progress and Grace Abounding), it was an entirely Welsh form.77 It was in essence an eulogy to its subject, and in fact the formal elegy itself became the expected conclusion to such volumes.78 Tracing the development of the form back to William Williams Pantycelyn, Lewis points to the importance of the cofiant’s subject as a ‘type’ of character rather than as a character in himself, and also to that type’s exemplary importance (and that character was, of course, usually male).

Interestingly, while Lewis’s essay is purportedly about the cofiant, the boundaries between biography and autobiography necessarily become blurred in the course of his discussion, as he records how the nineteenth-century cofiant

75 Ibid., p. 341.
76 Ibid., p. 341.
77 Ibid., p. 342.
78 Ibid., p. 343.
evolved into a form which included not only eulogies to the subject, but also brief autobiographies by the subject himself. One example given by Lewis of this evolution of the form is *Cofiant neu Hanes Bywyd a Marwolaeth y Parch. Thomas Charles* [The Biography or the History of the Life and Death of the Reverend Thomas Charles]:

Thomas Charles wrote his autobiography in English, that autobiography was translated by Thomas Jones; there are two hundred and fifty pages in the book, Charles’ autobiography makes up the first one hundred and fifty, then there are a number of his letters and a short appendix after them giving a few facts and dates and a description of his death.79

This was not a static form, however, as Lewis shows—he notes for example, how the genre was to evolve between 1840 and 1870 from the pattern outlined in the above quotation to a more strictly biographical approach. The autobiography at the beginning was replaced with a short history of the public life of the subject and his conversion (the *cofianau* being histories of religious progress); this would then be followed by a portrait of the subject as a man, a Christian and a minister. Nevertheless, of the many examples cited by Lewis, there are several which do not conform strictly to this pattern, and he concedes the anecdotal historical approach of some, with their valuable focus on local history (a possible precursor for the kind of autobiography written by Kate Roberts, D. J. Williams *et al.*, perhaps). He also points to outstanding formal exceptions such as Owen Thomas’s biography of John Jones, Talsarn (published in 1874), in which the portrait of the subject is no static retrospective, but a depiction of a man in the context of his community and shifting social relations. This volume, says Lewis, ‘is a biography of an entire community’ in addition to being that of an individual.80

During the final quarter of the century, the *cofiant* receded in cultural importance as novelists such as Daniel Owen came to prominence (and, as Lewis points out, novels such as *Hunangofiant Rhys Lewis* actually masqueraded as autobiographical fact rather than fiction). However, if the days of the religious

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79 Ibid., p. 347.
80 Ibid., p. 356.
coifiant were numbered, its time as a modern genre was just beginning, as was that of a more secular, rooted autobiography. Biography and autobiography have continued to flourish as important cultural and literary histories of community in Welsh throughout the twentieth century. While a full discussion of their recent evolution is beyond the scope of this chapter, it may be pertinent to draw some conclusions about twentieth-century Welsh autobiography relevant to our understanding of Kate Roberts's *Y Lôn Wen*. Eigra Lewis Roberts is just one critic, for example, who has noted the significance of the book as a social document:

*Y Lôn Wen* is described on the dust jacket of the volume as an ‘important document of social history during a particular period’. This in itself connotes the special value of the book [...] The events and circumstances described doubtless draw on memories of many of our fathers and grandfathers. After all, it is not the memory in itself which is important, but rather the way in which it is deployed.  

The seam of communal memory which Roberts has mined so lovingly in the book is evidently easily recognisable to other, younger readers. These are shared memories of a shared community: this social document as it interpreted by Eigra Lewis Roberts—and, as she so easily and naturally assumes, as it is understood by other Welsh readers—is the closest one can get to a textual representation of a community's unconscious, it seems. Kate Roberts herself, despite her reluctance to 'tell the truth', seems complicit with this notion of the communally representative nature of individual autobiography:  

When I was writing these things the dead rose from their graves for a spell to talk to me. They've gone back to sleep again. I have written about my family and called it autobiography, but I'm right. The history of my family is my own history. It is they who wove my destiny in the distant past.
The voices that we have heard in reading the book, according to Roberts, are the voices of the ‘ghosts of the dead’, which she has attempted to represent as directly and faithfully as possible. In this sense the autobiographer appears as an empty vessel, a crucial but unremarkable mediator of the past; and her work represents a bridging of past, present and future, her role a custodial one of preserving and strengthening the collective unconscious on which the Welsh-language community depends.

Roberts’s negotiation of autobiography as a culturally specific genre is nonetheless complicated and occasionally contradictory. While she is writing in a generic context heavily marked by Nonconformism, her belief in the power of Nonconformity is social rather than spiritual—reflecting the increasing secularization of Welsh-language culture during the twentieth century. While her ‘biography of place’ holds echoes of nineteenth-century cofiannau, it is also very much caught up in the development of hearth, home and community as the cornerstones of Welsh nationalist politics and discourses of Welsh-language identity following the establishment of Plaid Cymru in 1925. And, finally, while she is utterly committed to the survival of an ancient and threatened culture, her negotiation of her custodial role as a practitioner of autobiography is of course complicated by her gender. The cofiannau of the nineteenth century were, by and large, authored by men and on (usually deceased) male subjects; interestingly, however, when it came to the development of a lively autobiography of community in the twentieth century, women were encouraged by magazine editors such as O. M. Edwards and, indeed, were relatively confident about relating their experiences first hand. Nevertheless, this appears to be in no small part due to the fact that Welsh autobiographers of the first half of the twentieth century seem to have considered themselves empty vessels for the collective unconscious of the community, as did Roberts herself.

‘A place from which to speak’: Moments of Being

The tensions and contradictions thrown up by a consideration of Roberts’s place in a specific literary tradition suggest the importance and relevance of issues of genre in addition to questions of gender for any reading of autobiographies produced by women of Roberts’s generation. If we take a closer look at Woolf’s memoirs in this respect—extending our reading to the pieces which she wrote for the Memoir Club—then it becomes clear that such questions of generic tradition, and of the intimacy of audience and community, were no less relevant to her than they were to Kate Roberts. In his seminal essay on Woolf’s Moments of Being, Christopher Dahl meticulously traces the very intimate family tradition within which it needs to be placed:

The works collected in Moments of Being are in fact the most recent offshoots in a long line of autobiographical writing which begins in the early nineteenth century with the remarkable Memoirs of Woolf’s great-grandfather James Stephen, Master in Chancery, and includes no fewer than nine full-scale works by members of four successive generations of the Stephen family.86

Dahl concedes that Woolf may not have been familiar with all of these works, but suggests that the Stephen family tradition as she inherited it nevertheless resonates with echoes of preceding volumes, and points particularly to the role of Leslie as the inheritor and mediator of the familial form that autobiography became for the Stephens.87 Feminist critics such as Trev Broughton have gone even further, extending the boundaries of autobiography and biography both in order to draw Woolf’s aunt, Anny Thackeray Ritchie, into the equation, and to theorise the increasingly ‘contested’ genre that was biography in Victorian England (with an eye, of course, to Leslie Stephen’s role as the editor of the Dictionary of National Biography):

In obituaries and dictionary entries, in biographies and reminiscences, they [Leslie Stephen and Anny Thackeray Ritchie] commemorated and mourned the deaths of Tennyson, the Brownings, Thomas Carlyle, George Eliot, and a multitude of other eminent acquaintances. For all its painful intimacy, the Mausoleum Book [Stephen’s own autobiography] was part of this much wider

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87 Ibid., 177.
project of reappraising and reaffirming the Victorian achievement at the end of
the century. 88

Nevertheless, it is within the parameters of the family tradition of autobiography
more specifically that the evolution of Woolf's own autobiographical writing can
most fruitfully be explored, particularly with regard to the masculinity of that
tradition. Several critics have observed that, in addressing 'Reminiscences' to
her future nephew (Vanessa Stephen, now married to Clive Bell, was pregnant
with her first child at the time of writing), Woolf was adhering to a specifically
familial generic model established by her father and her uncle, Fitzjames
Stephen. Leslie Stephen addressed his mournful Mausoleum Book to his
children, for example, while Fitzjames wrote his memoirs with copies of his
grandfather's autobiography and his father's diary on the desk before him. 89
Critical readings of 'Reminiscences' concur that a long shadow is cast by such
traditions over Woolf's earlier memoir: in particular, that it is not only
emotionally skewed by unresolved bereavement, but also aesthetically warped
by the influence of previous autobiographers in the Stephen family.
'Reminiscences' is suffused with an artificiality of tone and self-conscious
literary style, both of which demonstrate her 'indebtedness to formal Victorian
memoir writing'. 90 Unsurprisingly, Woolf's writing is at its most stilted in this
first memoir when she writes of her own relationship with her parents. Of her
mother's death, for example, she writes:

If what I have said of her has any meaning you will believe that her death was
the greatest disaster that could happen; it was as though on some brilliant day of
spring the racing clouds of a sudden stood still, grew dark and massed
themselves; the wind flagged, and all creatures on the earth moaned or wandered
seeking aimlessly. 91

88 Trev Lynn Broughton: 'Leslie Stephen, Anny Thackeray Ritchie, and the Sexual Politics of
Lynn Broughton and Linda Anderson (State University of New York Press, 1997), p. 132. See
also Carol Hanbery MacKay, 'The Thackeray Connection: Virginia Woolf's Aunt Anny',
Virginia Woolf and Bloomsbury: A Centenary Celebration, ed. Jane Marcus (London:
89 E.g., Christopher Dahl, 'Virginia Woolf's Moments of Being and Autobiographical Tradition
in the Stephen family', op. cit., 181.
90 Ibid., 184.
91 Virginia Woolf, 'Reminiscences', op. cit., p. 46.
Feminist criticism has suggested that, not only does 'Reminiscences' remain the book of her father as argued by Dahl, it also destabilises her position as author of her own autobiography quite simply because she, unlike her father Leslie, her uncle Fitzjames et al., is a woman. Linda Anderson, for example, suggests that:

Though it seems to have been her avowed aim in 'Reminiscences' to emulate this tradition, Virginia Woolf can only as a woman situate herself awkwardly within it. Tension about her position as a woman within the family leads to another tension within the memoir: a difficulty about finding a place from which to speak. 92

That tension, it seems, is irretrievably bound up with bereavement, the loss of her mother especially, and a still unresolved anger towards her father, complicated further by his subsequent death while she was still relatively young.

'A Sketch of the Past', by contrast, shows how Woolf has come to terms with the loss of both parents, an emotional resolution which seems also to have aesthetic consequences. Where 'Reminiscences' was stiff and self-consciously Victorian, 'A Sketch of the Past' is fluid, probing and acutely aware of the problems involved in the writing of one's memoirs. 'A Sketch of the Past' displays both a constant emphasis on writing itself as a process and not a product, and a slightly subversive attitude towards the generic parameters to which she is committing herself by even taking pen to paper:

There are several difficulties. In the first place, the enormous number of things I can remember; in the second, the number of different ways in which memoirs can be written. As a great memoir reader, I know many different ways. But if I begin to go through them and to analyse them and their merits and faults, the mornings—I cannot take more than two or three at most—will be gone. So without stopping to choose my way, in the sure and certain knowledge that it will find itself—or if not it will not matter—I begin; the first memory. 93

92 Linda Anderson, Women and Autobiography in the Twentieth Century: Remembered Futures op. cit., p. 64.
93 Virginia Woolf, 'A Sketch of the Past', op. cit., p. 74.
This passage is followed by a much quoted memory, that of sitting on her mother's lap on a train returning from St Ives to London. Like so much of 'A Sketch of the Past', it is a deeply physical, sensual description, focusing on physical closeness to her mother and its effect on the senses of the young Woolf: 'I therefore saw the flowers she was wearing very close; and can still see purple and red and blue, I think, against the black; they must have been anemones'. It is this sensual aspect of the later memoir, combined with Woolf's emphasis on the creation of autobiography as a process and not a product, which has attracted critical readings which pitch the 'femininity' of the later work against the stilted early 'Reminiscences', its generic parameters warped by an inherently masculine and patriarchal tradition. Woolf's later memoir, such critics argue, 'returns to her mother through the experience of loss: this loss of "wholeness"—and with it the experience of separateness—is, of course, the very condition of remembering'.

And yet, 'A Sketch of the Past' is at least as self-conscious a text as 'Reminiscences', if in intent rather than effect. Just as she remains constantly aware of writing autobiography as an ongoing process, Woolf also, in 'A Sketch of the Past' explores the process of remembering, which, while it certainly seems to take her back to her mother in the way suggested by feminist criticism, also boldly questions the parameters of memory just as it questions the parameters of genre. The result is an evident fascination not so much with the 'wholeness' engendered by remembering a return to the mother, but rather with the dislocation and separateness which themselves drive the urge to return and remember. Thus Woolf focuses again and again on the inexplicable faultlines of memory and its textual representation through the medium of the autobiographer:

Why have I forgotten so many thin that must have been, one would have thought, more memorable that what I do remember? Why remember the hum of

94 Ibid., p. 74.
bees in the garden going down to the beach, and forget completely being thrown
naked by my father into the sea? (Mrs Swanwick says she saw that happen.)

It is this very sense of dislocation and disjunction, this distrust of the selective
process that is memory (that is writing itself), which informs 'A Sketch of the
Past'. One of the most interesting aspects of this dislocation, I would argue, is
the way in which it relates to place, as well as to time. I cited earlier a
frequently quoted passage from the opening paragraphs of 'A Sketch of the
Past', and noted that the scene took place in a train carriage, moving between St
Ives, where the Stephens' had a summer house, and London, where they spent
the winters. Another much quoted passage from the memoir follows that very
scene, suggesting that St Ives represents home, wholeness, a feminine closeness
to the mother, to childhood, to language itself:

If life has a base that it stands upon, if it is a bowl that one fills and fills and
fills—then my bowl without a doubt stands upon this memory. It is of lying
half asleep, half awake, in bed in the nursery at St Ives. It is of hearing the
waves breaking, one, two, one, two, and sending a splash of water over the
beach; and then breaking, one, two, one, two, behind a yellow blind. It is of
hearing the blind draw its little acorn across the floor as the wind blew the blind
out. It is of lying and hearing this splash and seeing this light, and feeling, it is
almost impossible that I should be here; of feeling the purest ecstasy I can
conceive.

This passage, with its seductively womblike, secure, pre-oedipal sense of
wholeness, evidently resonates with Freudian echoes, associations and
speculations for many contemporary Woolf critics. And yet it is out of
separation—the disjunction of what Woolf calls 'I now' and 'I then', that
autobiography is made. Not only that, but time and place intersect in
extremely complex ways in 'A Sketch of the Past' in order to enable the telling
of that most personal of stories, the story of oneself. It is quite clear that Woolf
intentionally brings time and space into precisely such a complex interrelation,
in a way which has not perhaps been fully appreciated by critics keen to
emphasise the Freudian qualities of the narrative:

96 Virginia Woolf, 'A Sketch of the Past', op. cit., p. 81.
97 Ibid., p. 75.
98 Ibid., p. 87.
Those moments—in the nursery, on the road to the beach—can still be more real than the present moment [...] At times I can go back to St Ives more completely than I can this morning. I can reach a state where I seem to be watching things happen as if I were there. That is, I suppose, that my memory supplies what I had forgotten, so that it seems as if it were happening independently, though I am really making it happen.99

Linda Anderson, however, is one critic who does acknowledge that the memories in ‘A Sketch of the Past’ are ‘essentially unlocated in time’, and who points to the way in which those memories

are associated with a place, St Ives, which exists both as a real place and as a symbolic topography, where the memories ‘hang together’, fuse and join [...] [T]he paradox is, of course, that this place only exists retrospectively, nostalgically, when it can be represented.100

And yet Woolf herself seems well aware that it is even more complex than this, that St Ives and London in fact co-exist in a symbiotic, dialogic relationship which itself gives rise to the creative tension which enables the process of writing.101 She remembers, for example, how it seemed natural, on her daily walks, to compare Kensington Gardens unfavourably with St Ives, and recalls how the Flower Walk of Kensington was sometimes ‘strewn’ with shells which, to her great pleasure, ‘had little ribs on them, like the shells on the beach’.102 It is at such moments, when Woolf brings St Ives into Kensington Gardens and makes her Cornish existence alive in—and, indeed, an essential part of—her London existence, that she succeeds in conveying the creativity with which her ‘other’, summer existence suffuses her drab winter life in London, and, indeed, becomes an inseparable part of it. While, as Woolf wrote, ‘[n]on-being made up a great proportion of our time in London’, the Broad Walk in Kensington would become all the more exciting and attractive because it could be compared

99 Ibid., p. 77.
101 In choosing to focus upon this creative tension, I am aware that I am overriding a persistently popular strand in feminist criticism on Woolf, namely that Woolf’s identifications with both her ‘matriarchal’ and ‘patriarchal’ heritages caused a psychic split, which was geographically embodied, according to Susan Squier, for example, by St Ives and London respectively. See Susan Squier, *Virginia Woolf and London: The Sexual Politics of the City* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1985).
with Halse Town Bog near St Ives—or Halestown Bog, as the young Stephens insisted upon calling it, reminding the reader that they were, after all, summer settlers for whom Cornwall was fascinatingly other, a place that they could perhaps only appropriate, linguistically and otherwise.\textsuperscript{103}

Symbolic topographies and a collective unconscious: Bloomsbury

The significance of place, as well as of time, in the creative process is therefore a crucial element of \textit{Moments of Being} as well as of Kate Roberts's \textit{Y Lôn Wen}. A heightened awareness of the importance of place has been enabled in this chapter by the foregrounding of a Welsh autobiography immersed in culturally conditioned notions of place and community. To apply such an emphasis to interpretations of \textit{Moments of Being} is to be reminded of the intersection not only of community and generic tradition, but also of time and place, resulting in a symbolic topography. Interestingly, both converge in Woolf's autobiographical writings in a repeated use of the image of house and home as representing the parameters of the community of the Stephen family itself and, subsequently of the equally exclusive and equally literary community that was Woolf's peer group, Bloomsbury. In her second contribution to the Memoir Club, for example ('Old Bloomsbury', delivered around 1921-1922), Woolf urges her audience to picture her childhood home:

But it is the house that I would ask you to imagine for a moment for, though Hyde Park Gate seems now so distant from Bloomsbury, its shadow falls across it. 46 Gordon Square could never have meant what it did had not 22 Hyde Park gate preceded it.\textsuperscript{104}

Similarly, at the end of the same piece, in which she has brought her audience up to the present day, Woolf questions—and thereby reaffirms—the parameters of the Bloomsbury Group:

But here again it becomes necessary to ask—where does Bloomsbury end? What is Bloomsbury? Does it for instance, include Bedford Square? Before the war, I think we should most of us have said 'Yes'. When the history of Bloomsbury is

\textsuperscript{103} Ibid., pp. 89 and 88 respectively.

\textsuperscript{104} Virginia Woolf, 'Old Bloomsbury', \textit{Moments of Being}, op. cit., p. 184.
written—and what better subject could there be for Lytton’s next book?—there will have to be a chapter, even if it is only in the appendix, devoted to Ottoline.¹⁰⁵

Bedford Square was the home in which Ottoline Morrell (wife of Phillip Morell and longstanding mistress of Bertrand Russell) entertained her artistic friends, hoping to inspire them to greatness by providing a suitable atmosphere in which they could fraternise.¹⁰⁶ But of course, these are facts which Woolf would not have had to explain to her audience, composed as it was of a ‘group of close friends of long standing’ that was Bloomsbury, a group well acquainted with London, but a group whose collective symbolic topography, so to speak, was constituted of the same few addresses.¹⁰⁷ Similarly, while the Memoir Club contributions certainly reveal a different aspect of Woolf the autobiographer, playing to her audience, the shadow of 22 Hyde Park Gate nevertheless looms over these intimate Bloomsbury gatherings. Once more, it is Christopher Dahl who makes explicit the historical and literary connections:

More generally, however, the Memoir Club contributions participate in family tradition because they take us back to the earliest roots of that tradition in the Stephen family. In their clannishness and exclusivity, in their sense of being in but not of the world, in their willingness to criticise each other unspARINGly but affectionately, and in their commitment to a new creed, the Bloomsbury Group .... were very much like their Evangelical ancestors in the Clapham Sect. The membership of the Memoir Club was virtually identical with that of the original Bloomsbury Group, and Woolf’s contributions repeatedly remind her audience of their membership in a special group.¹⁰⁸

Thus Woolf’s community, just like that of Kate Roberts, has both a symbolic topography and a collective unconscious. Even more importantly, for this consideration of Woolf’s autobiography, situated as it is at the intersection of gender and genre, that collective unconscious is one which can be connected with a particular literary tradition and heritage, one which makes certain demands upon those who participate in its culture, but one from which Woolf managed eventually to distance herself emotionally and aesthetically by the

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 204.
¹⁰⁶ See, for example, Miranda Seymour, Ottoline Morrell: Life on the Grand Scale (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1992).
¹⁰⁸ Christopher Dahl, op. cit., 188.
time she came to write her final piece of autobiographical writing, ‘A Sketch of
the Past’, in 1939.

Conclusion
A comparative reading of Y Lôn Wen and Moments of Being shows, therefore,
how they follow similar trajectories, despite the evident differences between
their authors in terms of class and culture. The most striking similarity between
these stories of the artist as a young woman lies in their gendered engagements
with autobiography, with the spectre of the Angel in the House looming large
over both texts, for all her culturally specific permutations. A consideration of
such questions in the context of community and genre points, however, to the
enormous differences, especially in terms of tradition and audience, between Y
Lôn Wen and Moments of Being. Roberts’s autobiography, rooted as it is in a
clearly mapped tradition of autobiography with its beginnings in the nineteenth-
century cofiant nonetheless serves to remind the reader of the equally
demanding aesthetic contract that was autobiography for Woolf. Reared within
a longstanding family tradition of autobiography, and the daughter of one of the
most famous biographers in Victorian England, Woolf’s autobiographical
writing, just as much as that of Roberts, is marked by a constant engagement
with a community tradition, even if her project eventually extends to a
questioning of the process of autobiography itself.

In the chapter which follows I shall continue with my analysis of such
preoccupations—audience and community, tradition and innovation—in the
context of modernism. In Chapter 2, I shall also maintain my deliberately
oblique approach to Kate Roberts and Virginia Woolf. Rather than paying
attention to such important and formally experimental works as Woolf’s To the
Lighthouse and Roberts’s Stryd y Glep [Gossip Row], I shall turn my attention
to their short stories, thus exploring the fringes of modernism from the
perspective of a genre generally considered peripheral to it.109

109 Virginia Woolf, To the Lighthouse, op. cit.; Kate Roberts, Stryd y Glep [Gossip Row]
(Denbigh: Gwasg Gee, 1949).
CHAPTER 2

Negotiations with tradition: the short fiction

As I argued in Chapter 1, the autobiographies of Kate Roberts and Virginia Woolf raise several issues central to their work, including the strong connection between the creative process and the reconstruction of the past. Of particular interest, I suggested, is the extent to which these autobiographies can be considered as individual expressions of a cultural contract held between the writer and her audience, therefore providing a useful index not only of her own life and the manner in which she represents it, but also of the community of readers for whom she is writing. However, one issue which remains largely extraneous to the autobiographies, due to their focus on pre-adulthood, is one which is crucial to an understanding of the work of both Roberts and Woolf—that of the relationship between the writer and the politics of her age and culture. It is this relationship which I intend to explore in some detail in this chapter in terms of each author’s personal development of a political aesthetics, while continuing with the central preoccupation of this thesis, namely the connections between genre and cultural identity between the two world wars, and their expression in the work of two British women writers.

Kate Roberts and the Welsh short story: the absence of tradition

The focus of my attention in this chapter will be the short stories written by Roberts and Woolf at a time when modernist artistic activity was at its peak. As Raymond Williams has asserted, modernism and, more particularly, the modernist metropolis, need to be reassessed in terms of both geography and economics:

It is then necessary to explore, in all its complexity of detail, the many variations in this decisive phase of modern practice and theory. But it is also time to explore it with something of its own sense of strangeness and distance, rather than with the comfortable and now internally accommodated forms of its incorporation and naturalization. This means, above all, seeing the imperial and capitalist metropolis as a specific historical form, at different stages: Paris, London, Berlin, New York. It involves looking, from time to time, from outside the metropolis: from the deprived hinterlands, where different forces are
moving, and from the poor world which has always been peripheral to the
metropolitan systems.¹

To look towards modernist London from across the border, from the ‘deprived
hinterlands’ of Wales—and there were areas of Wales, especially the industrial
South Wales valleys, which were desperately deprived during the 1920s and
’30s—is to see it as the specific imperial and capitalist ‘historical form’ of
Williams’ critique. To examine the short fiction published by Kate Roberts
between the wars, for example, is to effect precisely the kind of
defamiliarisation of the modernist metropolis for which Williams argues. For
while Virginia Woolf was receiving great acclaim in London and New York for
her increasingly experimental novels, *To the Lighthouse*, *Mrs Dalloway*, and
*The Waves*, Kate Roberts was writing realist short stories for an increasingly
politicised Welsh audience, stories which, by the very nature of the minority
language in which they were written, were destined never to participate in
modernist culture.²

However, even if Roberts had written her stories in English, it is
doubtful that they would have been admitted to a modernist canon, since—as is
now widely acknowledged—the short story occupied an inferior position in the
modernist hierarchy. Valerie Shaw, for example, argues that:

[T]he genre has not been assigned any definitive role in accounts of modernism,
which invariably focus on poetry and the novel. The short story suffers
particular disadvantages, it is not readily associated with a developing tradition
represented by literary figures about whose stature there is wide agreement.³

Shaw’s arguments relate to mainstream European and American short stories,
and, as I shall show, Wales’s relationship with modernism was in any case quite
different from that of the mainstream. Nevertheless, when Kate Roberts began
publishing her stories in the 1920s, the short story in Welsh was also a modern
genre which suffered from the fact that it could not be ‘readily associated with a

developing tradition’. As early as 1928, Roberts herself recognised this ‘absence of tradition’, as she called it:

Mae gennym ganrifoedd lawer o draddodiad y tu cefn i’n barddoniaeth a rhyw ganrif neu ddwy y tu cefn i’n rhyddiaith. Erbyn heddiw mae defftro ym myd rhydddiaith yng Nghymru, ac mae pawb yn ysgrifennai storfau byrion a storfau eraill; a phan ddaw rhywbeth newydd i’n gwlad, rhuthra pawb i ddechrau adeiladu heb feddwiliam y sylfaen.

We have many centuries of tradition behind our poetry, and a century or two behind our prose. By today there is an awakening in the world of prose in Wales, and everyone is writing short stories and other stories; and when something new comes to our country, everyone rushes to begin building without thinking about the foundation.

As Roberts pointed out elsewhere, if there are only a few writers of fiction compared with poets, then the number of critics of fiction will also be comparatively few. As late as 1952, she was still complaining that prose was not accorded the critical attention it deserved:

It seems to me that we never gave a minute of our time to study prose. In contrast with poetry, we look upon prose as everyday speech polished up a little, like a woman putting her best coat over her work clothes to go to chapel. Prose

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4 Kate Roberts, ‘Problemau llenorion Cymraeg’ [The Problems facing Welsh Writers], in Erthyglau ac Ysgrifau llenyddol Kate Roberts, op. cit., p. 253. This article was originally published in Y Faner, 19 October, 1949.

5 Kate Roberts, ‘Y Nofel Gymraeg’ [The Welsh Novel], Erthyglau ac Ysgrifau llenyddol Kate Roberts, ed. David Jenkins, op. cit., p. 232. This article was first published in Y Llenor VII (1928).

6 Kate Roberts, ‘Prinder Llyfrau Cymraeg’ [The Lack of Books in Welsh], Erthyglau ac Ysgrifau llenyddol Kate Roberts, ed. David Jenkins, op. cit., p. 261. This article was originally published in Y Faner, 23 July 1952.

7 Ibid., p. 261.
does not have to be poetic, but surely enough attention needs to be given to expression (not correctness, that tool has to be clean before we begin) to the rhythm of our sentences, to our vocabulary and to balance and similar things. But how many times have we read a review of a novel in Welsh which does not pay any attention to those things? The reviewer tossing and turning over the characters and their values, weighing them up and measuring them, without one sentence in the story showing that the author has any kind of style at all, only writing as if he was asking for his errand in the shop all the way through. You have to have that kind of Welsh in a novel connecting other things, but if that is the Welsh of the novel all the way through, then it clearly shows that the author cannot write a story either.

Her disappointment at the lack of a critical discourse on short stories, in particular, seems to have been well founded, judging from the critical criteria offered by the magazines and papers which were largely responsible for the development of the genre during the earliest decades of the twentieth century. The single criterion that was repeatedly offered was that the subject-matter of the story should be Welsh or Welshness. The editor of Papur Pawb [Everyone’s Paper], for example, insisted that: ‘[W]e want stories about Wales [set] in Wales’. According to one account, the Eisteddfod committees appear to have been similarly restrictive, perhaps as a consequence of some confusion about more strictly aesthetic definitions of the short story:

The Eisteddfod committee was extremely uncertain at the beginning of the century as to what a short story was, or what it should be. Year after year they asked for a tale or story depicting Welsh life.

Such criteria reflected an interest in the short story which extended no further than plot and characterisation; newspaper editors and literary committee members were clearly interested in content rather than in the form itself.

As Roberts became increasingly committed to the short story as her primary literary medium, she sought to correct this critical imbalance between poetry and prose in her own literary journalism. Her range of references was broad, encompassing the biblical story of the Prodigal Son at one end of the

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spectrum, and James Joyce's *Ulysses* at the other.\(^9\) While her reading notes and letters show that she in fact read widely in English—she professed a particular liking for Katherine Mansfield, for example—she also read translations, in both Welsh and English, of Chekhov, Maupassant, Strindberg, Daudet, Pirandello and Balzac, to name but a few.\(^11\) She wrote in one article that it was ‘perfectly all right’ for the Welsh short story writer to look to other countries for literary frameworks or ‘patterns’, arguing that the ‘weakness and strength and yearning of humanity are the same everywhere’.\(^12\) However, she insisted, ‘we [Welsh writers] must paint these things in the colours of our own country’.\(^13\) She attempted to establish Welsh antecedents for the modern short story in earlier prose forms, arguing, for example, that those wishing to learn the craft of short story writing should immerse themselves in the simple, straightforward and concise Welsh of the tales of the Mabinogi.\(^14\) She was especially interested in the connections between the modern short story and the lyric poem of the Welsh tradition:

Ond mae a wnelo stori fer a thelyneg â rhyw un peth, rhyw un fath o brofiad, rhyw un mwd, rhyw un digwyddiad, rhyw un agweddr gymeriad; rhyweth wedi ei gipio o holl brofiadau bywyd a’i wasgu fel lafant rhwng papur sidan, ac yna gollwng ei beraroglau i’r ystafell.\(^15\)

*But a short story and a lyric have to do with some one thing, a single kind of experience, a single mood, some one event, a particular attitude to a character; something snatched from all of life’s experiences and pressed like lavender between silk paper which then releases its perfume into the room.*

\(^9\) Ibid., p. 206.  
\(^10\) Kate Roberts, ‘Y Stori Fer Gymraeg’ [The Welsh Short Story], *Erthyglau ac Ysgrifau Llenyddol Kate Roberts*, op. cit., p. 239. This article was originally published in *Y Faner*, 21 April 1931.  
\(^11\) Roberts refers approvingly to Katherine Mansfield, for example, in a letter to Saunders Lewis on 11 October 1923, *Annwyl Kate, Annwyl Saunders: Gohebiaeth 1923-1983*, op. cit., p. 6. She refers to translations of Chekhov *et al.* in ‘Sut i Sgrifennu Stori Fer’ [How to Write a Short Story], *Erthyglau ac Ysgrifau Llenyddol Kate Roberts*, op. cit., p. 246. This article was originally published in *Lleufer* 3 (1947).  
\(^12\) Kate Roberts, ‘Y Nofel Gymraeg’, op. cit., p. 232.  
\(^13\) Ibid., p. 232.  
\(^14\) Kate Roberts, ‘Sut i sgrifennu stori fer’, op. cit., p. 245.  
\(^15\) Kate Roberts, ‘Y Stori Fer Gymraeg’, op. cit., p. 238.
Finally, Roberts tried to provide a historical context for the short story in Welsh in order to encourage critical recognition of the development of the genre. She wrote several articles on her literary predecessors, including Glasynys, Richard Hughes Williams, Winnie Parry, and Fanny Edwards who, along with R. Dewi Williams and T. Gwynn Jones, made a substantial contribution to the development of the genre as a modern form. Richard Hughes Williams is most widely acknowledged as a pioneer in the field, and it is perhaps for this reason that Roberts wrote about him most frequently. Another reason for her predilection for the work of this author may well have been because, in addition to being a writer worthy of praise in her eyes, he was also a native of her village of birth, and many of his stories had their roots in his experiences as a quarry worker there.

Establishing a realist tradition: Kate Roberts's short stories as discourses of place

It is in fact not at all surprising that Roberts expressed such warm approval of Richard Hughes Williams's realistic portrayals of quarry life: as Hywel Teifi Edwards has shown, and as the reader will remember from the previous chapter of this thesis, the literary power of nostalgic representations of place were extremely dominant in Welsh literary culture at the time. While notions of the rural village as an idealised topos of literary Welsh nationhood had their origins in the Welsh appropriation of the English picturesque, they were manipulated and transformed in the early twentieth century by cultural figures such as O. M. Edwards into highly politicised expressions of modern Welsh identity. This preoccupation with the village topos certainly appears to dominate in the three collections of short stories published by Roberts between the wars, while the critical reception which they received among her peers indicates the extent to which these concerns had pervaded Welsh literary discourse more generally. One of the most striking consequences of this almost obsessive focus on place

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16 Several of these articles are collected in Erthyglau ac Ysgrifau Llenyddol Kate Roberts, op. cit.
17 See Chapter 1, [pp. 16-17], of this thesis.
was a critical demand for realism, which Roberts appears to have fulfilled more than willingly. Several of her earliest stories were published in magazines in the four years preceding the publication in 1925 of her first collection, *O Gors y Bryniau* [From the Marsh of the Hills]. Most were printed in O. M. Edwards’s *Cymru*, and in *Y Llenor* (established in 1922 under the editorship of W. J. Gruffydd). *O Gors y Bryniau* portrays select and significant moments in the lives of the villagers of a quarrying community in North Wales. A young man leaves his apprenticeship in the town in order to work in the quarry near his native village; a married woman teeters on the brink of suicide—intending to throw herself into a local pond—when her husband’s bullying behaviour finally overwhelms her; a widow ceases to find her lover attractive, seeking consolation instead in the care she lavishes on her young calf. Stories such as these—‘Prentisiad Huw’ [Huw’s Apprenticeship], ‘Pryfocio’ [Provocation] and ‘Y Wraig Weddw’ [The Widow]—depict the rural village as a fixed and immutable location. In stories such as ‘Y Llythyr’ [The Letter], set in Liverpool, and ‘Hiraeth’ [Homesickness], narrated from a southern mining town, the connection between these settings and the native rural village from which the protagonist originates seems more tenuous, and yet the northern quarrying community remains the location, in that it is the displacement from the native village which is explored. Thus, in ‘The Letter’, Wmffra gazes into the fireplace at his lodgings, only to imagine the fire at home and thereby to indulge in nostalgia for the home he has been forced to leave in order to find employment:

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18 The following short stories were published by Kate Roberts in magazines before she published her first collection: ‘Prentisiad Huw’ [Huw’s Apprenticeship], in *Cymru* 61, 369 (1922), 135-138; ‘Y Chwarel yn Galw’n òl’ [The Quarry Calling Back], in *Cymru* 63, 372 (1922), 10-12, ‘Y Man Geni’ [The Birth Mark], in *Cymru* 63, 375 (1922), 101-102; ‘Y Llythyr’ [The Letter], in *Y Llenor* II, 2 (1923), 86-89; ‘Pryfocio’ [Provoking], in *Y Llenor*, II, 4 (1923), 225-230; ‘Y Wraig Weddw’ [The Widow], *Y Llenor*, III, 2, (1924), 73-81; ‘Bywyd’ [Life], in *Y Llenor*, IV, 3 (1925), 129-134; ‘Henaint’ [Old Age], in *Y Llenor*, III, 4, (1924), 219-225. ‘The Quarry Calling Back’ was published under the title ‘Hiraeth’ [Homesickness] in Roberts’s first collection, and ‘Life’ was published as ‘The Ruts of Life’ when it became the title-story of Roberts’s second collection, *Rhigolau Bywyd* [The Ruts of Life] (Aberystwyth: Gwasg Aberystwyth, 1929).

19 One notable exception is ‘Y Man Geni’ [The Birthmark], which ventures into the realms of myth.
Eisteddai Wmffra wrth y tân, ei ŋen ar ei wasgod, a’i ddwylo yn ei bocedi, ei draed dan y gadair a’i lygaid ar ffyn y grât, yn edrych rhynghddant i’r tân a thrwy’r tân i dŷ bychan mewn pentref bychan yn Sir Gaernarfon. [...] Gwelai ei gegin ei hun gartref, heb fod lawr mor dwt â hon, eto cyn dwtied ag y gadawai chwecch o blant a dau filgi a thywydd gwlyb iddi fod; dim heyrn o flaen y tân, ond stôl bren isel hir, y gallech ddodi eich traed amri heb ofni clywed pregeth gan eich gwraig, a’ch dau ben glin ar ddannedd y grât.

Wmffra sat by the fire, his chin on his chest, hands in his pockets, his feet under the chair and his eyes on the bars of the grate, staring between them at the fire and through the fire at a cottage in a small village in Caernarvonshire [...]. Wmffra saw a vision. His own kitchen at home, not quite as tidy as this, but tidy as you could expect it with six children and two greyhounds and the rain; no fire irons, but a long, low wooden stool you could put your feet on without risk of a lecture from your wife, your knees up against the grate.

W. J. Gruffydd, reviewing O Gors y Bryniau in Y Llenor in 1925, argues that it is precisely the centrality of the northern village as a site of representation, as the filter through which Kate Roberts’s narrators mediate their stories, which has stimulated her creative ‘muse’, resulting in this collection, a ‘masterpiece’. He goes on to assert that:

we must look upon this book as an important milestone in our literary growth, and we expect, further, that those who imitate Miss Roberts (like those whom I have seen so doing already) will understand the excellence integral to her work.

The cultural inclusiveness intimated by Gruffydd’s reference to ‘our literary growth’ is bolstered further by his conclusion, in which he says that he has tried in this review: ‘to show my fellow countrypeople why (as I see it) O Gors y Bryniau has cast all of the short stories of Wales [published prior to this collection] into the shade’. Due to the language which is his medium, of course, Gruffydd’s fellow readers are also his fellow countrypeople—a reminder of the extent to which to form a reading or writing identity is also to form a national identity.

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20 Kate Roberts, ‘Y Llythyr’, O Gors y Bryniau (Wrexham: Hughes a’i Fab, 1925), p. 79. The edition from which I am quoting here is the 1926 edition; all page numbers referred to hereafter also refer to this edition.
23 Ibid., p. 256.
24 Ibid., p. 256.
In his review of Roberts’s second collection of short stories, *Rhigolau Bywyd a storiau eraill* [The Ruts of Life and other stories], published in 1929, Saunders Lewis discerns a maturing of her style: 

> `The new book [...] is the work of a matured talent. It is achievement and not promise. Here a very good writer has found her theme and method and her style'.

He even goes so far as to hail it as a ‘Welsh classic’:

> As I write the decade of the nineteen-twenties is moving out. Looking back reminiscently at the Welsh prose of that decade I incline to think that the two books which are above all others certain of a permanent place among the classics of Welsh literature are the ‘Ysgrifau’ [Essays] of Mr. Parry-Williams, and this book of short stories ‘Rhigolau Bywyd’.

Lewis seems peculiarly concerned to establish Kate Roberts’s brand of ‘Welsh classicism’ as somehow dateless and untouched by the literature of England. Similarly, in an interview conducted with her some years later, he said of her characters:

> And, reading about them, I would not place them with anything in modern English or foreign literature, but with the characters of the first ancient poets of Greece, Hesiod, or Homer himself [...] These Greek things, this dateless and fashionless classicism, that is to me the charm and power of your stories.

However, it is difficult to agree that *Rhigolau Bywyd* can be so easily removed from its historical context, let alone any other kind of context. It is certainly not dateless, as practically every story in the collection deals with the emotional concerns of women of various ages, concerns which by their nature alone point to the position of women in a Welsh Nonconformist society during the first half of this century. Considered as a whole, the volume can be read as an exploration of the vagaries of sexual and romantic attraction as opposed to the stability and claustrophobia of marriage. The collection is peopled by women who ponder upon the difficulties of married life, the prime problem explored being that of the loss of romance and physical attraction. In the title-story, for

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example, Beti Gruffydd is suddenly struck by the fact that she and her husband are becoming old, a realisation which causes her to consider their married life together afresh, and brings her to some depressing conclusions:

Beti looked for a long while at her husband. She hadn't given him so much thought since before she married. At that time Dafydd Gruffydd was one in a thousand, but by today living with him had made him very much like the rest of the thousand. Beti had too much common sense to fool herself that the romance of courting continues very long after marrying.

Similarly, in 'The Loss', Annie Williams, who has been married only eighteen months, feels that when she married she 'lost a lover in gaining a husband'. 31 In 'The Wind', a young girl is thwarted by her father and disappointed by her lover, while in the final story in the collection, 'A Summer's Day', Roberts depicts a dissolute young man who has made a young girl pregnant, to the disappointment of his mother. The most daring story of the collection, 'Christmas', explores a young girl's fear that she will lose a close female friend when she gets married. A queer reading of another story by Roberts, 'Y Trysor' [The Treasure], has suggested a lesbian sensibility on the part of Roberts, expressed in her sensual descriptions of close relationships between women. 32 Such a reading could certainly be extended to include 'Christmas', which closes on a sombre note, as Olwen stands at the station, waiting for her lover, Gwilym, but thinking of her friend, Miss Davies:

Sylweddolodd o'r diwedd beth a olygai ei llythyr iddi bore fory, beth a olygai ei phriodi iddi, pan ddigwyddai hymny. Aeth ei choesau i grynnu, teimlai fel Judas, sut bynnag y teimlodd hwnnw pan &adychodd ei Arglwydd. Clywai'r tren yn dyfod i mewn. Fel y torrai ei waedd ar ei chlyw, aeth rhyweth fel cylllell drwy ei henaid hithau. Gwelai ddynees o fewn dwyflwydd i'w thrigain yn sefyll yn ei

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29 Kate Roberts, 'Rhigolau Bywyd', Rhigolau Bywyd, op. cit., p. 6.
32 Richard Crowe, 'Llên y Cymry, Hoyw, (Try)loyw?', Taliesin 93, Spring, 1996, n. b. 75-76.
thy ar fore Nadolig a bob bore ar ôl hynny byth yn unig, a llenni a chlustogau wedi colli eu llw ac wedi gwywo yn gefndir iddi.\footnote{Kate Roberts, ‘Nadolig’, Rhigolau Bywyd, p. 36.}

She finally realised what her letter would mean to [Miss Davies] the following morning, and what her marriage would mean to her, when that came about. Her legs began to tremble, she felt like Judas when he betrayed his Lord. She heard the train coming in. As it screeched fit to break her eardrums, she felt her soul being pierced as if by a knife. She saw a woman two years short of sixty standing in her house alone on Christmas morning and every morning after that, against a background of faded curtains and withered cushions.

The closing lines of the story are indeed suggestive, if not of a bisexual identity, then at least of divided allegiances—when Olwen hears the screech of the train ‘she felt her soul being pierced as if by a knife [literally: something like a knife went through her soul]’—and once more depict a woman who anticipates her imminent marriage with some unwillingness.

The stories in Rhigolau Bywyd are certainly not dateless, therefore. Rather, they reflect the concerns of a generation of women who had reached maturity in an age which heralded previously unimaginable freedoms for their sex—particularly in the fields of education, work, and enfranchisement. Many of Kate Roberts’ protagonists like Kate Roberts herself at this time, were often professional single women (usually in their twenties and early thirties), working and living away from their native village, earning their own money and living independently. However, it is true that most of the stories in this collection, in keeping with so much of Kate Roberts’s work, are highly successful exercises in realism, set in an easily recognisable Welsh location. As such, they hardly seem to have been touched at all by the influences of European, and especially English, modernism. When Rhigolau Bywyd was published, Kate Roberts was living in the future capital of Wales, Cardiff, and yet, even there, she seems to have felt distant from metropolitan and modernist values. Looking back on this period, she comments:

Rhiwbina was a Welsh garden suburb. All the streets had mellifluous Welsh names chosen by W. J. Gruffydd himself who lived there, the centre of a blossoming intellectual elite [...] My business was to write short stories and
novels they said. And I longed to agree with them. I longed for the leisure to
develop the cutting edge of modernism, to absorb the atmosphere of experiment
I knew was in the air. But I also knew their comfortable and complaisant
lifestyle was not for me.34

Elsewhere, she explained why it was so important for Welsh writers to look
back, to hold on to tradition instead of throwing caution to the winds by
indulging in modernist experimentation:

Mae’r rhan fwyaf o lenorion Cymru yn ymdeimlo â’r broblem o ddirywiad eu
hiaith a’u diwylliant, ac maent yn rhoddi a’u hegfi i geisio gwella
pethau—nid er mwyn iddynt gael mwy o ddarllenwyr i’w gweithiau [...] eithr y
mae eu hymwybyddiaeth o’u cysylltiad â gorffennol eu cenedl mor gryf fel na
fedrant feddwl am i’w diwylliant a’u hiaith farw. Ac os yw llenor yn llenor
Cymraeg cywir, ni all beidio â bod yn un â gorffennol ei genedl ac yn un â’i
dyfodol hefyd, ac felly gwng bo math o fawr ei allu i gadw iaith a diwylliant ei
genodl yn fyw.35

Most Welsh writers [are conscious of] the problem of the degeneration of their
language and culture, and they give their time and energy to try to improve
things—not in order to have more readers for their works [...] but their
awareness of their connection with their nation’s past is so strong that they
cannot think about their language and their culture dying. And if a writer is a
proper Welsh writer, he cannot but be at one with his nation’s past and at
one with his nation’s future too, and so he will do everything within his power to
keep his nation’s language and culture alive.

Nevertheless, Roberts complains in this same article that too many Welsh
writers see their creative time swallowed up by their political pursuits. In
another essay, she sighs for the freedom of the English writer, who has the time
and money to write novels, while Welsh writers have so many urgent politcal
calls on their time that this is impossible.36 All the same, her recognition of the
political urgency of the Welsh situation—and it needs to be borne in mind that
the percentage of Welsh-speakers fell by almost half between 1901 and
1951—remained unwavering, and her support of Plaid Cymru unstinting.37

34Quoted in translation by Emyr Humphreys, The Triple Net: A Portrait of the Writer Kate
36 Ibid. p. 257.
67-68. Nia Williams chronicles Kate Roberts’s early political activity in “Fy laith, fy Ngwlad,
fy Nghenedl”: Hanes Ymgyrchoedd Gwleidyddol Kate Roberts 1915-1961’ [“My Language,
My Country, My Nation”: The History of Kate Roberts’s Political Campaigns 1915-1961’,
Roberts’s commitment to traditional Welsh realism rather than to experimental ‘un-Welsh’ or English modernism was, therefore, a self-conscious, politically rigorous decision rather than an intellectually or artistically naïve point of view. A handful of critics have recently proposed the reassessment of the work of some of Kate Roberts’s contemporaries in a modernist context: Simon Brooks, for example, has argued that T. H. Parry-Williams can be read as a modernist writer, while Jerry Hunter has paid attention to the combination of Romantic and modernist aesthetics in the work of T. Gwynn Jones. By contrast, during the period itself, modernism was frequently associated with Englishness and the upper classes, and therefore considered to be remote and irrelevant. W. J. Gruffydd, for example, noted disparagingly in 1927 (and somewhat paradoxically, considering Roberts’s quotation above regarding his apparent predilection for modernist aesthetics) that ‘the short story in England today is some awful stunt. It appears that it has two rules—firstly, that it should have no plot, [...] and secondly, that it should not be “interesting”’. As was noted earlier in this chapter, dominant cultural institutions such as the literary media and Eisteddfod committees insisted that Welshness was the essence of the short story as a genre. Nevertheless, short stories in languages other than English were frequently translated into Welsh and enthusiastically received by the public during the period, usually in magazines. Popular writers included Chekhov and Maupassant, and it seems that such story writers offered the Welsh gwerin an aesthetic and cultural framework within which to recreate and to represent themselves in a self-consciously contemporary, and thus pliable, genre. Kate Roberts herself comments, for example, that:

Yr hyn a wnaeth darllen straeon byrion o ieithoedd eraill i mi ydoedd, nid gwneud imi ddymuno dynwared eu dull, na benthycà dim oddi arnynt mewn unrhyw fodd, ond dangos imi fod deunydd llenyddiaeth ym mywyd fy ardal fy hun.[4]

39 W. J. Gruffydd, ‘Nodiadau’r Golygydd’ [Editor’s Notes], Y Llenor, IV, 2 (1927), 66.
40 Helen Ungoed Adler, op. cit., n.b. ‘Cyfieithiadau’ [Translations], pp. 18-47.
41 Kate Roberts, in Creff y Stori Fer [The Craft of the Short Story], op. cit., p. 11
What reading short stories from other languages did for me was neither make me wish to imitate their style, nor borrow anything from them in any way, but show me that there was the stuff of literature in the life of my own area.

Magazines were particularly eager to publish Welsh translations of stories from France, Russia, Spain, Sweden, Ireland and Bohemia, using cultural similarities such as those between the peasants of Russia and those of Wales, for example, and thus between their stories, to articulate a modern and politically potent Welsh identity. However, to such an extent did the Welsh-language literary culture of the period equate modernism with Englishness, that the same magazines consistently rejected stories written in Welsh which showed too English an influence.

The political aesthetics of ‘nowhere’ in ‘Y Gwynt’

Despite her political convictions, Roberts’s creative urge to experiment remained strong. In one radio interview conducted as late as 1947, for example, she comments speculatively in response to a question on new literary movements or tendencies:

Teimlo'r ydw'i na ddihysbyddwyd yr hen ddull o sgrifennu yn Gymraeg eto, er mae'n amlwg ei ddihysbyddu yn Saesneg, oblegid yr arbrofion newydd a geir o hyd. Mae arnaf ofn fy mod i yn rhy hen ffasiwn i fynd ar ôl y ffasiynau newydd yma, ond mae un awdur Saesneg y byddaf yn gweld y gellid efelychu ei dull yn Gymraeg, sef Miss Virginia Woolf. Cytunaf yn llwyr â hi na ddylid rhoi i lawr bob dim a wna neu ddyfyd y cymeriadau. Pwysicach yw yr argraffiadau a gaiff yr awdur ar ei feddwll, ac yn hyn o beth mae'r iaith Gymraeg yn iaith gyfaddas iawn i gyfeirio'r darluniau a'r meddylddrychau priodol, bu'n iaith barddoniaeth odiog ar hyd y canrifedd, ac mae idiom ei gwerin yn llawn darluniau ym yr eu siarad bob dydd, a chredaf y gellid nofel o'r teip yma yn Gymraeg.

I feel that the old way of writing in Welsh has not been exhausted yet, although such exhaustion is evident in English writing, on account of the new experiments still to be seen. I'm afraid that I'm too old fashioned to follow these new styles, but there is one English writer whose style I could see being imitated in Welsh, namely Miss Virginia Woolf. I completely agree with her that one should not record everything the characters do or say. The impressions made upon the mind of the author are more important, and in this the Welsh language is extremely suited to the implication of appropriate images and ideas, it was a

42 Helen Ungoed Adler, op. cit., p. 20.
43 Ibid., pp. 20-21.
language of poetic excellence through the centuries, and the idiom of the
everyday speech of its folk is highly visual, and I think that a novel of this kind
could be had in Welsh.

In spite of her usual adherence to realism, there is in fact one story in Rhigolau
Bywyd which shows something of the impressionistic quality of Woolf’s work,
as it is described by Roberts herself here. In ‘Y Gwynt’ [The Wind], the wind
functions as narrating voice through most of what is an extremely dreamlike
tale: its gentle, rhythmic, poetic sound can be compared to the six voices,
sometimes intertwined, sometimes disparate, in Woolf’s experimental prose-
poem/novel, The Waves.44 A traveller is told the story of a young woman who,
after falling in love with a sailor, is tempted to escape the dreary and drab
surroundings of her father’s public house (the geographical location of which,
in stark contrast to many of Roberts’s stories, remains vague). Finally
abandoned by her lover, the young woman, Doli, becomes transformed into the
wind-voice which relates the tale to the traveller. Interestingly, in view of Kate
Roberts’s own comments on the poetic nature of the Welsh language, and on
the potential richness of its relationship with experimental styles of narration
(‘it was a language of poetic excellence all through the centuries’), this voice is
introduced, literally, through poetry:

Edrychais allan. Nid oedd yn bwrw ar y prydd. Ond chwythai’r gwynt ddafnau
glaw ar fy ffenestr oddiarg fargod darn o’r gwesty a redai’n groes i’r hystafell l.
Troellai’r dafn yn y gwynt ar hynt ddiamcan ac yna disgynai ar chwarel fy
ffenesr. Redai’r lleuad yn gyflym ar gefindir glas tu ôl i gymylau llac, teneu a
hongiai yn yr awyr fel gwlân dafad wedi bod drwy glawdd drain. Euthum yn ôl
i’r gwely, ond er caur’r ffenesr deuai swn y gwynt a rhygnu’r sein a’r dafn glaw
yn disgyn ar y chwarel. Ethrh yn ysgafnach na chynt. Pwff o wynt, yna gwIch,
ac yna drawiad ysgafn y dafn glaw ar y gwydr. Cynecinnod fy nghlyst og ef
ymhen tipyn ac yn fuan suai’r swn trithlyg yma fi i gysgu.

Toc, ffurfioedd y swn yn llais a dywa a glywn mewn acen feddal,—

‘A welais ti y llanc penfelyn
A’m caraí i y dyddiau gynt?’45

I looked out. It was not raining now. But the wind was blowing drops of rain
on to my window from the gable of a part of the inn which ran at right-angles to
my room. The drop would dance aimlessly in the wind and then fall on the pane

of my window. The moon was running swiftly over a blue background behind loose thin clouds which hung in the air like the wool of a sheep after going through a quickset hedge. I went back to bed, but though I had shut the window, the sound of the wind and the swinging of the sign and the drop of rain falling on the window-pane still came to me. But more faintly than before. A puff of wind, then a squeak, then the light tap of the raindrop on the glass. My ear became accustomed to it, and soon this triple sound lulled me to sleep.

Presently, the sound became a voice, and this is what I heard in a soft accent:

   ‘Say have you seen the fair-haired lad,
       Who loved me in the days gone by?’

Significantly, ‘The Wind’ has been unenthusiastically received by critics. Saunders Lewis, for example, wrote to Roberts that it was ‘not amongst your best things’. Derec Llwyd Morgan has similarly suggested that

[This is the kind of story unexpected in Kate Roberts’s canon. The only connections between her world and ‘Y Gwynt’ are the monotony of the girl’s life and the sense of cosmic abandonment that pervades the whole piece.

Llwyd Morgan makes a clear distinction between Kate Roberts’s world and the world of ‘The Wind’, suggesting that the two are plotted on different maps, and thus ‘The Wind’ displaces itself, out of Kate Roberts’s canon. ‘It is a bit fanciful’, he concludes, thus intimating that the place of Kate Roberts’s stories, her canon, is reality, or at least realism.

The fact that ‘The Wind’ is a story of sexual release, as well as of release from the village topos, is a powerful indicator of the subversive undercurrents of the tale. Doli’s young sailor uproots her from the suffocating life in the public house, an escape which is mediated in terms of sexual pleasure:

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47 Saunders Lewis, in a letter to Kate Roberts dated 26 February 1928, Annwyl Kate, Annwyl Saunders: Gohebiaeth 1923-1983, op. cit., p. 32.
49 ibid., p. 37.

‘Though I had never danced before, it was not long before I was able to go round in my sailor’s arms. My head was whirling, and my feet hardly touched the floor. The soldiers made a single red patch. I had never before known what it was to feel the strong arms of a man about me. He was so close to me, and I felt a thrill as I felt his head almost on my shoulder. ’s"

And yet ‘The Wind’ is also filled with a sense of loss and of displacement. While the escape from realism seems empowering, it ultimately remains unsatisfying. The narrating wind voice describes how she is transformed into the wind itself and escapes from her restrictive lifestyle:

Codai’r gwynt ei ru allan, a meddyliwn mor braf a fyddai’n mynd ar y gwynt, peidio a stopio o gwbl ond mynd i rywle, mynd i bobman [...] Yr oedd hynny’n braf ar y dechrau i un oedd wedi bod yn ei hunfan am bum mlynedd ar hugain.

Ond buan y blinais.

The roar of the wind outside grew louder, and I thought how fine it would be to go with the wind, not to stop at all, but just to go somewhere, to go everywhere [...] This was fine to begin with for one who’d been in the same place for twenty-five years.

But I soon got tired.

Tiring of this freedom, the story and narrator also tire of themselves, as it were, petering out into nothingness: “‘Tired,” said the voice wearily’. The vacuum into which the girl escaped by becoming wind has left her with no identity, no map on which to plot that identity, politically or otherwise, and no voice, no language. ‘The Wind’ may still be Welsh, simply by virtue of the language which is the medium of its expression, but the process of storytelling is itself as displaced as is Doli, the woman/wind: this is no rooted Welsh narrator, but a body become voice. Doli’s story is also a narration within a narration: it is

54Ibid., p. 37.
framed by that of the traveller to whom she tells her tale and thus to a certain extent confined by that framework. It also, however, takes on a powerful role, that of the storyteller, appropriating the reader directly, as it were, and speaking to that reader of a topic frequently repressed in a great deal of Kate Roberts' own writing (and, perhaps more pertinently, in criticism of her work): female sexuality. This appropriation is effected through the medium of experimental prose reminiscent of the writing of Virginia Woolf. However, the way in which the story peters out intimates that this is no more than an act of empty ventriloquism in which Roberts temporarily echoes a modernist voice, only to be left dissatisfied and displaced.

And yet we should perhaps be wary of seeking too clearly defined a modernist impetus in Roberts's more unusual stories. Although she both admired the work of Virginia Woolf, and occasionally chafed under the yoke of a self-conscious Welsh anti-modernism, ‘The Wind’ does not merely represent an escape from a culturally conservative Welsh realism. Derec Llwyd Morgan has made the intriguing suggestion that ‘The Wind’ could actually be a prose exercise on the final verse of John Morris Jones’s poem, ‘Cwyn y Gwyt’ [The Wind’s Lament], thus rooting the text to a particular, Welsh, poetic tradition, while Roberts herself has explained that:

Ceisio gwneuthur rhywbeth at y Nadolig a wneuthum, a cheisio cael awyrghych gaeaf hen ffasiwn mewn tref hen ffasiwn, a thrwy hynny fod yn anonest â mi fy hun. Mae yna le i’r math yna o lenyddiaeth, ac mae yn nhref Caernarfon gystal llwyfan iddo ag unman. Gall miloedd o ysbydion dynion a lofruddion fod yn ymguddio yn ei chwrtudd culion. Ond rhaid cael cael rhyw William de Morgan o awdur ato, ac nid y fflw’r un i’w ysgrifennu.

What I did was to try to do something for Christmas, to try to have the atmosphere of an old-fashioned winter in an old-fashioned town, and through this to be dishonest to myself. There is a place for that kind of literature, and there is in the town of Caernarfon as good a stage for it as anywhere. There could be hundreds of spirits of murdered men and murderers hiding in its narrow courtyards. But you would have to have some author like William de Morgan for it, and I'm not the one to write it.

55 Derec Llwyd Morgan, Kate Roberts, op. cit., p. 37.
56 Kate Roberts, in a letter to Saunders Lewis dated 20 March 1928, Annwyl Kate, Annwyl
Two crucially important points are raised here. First, that Roberts had in fact been attempting to create an old-fashioned atmosphere in ‘The Wind’; hence the reference to the Victorian novelist William de Morgan. We could then ask why it is that the story’s impressionistic flavour lends itself to a modernist interpretation. While Roberts’ aesthetics can be seen as culturally conservative (and therefore, perhaps ‘traditional’), it is important to remember that, in terms of the modern short story as it was developing in Wales at the time, she was certainly at the ‘modern’ end of the spectrum. By the 1960s it was generally recognised that the modern short story in Welsh had two sources: the literary story influenced by short stories of different cultures in Europe and Russia, as introduced into Welsh culture mostly through the medium of the magazine, and the storyteller’s tale, the country or folk tale. According to critical consensus, D. J. Williams is the archetypal example in Welsh literature of the latter, the storyteller as defined by Walter Benjamin as deeply rooted in tradition and folklore, while Kate Roberts is a story writer who has appropriated and adapted European influences.

Dafydd Jenkins, for example, points to the Welsh oral tradition of storytelling as a prominent influence on D. J. Williams’s stories: the reader could imagine his characters relating these stories just as they are narrated in the text. By contrast, he maintains, Kate Roberts, while she also focuses on local characters and dialect, constructs a narrative that is literary, concise, dense and highly polished, to the extent that her text distances itself from her subjects. In these terms, Roberts is right when she says that she is not the person to write an old-fashioned tale which ventures into the realms of either the Welsh ‘chwedl’ (tale) or of Victorian fantasy. She might not have been a modernist, but she is still, in this sense, far too modern.

As noted by Dafydd Ifans, op. cit., William de Morgan (1839-1917) was a Victorian novelist who turned to novel-writing at the age of sixty-five following a career spent making colourful dishes under the influence of William Morris: ‘His first novel was Vance (1906)—an autobiographical novel about London in the 1850s. He published five other novels before his death’ (p. 35 footnote).

Walter Benjamin, ‘The Storyteller: Reflections on the works of Nikolai Leskov’, Illuminations, trans. Harry Zohn (London: Jonathan Cape, 1970), p. 84: ‘Experience which is passed from mouth to mouth is the source from which all storytellers have drawn. And among those who have written down the tales, it is the great ones whose written version differs least from the speech of the many nameless storytellers.’

Dafydd Jenkins, D. J. Williams (Cardiff: University of Wales Press [Writers of Wales series],
The second important point raised by Roberts in her own commentary on the composition of ‘The Wind’ is a reminder of the importance of place in Welsh aesthetics between the wars, especially following the establishment of the Welsh Nationalist Party in 1925. \(^{60}\) She writes that: ‘There is a place for that kind of literature, and there is in Caernarfon as good a stage for it as anywhere’. She therefore regards ‘Y Gwynt’ not only as a failure in style, but also as a failure in setting, because she did not follow her usual practice of rooting her characters in easily recognisable, if not named, locations. In this she is evidently bowing not only to her own political aesthetics, but also to those of her audience. Even a decade after the composition of ‘Y Gwynt’, the only stories in her third collection—Ffair Gaeaf [Winter Fair]—to come in for serious criticism from her reviewers were those which were not set in the North Walian idealised village of the Welsh-speaking community’s imagination.\(^{61}\) The stories in question are set in the mining areas of South Wales—far removed from Roberts’ native Rhosgadfan—and are vivid depictions of the poverty-stricken conditions of families in the Valleys who were suffering the effects of an increasingly depressed coal industry. Having spent eleven years living and teaching in Aberdare, Roberts was well placed to write on this subject, and to attempt to enter imaginatively into the minds and hearts of the people it affected.\(^{62}\) She was also determined that the final vestiges of Welshness remaining in the industrialised valleys should be rescued and revitalised as part of the nationalist crusade to save the language and culture. Many years later, she said of this period:

The valleys were more important than the city. The people living in the shadow of the tips and the tramways were still close enough to the Welsh experience to make it possible for us to reach them [...] you can’t conduct a life and death struggle for the life of a nation behind the hedges of a garden suburb. A whole

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\(^{60}\) D. Hywel Davies, The Welsh Nationalist Party 1925-1945: A Call to Nationhood, op. cit. See also Nia Williams, op. cit., and Chapter 5 of this thesis, for further discussions of Kate Roberts’s political activities.

\(^{61}\) Ffair Gaeaf a storlau erall (Denbigh: Gwasg Gee, 1937).

\(^{62}\) For information on Kate Roberts’s time as a teacher at the Girls’ Grammar School Aberdare (1917-1928), see Bro a Bywyd Kate Roberts, ed., Derec Llwyd Morgan (Arts Council of Wales, 1981) and Emyr Humphreys, The Triple Net, op. cit.
society was turning away from our language, culture, traditional way of life. Not just criticising it as we were eager to do: but deserting it in droves.\textsuperscript{53}

\textbf{Dispossession and the Depression: an alternative politics of place}

The two stories in \textit{Ffair Gaeaf} which are set in the Valleys, ‘Diwrnod i’r Brenin’ [Red-Letter Day] and ‘Gorymdaith’ [Protest March], describe an unusual day in the lives of two women worn down by poverty. In ‘Diwrnod i’r Brenin’, a gift of a few shillings from a relative enables Rachel Annie to escape the depression of a household which, since her mother died and her father was made unemployed, she has had to run on his father’s small unemployment allowance, eked out by her work as a seamstress:

Fe ddaeth y papur chweugain a’r dydd cyntaf o haf gyda'i gilydd yr un bore. Mewn ardal hyll, dlawd, lle mae mwy allan o waith nag sydd mewn gwaith, lle’r ymestyn y gaeaf ymhell dros y gwanwyn, mae croeso i’r ddau. Ar un o’r boreau hynny pan lifa’r haul i mewn dwyw’r ffenestr ar ôl wythnosau o wynt main, oer—bore a wna i rai lawenhau am y cânt wisgo’u dillad newydd, ac a wna i eraill dristâu am nad oes ganddynt ddillad newydd i’w gwisgo, daeth papur chweugain dwyw’r post i No. 187 Philip Street, cartref Wat Watcyn a’i ferch Rachel Annie, oddi wrth Mog, brawd Wat. Trawyd Rachel a syfrdandod rhy oer i fyned â’r Ilythyr i fyny i’w thad. Yr oedd pedair blynedd o fyw ar gythlwng wedi parlysu ei theimladau.\textsuperscript{64}

The ten-shilling note and the first day of summer arrived together the same morning. In a poor, ugly district, where there are more out of work than in, where winter stretches far into spring, both find a welcome. On one of those mornings when the sun flows in through the window after weeks of thin, cold wind, a morning that makes some rejoice because they can wear their new clothes, and that makes others grieve because they have no new clothes to wear, a ten-shilling note came through the post to no. 187 Philip Street, the home of Wat Watcyn and his daughter Rachel Annie, from Wat’s brother Mog. Rachel was turned too cold with astonishment to bring the letter up to her father. Four years of living on short rations had paralysed her feelings.\textsuperscript{65}

Similarly, in ‘Gorymdaith’, the protagonist, Bronwen, a young wife whose husband is also out of work, escapes the dark basement flat in which they live in order to take part in a protest march, only to be disillusioned even by

\textsuperscript{53}Quoted in translation by Emyr Humphreys, \textit{The Triple Net}, op. cit., pp. 32 and 33.
\textsuperscript{64}Kate Roberts, ‘Diwrnod i’r Brenin’, \textit{Ffair Gaeaf}, op. cit., pp. 31-43, p. 31. I am quoting from the 1993 edition here; all relevant page numbers referred to hereafter are taken from this 1993 edition.
socialist politics, which seem somehow irrelevant to the misery of her own life. Ironically, of the speeches which she hears, 'the only word that stuck in her mind was the word “proletariat” and she did not know the meaning of that'—presumably because she is a native Welsh speaker—an indication perhaps of the unhappy marriage of socialism and nationalism that informed Kate Roberts's politics. 66 Each story is beautifully constructed. ‘Diwrnod i'r Brenin', for example, is structured around Rachel's train journey out of and back into the valleys when she takes a day trip to Cardiff. The optimism of her outward journey, to the 'completely different country' that is the city, is countered by the depression that overwhelms her as the homeward bound train makes its way through the overcrowded terraces back to her home in the heart of the valleys. 67 In ‘Protest March', the climax of the march (and of the story itself), is soured when Bronwen, cold and hungry, catches sight of the wife of their local M.P., standing at the head of the procession wearing a fur coat.

However, T. J. Morgan, reviewing *Ffair Gaeaf* in *Y Llenor*, admitted that it was precisely these stories which disappointed his expectations, arguing that they offer merely a mediocre, mundane episode which is not transformed into a special experience or event:

The two stories about the Glamorgan valleys demonstrate this, ‘Protest March' and ‘Red-Letter Day'; they are exemplars, examples first and stories second. Things are wrong somehow; rather than the troubles of particular characters created by Kate Roberts herself being an occasional revelation of life in general, she begins with the general characteristics and consciously assembles them into a character and a tribulation. 68

It could be argued that for this reviewer, 'things are wrong somehow' because Kate Roberts views the Depression from the perspective of two young women, their domestic hopes and dreams for the future disabled and 'paralysed' by a

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67 Kate Roberts, ‘Diwrnod i'r Brenin’, *Ffair Gaeaf a storl’au eraill*, op. cit., p. 37. I use my own translation here because Clancy's choice of 'region' (Clancy, op. cit., p. 85) rather than 'country' for 'gwlad' dilutes the sense of the sentence entirely, taking away from the interpretation which I offer here.
unending struggle against poverty (rather than from the viewpoint of the struggling male miner). For Rachel, in particular, '[s]he had no hope of marrying, because Enoc, her sweetheart, was also without work. And she didn't want to marry, by now. Waiting and waiting had killed off every yearning she'd ever had to be a wife.' In these stories, Roberts has also dared to tackle a subject perhaps distasteful to the nationalists, raising an uncomfortable question that had always bothered her, that of the possibility of placing socialist concerns on the nationalist agenda. In doing so, she focuses not on the rural gwerin, but on the dispossessed women of the South Wales valleys, using a southern dialect in the dialogue for the sake of verisimilitude. And she is swiftly chastised for doing so, and brought into line by her reviewer. To universalise certain places and particular discourses of nationhood is not only acceptable but also desirable—so that Kate Roberts' turn-of-the-century monolingual Welsh rural village becomes the place where Welshness can and must be articulated—but is unacceptable for a depressed valleys mining town to represent national identity, it seems, particularly when that identity is represented from the perspective of a young woman.

Kate Roberts: anti-modernist
While in the metropoles of Central Europe and America, therefore, modernist and avant-garde movements developed frenetically, erratically, but always with energy and enthusiasm, in Wales a highly self-conscious politicised aesthetics permeated the artistic community, resulting in a constant self-policing of its cultural and literary boundaries. This may have been partly due to the fact that Plaid Cymru was dominated and led by important literary and cultural figures such as Saunders Lewis, D. J. Williams and Kate Roberts herself. It may also have been the result of what Hywel Teifi Edwards has described as the appropriation and cultural reinvention of the English picturesque in a Welsh context, resulting in what can be considered as a literary movement in itself

68 T. J. Morgan, untitled review of Ffair Gaeaf, Y Llenor XVII, I (1938), 59-60.
70 D. Hywel Davies, op. cit.
comparable with the later neo-Romanticism in England. In addition to this, it may also owe something to the fact that, in England, modernism was focused upon and emanated from London, the capital city and imperial metropolis, and was thus, in the eyes of a politicised Welsh literati, to be treated with scorn and derision. Even if some, like Roberts, occasionally found modernist experimentation aesthetically seductive, they knew that it just was not Welsh, and therefore of no use to them (in fact positively inimical) at a time when all activity, literary and political needed to reassert its Welshness in the face of a sudden linguistic and cultural erosion.

Central to Kate Roberts’s rejection of modernism, therefore, was literary tradition, but not a merely nostalgic adherence to a traditional realism for its own sake. One of the reasons for Roberts’s refusal to engage in modernist experimentation was that modernism itself was very much an engagement with and rebellion against the literary traditions of particular majority and metropolitan cultures. As Kate Roberts herself pointed out many times, Wales lacked a tradition in prose writing, and writers like her had to focus their energies on inventing a tradition in genres such as the novel and short story, in both their fiction and their criticism. Commenting on the lack of a prose tradition in Welsh, she wrote in 1949, for example:

Canlyniad hynny ydyw fod ein storiau heddiw fel pe baent wedi tyfu heb wreiddiau, ac yn dilyn patrymau gwledydd eraill, Lloegr fynychaf, gan fod ein cyfundrefn addysg wedi gofal u ein bod yn dysgu rhyw fath o Saesneg. Gwir bod peth o’n bardoniaeth heddiw yn dilyn ffasiynau Saesneg, ond mae digon ohoni yn dal i ddilyn traddodiad Cymraeg. Prawf clir o hyn, mi gredaf, oedd y drafodaeth, trafodaeth wych iawn, a gawsom ar y radio, ar gyfansoddiau yr Eisteddfod eleni. Fe ymdriniodd y beirdd â ffurf ac â geiriog, ond ni soniodd neb am arddull yr un o’r ddwy stori fer. Petai ein stori fer wedi tyfu o’n bywyd ni ein hunain mentraf ddweud y byddai sôn am yr arddull.\(^{71}\)

The result of this is that our stories today have grown as if without roots, and follow the patterns of other countries, most frequently England, as our education system has ensured that we learn some kind of English. It is true that some of our poetry today follows English fashions, but enough of it still follows the Welsh tradition. Clear proof of this, I think, was the discussion, a very brilliant discussion, that we had on the radio, on this year’s Eisteddfod compositions. The poets dealt with form and words, but no one mentioned the style of either of

\(^{71}\) Kate Roberts, ‘Problemau Llenorion Cymraeg’, op. cit., p. 254.
the two short stories. If our short story had grown from our own life, I venture to say that the style would have been mentioned.

It is quite clear that to engage with modernism would have involved a political and literary engagement with the literary traditions of another culture at a time when that very culture was overwhelming and eroding the Welsh language and culture. Like so many of her contemporaries, Roberts’s priority was to create, contribute to, and engage with a Welsh literary tradition in prose. Such a cultural climate—for all the complications that it involved for a female writer of the period—quite simply precluded an engagement with metropolitan modernism.

Virginia Woolf: feminist outsider or metropolitan modernist?

Although Kate Roberts’s aversion to modernism has received little, if any, critical attention to date, her commitment to the creation as well as the preservation of Welsh literary traditions can be seen as entirely in keeping with her political commitment to the survival of an endangered language and culture. This latter commitment has, as might be expected within a politically aware literary community, been well documented by Welsh critics.72 While, by contrast, much has been written about both the position of Virginia Woolf as a female modernist writer, and about her critical attitude towards a patriarchal British Empire, critics have been slower to consider the contradictions of Woolf’s position as a female modernist writer within that Empire. 73 There has been little exploration of the complex, paradoxical and uneasy aspects of her relationship with the English literary tradition in any terms other than either feminist or modernist terms. In fact, as I shall demonstrate, there is a critical tendency simply to conflate feminism with modernism in discussions of her experiments with narrative. This may perhaps be because she has so often

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72 See for example the essays collected in the festchrift, Kate Roberts: Cyfrol Deyrneged, ed. Bobi Jones (Denbigh: Gwasg Gee, 1969).
imaged herself as standing on the sidelines of British imperial culture, banished to the colony of womanhood, as it were. For example, in ‘The Leaning Tower’, written in 1940, Woolf urges women to trespass on the private enclosure that is a literature possessed by a male private enclave:

Let us trespass at once. Literature is no one’s private ground; literature is common ground. It is not cut up into nations; there are no wars there. Let us trespass freely and fearlessly and find our own way for ourselves. It is thus that English literature will survive this war and cross the gulf—if commoners and outsiders like ourselves make that country our own country, if we teach ourselves how to read and to write, how to preserve, and how to create.74

True to her famous pronouncement that ‘as a woman, I have no country’, Woolf here depicts the act of writing as a woman as an aggressive seizure of that which is her right—citizenship in the empire of literature.75 She suggests that women, who are still commoners, outsiders and exiles of that empire, can make it their own by preserving their own female literary traditions and by creating new ones. However, despite the strength and resonance of such images, they are contradicted by her expression of the need, if not desire, to help English literature—that is, the literature and cultural heritage of a specific nation—to survive the threat posed by the Second World War. Literature, it seems, is cut up into nations after all, despite Woolf’s assertions to the contrary in the pursuit of a radical feminist discourse. Woolf’s work evidently has a dual purpose: both to preserve and create female literary traditions, and to preserve and create English literary traditions. Her interest in the latter certainly intensified and became more self-conscious during the period leading up to the outbreak of the Second World War (an aspect of her work which will be examined further in my discussion of her last novel, Between the Acts, in the following chapter of this thesis).76 However, a consideration of Woolf’s critical comments on both traditions, female and English, shows that, firstly, they are of course not


separate, but, for an Englishwoman, inextricably intertwined. Secondly, it reveals the extent to which radical feminist and post-colonial readings of Woolf have neglected the more conservative aspects of Woolf's work, and, as a consequence, have failed to consider the cultural tensions which arise from what is inevitably an uneasy alliance of radical and conservative impulses. By extending this exploration to a consideration of Woolf's short stories, which are—surprisingly perhaps—comparable to those of Kate Roberts in that they existed on the fringes of the metropolitan mainstream, a deeper understanding of the profound tensions in Woolf's work between the feminist outsider and the metropolitan modernist may be reached.

Female literary traditions and the economics of genre

It is, of course, Woolf's concern with the conservation and preservation of female literary traditions which has been most widely documented. She frequently draws attention to the generic distinctions which have existed historically between the work of men and women. In 1929, for example, she wrote in 'Women and Fiction' that:

Fiction was, as fiction still is, the easiest thing for a woman to write. Nor is it difficult to find the reason. A novel is the least concentrated form of art. A novel can be taken up or put down more easily than a play or a poem. George Eliot left her work to nurse her father. Charlotte Brontë put down her pen to pick the eyes out of the potatoes. And living as she did in the common sitting-room, surrounded by people, a woman was trained to use her mind in observation and upon the analysis of character. She was trained to be a novelist and not to be a poet.

Woolf here seeks (and finds) the reasons for the fact that women have traditionally chosen prose (particularly, since the late eighteenth century, the novel) over poetry in the practical circumstances of their daily lives. The novel's subject matter, for example, could be rooted in those domestic

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78 Virginia Woolf, 'Women and Fiction', in Virginia Woolf on Women and Writing, op. cit., p. 46. Barrett notes (p. 44) that this essay appeared in The Forum in March 1929, and is reprinted in Granite and Rainbow.
circumstances, while its execution could be carried out in fits and starts, in accordance with the demands of running a household. She goes on to suggest that English literature is still waiting for its greatest women poets, and argues that changes in women's political and practical circumstances will create the conditions in which female poets can finally be nurtured:

The greater impersonality of women's lives will encourage the poetic spirit, and it is in poetry that women's fiction is still weakest. It will lead them to be less absorbed in facts and no longer content to record with astonishing acuteness the minute details which fall under their own observation. They will look beyond the personal and political relationships to the wider questions which the poet tries to solve—of our destiny and the meaning of life.79

Woolf here bows to the supremacy of poetry in the English literary tradition, but, as so often in her writing on women, is scrupulous in her adherence to the notion that economic circumstance has a large part to play in the development of the poetic spirit. Rather than treating the creative muse, the poetic spirit, as an abstract phenomenon which can be judged either qualitatively or quantitatively, she applies her astute common sense to the issue:

The basis of the poetic attitude is of course largely founded upon material things. It depends upon leisure, and a little money, and the chance which money and leisure give to observe impersonally and dispassionately. With money and leisure at their service, women will naturally occupy themselves more than has hitherto been possible with the craft of letters. They will make a fuller and a more subtle use of the instrument of writing. Their technique will become bolder and richer.80

Women will penetrate that coveted genre which has so long been the empire of men, she predicts, and many other genres too, once they have a little money in their pockets:

So, if we may prophesy, women in time will come to write fewer novels, but better novels; and not novels only, but poetry and criticism and history. But in this, to be sure, one is looking ahead to that golden, that perhaps fabulous, age when women will have what has so long been denied them —leisure, and money, and a room to themselves.81

79 Ibid., p. 51.
80 Ibid., p. 51.
Woolf was concerned not only to provide the woman writer of the future with a room of her own in which to write poetry, plays, biography and criticism, as well as novels and memoirs, but also to furnish that room with shelf upon shelf of books written by her female forbears. Much has been written about Woolf’s resurrection of a female tradition, and anthologies such as Michèle Barrett’s *Virginia Woolf on Women and Writing* help the reader to construct some kind of Woolfian female canon, by grouping together Woolf’s critical articles on, and reviews of, the work of writers from Aphra Behn and Eliza Haywood to Katherine Mansfield and Dorothy Richardson.82 Noting Woolf’s particular interest in the work of her contemporaries, Mansfield and Richardson, Barrett suggests that ‘[s]he saw them as, like herself, attempting to break significantly with the traditional conventions of literature’, and adds that ‘[i]t is not surprising [...] that Virginia Woolf, in her criticism of modern women writers, chose to concentrate on those who were engaged in a similar project to her own of challenging the conventions in literary style and form.’83 Barrett is clearly gesturing here towards a modernist engagement with literary tradition shared not only by Woolf, Richardson and Mansfield, but also, in many different forms and with varying degrees of popularity and success, by many writers and artists, men and women, working in London, Paris, Berlin and New York between roughly 1910 and 1939. The grouping together of female modernists in such a way is fraught with difficulties, I would suggest, as is more obviously exemplified by the volume *Women artists and writers: Modernist (im)positionings*, by Bridget Elliott and Jo-Ann Wallace.84 To the critic concerned with the cultural as well as the gendered aspects of literature, the difficulties presented by the ghettoising of female modernists in this way are manifold; most disturbing in this respect is a seemingly unproblematic critical stance vis-à-vis the modernist metropolis. Criticism on English provincial and working-class writers of the period serves as a salient reminder of the fact that modernism was a purely metropolitan, and indeed a class-bound

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81 Ibid., p. 52.
83 Michèle Barrett, introduction to *Virginia Woolf on Women and Writing*, op. cit., pp. 31 and 32.
84 Bridget Elliott and Jo-Ann Wallace, *Women artists and writers: Modernist (im)positionings*
phenomenon.\textsuperscript{85} English women writers of the period cannot be discussed as a
group under the heading ‘female modernists’—or at least they can, but such
discussions cannot masquerade as a critical corrective to the ideological
idiosyncrasies of more traditional accounts of modernism. They remain
focused on the city, centre of an imperial as well as a patriarchal tradition, and
therefore they are riddled with ideological idiosyncrasies of their own.

When it comes to an examination of individual women writers of the
period as female modernists, such as Woolf, another question emerges. Woolf
was indeed at pains to establish a canon of female literary figures, and was
extremely interested in the differences between female and male writers, most
particularly in terms of the oppressive conditions in which most women wrote
before the twentieth century and indeed continued to write during her own time.
However, she was also well aware that to learn the business of writing involved
an engagement with a canonical (i.e. male-dominated) literary heritage. This is
a crucial aspect of Woolf’s work which seems to have been dealt with
somewhat summarily, if not wrongheadedly, by feminist criticism. For
example, Diane Filby Gillespie, in her lucid comparison of the novels of Woolf
and Dorothy Richardson, polarises aspects of what she calls ‘masculine’ and
‘feminine’ realism, in order to argue that the ‘stream of consciousness’ method
deployed by both writers was a form of political aesthetics, a deliberately
subversive strategy employed by women writers who were striving to write
against the grain of ‘masculine’ traditions:

Woolf recognises that reality as Richardson defines it is the individual
consciousness responding to, distorting, even ignoring facts and events, not the
facts and events themselves. Even more frequently, reality is the individual
consciousness registering and interpreting cues from the outer world, like
atmospheres and silences, not usually included in the novels. Woolf perceives in
Richardson’s work a significant shift in values, from outer to inner, from
emphatic to subtle. With a shift in values has gone a shift in characterization.
And a more sensitive stylistic instrument, a more flexible sentence, has become
necessary.\textsuperscript{86}

\textsuperscript{85} Celeste Schenck, ‘Exiled by Genre: Modernism, Canonicity and the Politics of Exclusion’, in
Women’s Writing in Exile, ed. Mary Lynn Broe and Angela Ingram (Chapel Hill: University of

\textsuperscript{86} Diane Filby Gillespie, ‘Political Aesthetics: Virginia Woolf and Dorothy Richardson’, op.
Gillespie can hardly be blamed for drawing this conclusion, lingering as she has in this article upon Woolf's own review, written in 1923, of Richardson's *Revolving Lights*, in which Woolf famously suggests that Richardson is consciously developing 'the psychological sentence of the feminine gender' (the 'flexible sentence' of the quotation above). Within these parameters, it is quite logical to conclude that both Woolf and Richardson are adopting a deliberately feminine aesthetic. However, as Gillespie herself is bound to note in her article, in Woolf's seminal essay on the English novel 'Modern Fiction' (to which I shall return later in this chapter), it is James Joyce who is credited with attempting to

convey the 'proper stuff of fiction,' who follows her injunction to 'record the atoms as they fall upon the mind in the order in which they fall, [to] ... trace the pattern, however disconnected and incoherent in appearance, which each sight or incident scores upon the consciousness', who perceives that the traditionally unimportant may be more real than the traditionally great.

The evident confusion which arises in such treatments of Woolf's political aesthetics is that of masculine and feminine with traditional and modern respectively.

It is no coincidence that French feminist Julia Kristeva also becomes terribly confused in this respect, and that in her view the apotheosis of *écriture féminine* (feminine writing) is to be found in the work of none other than high modernist James Joyce. It seems that it is modernist techniques such as stream of consciousness which are feminine in character, and that the flexible feminine sentence of the work of Woolf and Richardson is also the flexible feminine sentence of the modernist novel. In her critical account of modernism, Lyn Pykett points to other critics who offer the same argument, for example, Alice Jardine and Stephen Heath, and she supplies a powerful critique

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87 Quoted by Diane Filby Gillespie, op. cit., p. 143.
88 Ibid., p. 144.
of the ahistorical and, indeed, politically dubious aspects of the deliberate equation of feminine and modernist. ‘Perhaps most problematic of all,’ she concludes:

it is rather difficult to accommodate the Kristevan view of the language of modernism as a feminine language of flow and flux with the tendency of some rather important male modernists (Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot, and D. H. Lawrence, for example) to castigate the offensiveness or incoherence of women and feminine language.  

Woolf and the cultural proclivities of high modernism
The question arises, then, of how the tangled knot of such contradictions might be unravelled. I would suggest that Woolf critics need to look also to the political aesthetics of modernism, to the traditional realist narrative which modernism sought to unsettle and reinvent, and to consider her place as a woman writer at the heart of that process of reinvention. It is often argued that Woolf was an outsider in the modernist metropolis, that, just as she was a woman barred from the libraries of Cambridge colleges, she was also a woman writer barred from certain ‘zones’ of metropolitan aesthetics. She did indeed feel excluded and angry, particularly about the fact that she had been denied an Oxbridge education, and it is about this very exclusion that she has written most passionately and famously in her two extended polemical essays, *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas*. However, we need to ponder at greater length upon the precise nature of that exclusion—from what exactly was Woolf being excluded, and why did it matter to her, as a female artist, as well as a female polemicist?

In his article on 'Virginia Woolf and the Classics', William Herman reminds the reader that Woolf's anger and disappointment at being denied access to a classical Oxbridge education by virtue of her sex were the

(11): Poetry that is Not a Form of Murder*).


91 *A Room of One's Own and Three Guineas* ed. Michèle Barrett, op. cit.
consequence not only of her perception of the imperial and sexual bias of such an education. In addition to this, he argues:

as she grew up, the idea of this particular deprivation rankled particularly because she saw, in the depth of her imaginative being, that the classics could inform and empower her work as they had an entire, overwhelming literary tradition. Her reading and the contexts of her literary relationships must have made clear to her that classical literature enjoyed a central place in the Western consciousness of making literature; she must have been aware—as we are—that the acquisition of the classical strain in her work would confirm her in the most English of literary traditions, the tradition of Sidney and Spenser, of Jonson and Milton, the sturdy English pastoral erected on the forms and mythopoesis of Latin and Greek literature. 92

Since Herman offered this argument in 1983, it has been amply confirmed by the publication of Woolf's diaries, letters, and early journals, also of important studies such as Alice Fox's *Virginia Woolf and the Literature of the English Renaissance*. 93 All of these indicate the depth and breadth of Woolf's reading, from Homer through to Sydney, through to the Romantics to Henry James. The publication of her complete essays, in particular, four volumes of which have been produced so far, has been a landmark in the critical field which has evolved around Woolf's work. 94 Feminist criticism on Woolf's writing about women and women's literature, which inevitably became ever sharper in focus during the 1980s and 1990s in the wake of Second Wave feminism, could give rise to the mistaken notion that Woolf was more concerned with women's writing than with canonical literature produced by men. If truth be told, and as her essays show (and as I shall emphasise in Chapter 5 of this thesis), Woolf was equally concerned with both, despite the fact that the emphasis of her interest in each was different. If her concern with women's writing extended to the desire to resurrect and comment upon a female literary canon, thus providing a literary context for twentieth-century women writers like herself

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(writers who needed to 'think back through [their] mothers'), her interest in the male literary canon arose from a similarly avid but more general interest in the development of literary traditions, and in notions of literary heritage and their consequences for the twentieth-century woman writer. These were questions which were to become more urgent for her during the course of the 1920s, a decade which saw the publication of four of her novels, each more formally experimental than the last. Woolf's development as an English writer involved an engagement with specific English literary traditions, as Herman argues, and he quite rightly suggests that as such she should be far more closely associated than she has been hitherto with the male writers of the modernist canon:

When we speak of the High Classical Moment of early twentieth-century literature in English, it is not customary to join Virginia Woolf's name to those of Joyce, Eliot and Pound. Part of the reason for this has been our ignorance of Woolf's disciplined acquisition of the classics and much else besides—an ignorance that is only now being corrected with the publication of much of Woolf's papers; part has been an ancillary undervaluation of her mind [...] Part of the reason has also been that the use she makes of the classics is radically different from theirs.

According to Herman, Joyce et al. use the classics 'in far more blatant ways than does Woolf [...] Antiquity is idealised and they mourn for a golden age'. Woolf, by contrast, is not concerned so much to mourn the golden age, 'but to weave away at its making'. He concludes that 'she sees the present moment as having a possible wholeness in its connections to the past and only the humane virtues will serve this connection'. An extended examination of the use made by Virginia Woolf of the classics is beyond the scope of this chapter, but what I would like to infer from the arguments outlined above is the extent to which Woolf, even at the height of her modernist experimental novel writing, was deeply concerned with tradition, and with a specifically English tradition at

95 Virginia Woolf, A Room of One's Own, op. cit., p. 88.
97 William Herman, op. cit., p. 266.
98 Ibid., p. 267.
99 Ibid., p. 267.
100 Ibid., p. 267.
that. She was especially fascinated with the ways in which the modernist novel, although it represented a rebellion against that tradition, might also make a lasting contribution to it. In her essay ‘Craftsmanship’, written in 1937, for example, she writes that:

Words belong to each other [...] To combine new words with old words is fatal to the constitution of the sentence. In order to use new words properly you would have to invent a new language; and that, though no doubt we shall come to it, is not at the moment our business. Our business is to see what we can do with the English language as it is. How we can combine the old words in new orders so that they survive, so that they create beauty, so that they tell the truth? That is the question.  

‘Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown’

As an individual who was extremely well read, both in the classics and in English literature generally, Woolf was well aware that her chosen medium, the novel, was a relatively young genre, and as such required critical paradigms. In a review written in 1927 of E.M. Forster’s Aspects of the Novel, for example, she argues that:

For possibly, if fiction is, as we suggest, in difficulties, it may be because nobody grasps her firmly and defines her severely. She has had no rules drawn up for her, very little thinking done on her behalf. And though rules may be wrong and must be broken, they have this advantage—they confer dignity and order upon their subject; they admit her to a place in civilised society; they prove that she is worthy of consideration.  

An interesting parallel emerges here between the culturally conservative aspects of Kate Roberts’s self-conscious and politically committed urge to create Welsh literary traditions for young genres such as the short story, and Woolf’s urge to ‘confer order and dignity’ upon the novel, and to admit ‘her to a place in civilised society’. It is precisely this kind of writing by Woolf which proves the extent to which radical and conservative elements become conflated in her aesthetic perspective on the novel. To ‘confer order and dignity’ upon the novel as a traditionally feminine genre is tantamount to admitting women writers a place ‘in civilised [i.e. masculine] society’, and thus highly radical.

\[101\] Virginia Woolf, ‘Craftsmanship’ The Death of the Moth and other essays, op. cit., p. 130.
However, to ‘confer order and dignity’ upon the novel is also to admit a still fairly young genre to a literary canon stretching right back to the classics; that is, to admit what can be seen as an expression of an increasingly urbanised and industrial modern society to a place in the ordered civilisation that is the British Empire, and thus highly conservative. For all that Woolf emphasises the need to experiment, she always relates that experimentation to a literary context and developing tradition. As she herself wrote: ‘We cannot avoid all memory of Shakespeare’. 103

This can be seen in one of the most influential critical essays ever published by Woolf. One of the most notable aspects of her much quoted essay, ‘Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown’ (1924)—which attempts to trace the sea change in English literature which she saw as taking place around 1910—is that, in its tracing of the tradition of the English novel since the Victorian period, it constructs a literary canon which of course contains many more men than women. 104 In this essay, Woolf ‘range[s] Edwardians and Georgians into two camps; Mr Wells Mr Bennett and Mr Galsworthy I will call Edwardians’, she writes, ‘Mr Forster, Mr Lawrence, Mr Strachey, Mr Joyce and Mr Eliot I will call the Georgians’. 105 Camping on Georgian territory herself, she explores modernist writing as a negotiation between ‘tradition’ and ‘innovation’, defending experimental aesthetics by postulating that ‘one reason’ for its advent is ‘surely’ that:

the men and women who began writing novels in 1910 or thereabouts had this great difficulty to face—that there was no English novelist living from whom they could learn their business. Mr Conrad is a Pole; which sets him apart, and makes him, however admirable, not very helpful. 106

In her own negotiation with tradition, Woolf seems to be specifying that this

105 Ibid., p. 81.
106 Ibid., p. 76
must be an anglocentric negotiation. She maps out the modernist English novel as a territory, a meeting-place between reader and writer, stressing that 'it is of the highest importance that this common meeting place should be reached easily, almost instinctively, in the dark, with one's eyes shut'.

This terrain of the English instincts, where a Polish writer is not 'helpful', is the territory on which the new aesthetics of the modernist period are mapped out by Woolf, thus bringing aesthetic and national discourse onto what she herself calls a 'common ground':

'At the present moment we are suffering, not from decay, but from having no code of manners which writers and readers accept as a prelude to the more exciting intercourse of friendship'.

One of the most intriguing aspects of the essay is that Woolf's anglocentric negotiation of the modernist novel extends to a culturally aware, and indeed a culturally purist notion, of what constitutes a novel from a particular culture:

Mr Bennett has never once looked at Mrs Brown in her corner. There she sits in the corner of the carriage—that carriage which is travelling, not from Richmond to Waterloo, but from one age of English literature to the next, for Mrs Brown is eternal, Mrs Brown is human nature, Mrs Brown changes only on the surface, it is the novelists who get in and out—there she sits and not one of the Edwardian writers has so much as looked at her. They have looked very powerfully, searchingly and sympathetically out of the window; at factories, at Utopias, even at the decoration and upholstery of the carriage; but never at her, never at life, never at human nature.

It would be easy enough to write three different versions of that incident in the train, an English, a French and a Russian. The English writer would make the old lady into a 'character' [...] A French writer would rub out all that; he would sacrifice the individual Mrs Brown to give a more general view of human nature; [...] The Russian would pierce through the flesh; would reveal the soul—the soul alone.]

Two aspects of this essay are of particular relevance to my discussion here. First, that in dealing with literary conventions, tradition and innovation, Woolf—of necessity, it seems—feels bound to list all the great male writers of the Edwardian and Georgian periods and compare their relative merits. Second, in the comparison of their merits and what follows, a groping towards some kind of foundation, or set of rules for the modern novel, she is quite specific

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107 Ibid., p. 81
108 Ibid., p. 81
about the fact that any foundation arising from such a discussion will be specifically *English* (even banishing poor 'Mr Conrad' from her discussion since he is 'a Pole').

However, Woolf's critical consideration of a developing English prose tradition betrays a significant absence: while she has written at great length and with great confidence on the subject of the novel, its sister genre, the short story, seems to have suffered a relative critical neglect. In her criticism she rarely, if ever, deals with the short story as an independent genre, and if she does it is with the broadest of brushstrokes. Of Chekov's 'Gusev' for example, she comments in 'Modern Fiction' that:

> But it is impossible to say 'this is comic', or 'that is tragic', nor are we certain, since short stories, we have been taught, should be brief and conclusive, whether this, which is vague and inconclusive, should be called a short story at all.  

Woolf's references to her own short story writing are equally desultory. In her response to David Garnett's warmly expressed admiration of one of her early stories, she writes dismissively:

> I'm very glad you liked the short story. In a way it's easier to do a short thing, all in one flight than a novel. Novels are frightfully clumsy and overpowering of course; still, if one could only get hold of them it would be superb. Anyhow, it's very amusing to try with these short things.  

Similarly, in her review of Katherine Mansfield's published journal she opens on a laudatory note, and yet positions herself at some distance from the genre under discussion:

> The most distinguished writers of short stories in England are agreed, says Mr Murry, that as a writer of short stories Katherine Mansfield was *hors concours*. No one has succeeded her, and no critic has been able to define her quality. But the reader of her journal is well content to let such questions be.  

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109 Ibid., pp. 84-85.
111 Quoted by Valerie Shaw, *op. cit.*, p. 22.
Her use of Murry's [Mansfield's husband's] praise of Mansfield in place of any praise of her own represents perhaps the delicate, self-protective or even snide removal of herself as a rival from the field. All the same, it effectively denies her own identity as a short story writer; rather, she projects an image of herself as a well regarded novelist and reviewer commenting on another writer's short stories.

'Completely opposed to the tradition of fiction': Monday or Tuesday

Following Woolf's own critical lead, as well as modernist prejudice in favour of the novel more generally, critics have been slow to pay attention to Woolf's short fiction, despite the fact that she wrote short stories on a regular basis throughout her career as a writer. While it is her novels, particularly *To the Lighthouse*, *Mrs Dalloway* and *The Waves*, which have received the most critical attention from those interested in considering her relationship with modernism, it is, I would argue, her short stories which in fact have more to tell us about that relationship and how it developed during the 1920s. Encouraged perhaps by the complex connections and creative interaction between Woolf's novels and stories, some critics have assumed that she 'apprenticed as a novel writer by being a story writer'. However, Woolf wrote and published 'shorter fictions' throughout her writing career, from 'Phyllis and Rosamond', written in 1906, to 'The Watering Place', one of the last pieces of fiction she produced before her death in 1941. Commentators on her shorter fiction note the years around 1920 and 1925 to be the most productive, with the earlier period acknowledged as a time when Woolf came under the influence of Katherine Mansfield, and the second as the period of what are called 'the Dalloway

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stories’. One volume of her collected short fiction was published during her lifetime: *Monday or Tuesday*, which appeared in 1921. The Hogarth Press had already published ‘The Mark on the Wall’ in 1917 with Leonard Woolf’s ‘Three Jews’, in *Two Stories*, and *Kew Gardens* in 1919. In addition to these volumes, Woolf published eleven short stories in various magazines between the wars.

‘A Mark on the Wall’ and ‘Kew Gardens’ were well received prior to their republication in *Monday or Tuesday*: Harold Child, for example, praises enthusiastically ‘the suggestiveness of Mrs Woolf’s prose’, while E. M. Forster relates the ‘unusual type’ of Virginia Woolf’s ‘art’ and the ‘aimlessness’ of her ‘long, loose sentences’ to ‘the newer developments in English prose’. Of the collection as a whole, contemporary critic Clare Hanson notes that ‘T. S. Eliot described the pieces collected in *Monday or Tuesday* as experimental prose. They seem today more experimental than her novels’. This generically marked difference was recognised by an unsigned reviewer as early as 1922, who wrote in *Dial* that: ‘In her present volume of sketches Mrs Woolf becomes

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much more arty than in her novels, although she never surpasses the technical superbness of *The Voyage Out*. Sandra Kemp argues that 'the poeticism of short stories like these leads [Woolf] directly to the high modernism of the later novels (the ‘Time Passes’ section of *To the Lighthouse*, and the interlude sequences of *The Waves*).’ Other critics have noted in similarly progressive terms the close relationship between Woolf's series of 'Dalloway stories' and the final version of the novel, *Mrs Dalloway*, published in 1925. As the discussion which follows will show, this was certainly the case. And yet I shall be concerned to explore further the seemingly organic relationship between the stories and novels in terms of the clear imbalance between the critical attention and cultural status awarded to the short story by Woolf herself in comparison with that which she accorded to the novel.

Sandra Kemp suggests that it is the acute sense of rhythm of Woolf's stories which is one of their most significant qualities:

Woolf's shorter fiction is written against the traditional grain. It has, in her own words, more 'rhythm' than 'narrative'. She explained to Ethyl Smyth, 'though the rhythmical is more natural to me than the narrative, it is completely opposed to the tradition of fiction and I am casting about all the time for some rope to throw to the reader'.

Typical in this respect is 'A Haunted House' (first published in *Monday and Tuesday* in 1921). Only two pages long, it amounts to only a few hundred words, and reads from the very outset more like a prose poem than a short story:

> Whatever hour you woke there was a door shutting. From room to room they went, hand in hand, lifting here, opening there, making sure—a ghostly couple.

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121 Unsigned review of *Monday or Tuesday*, in *Virginia Woolf: The Critical Heritage*, op. cit., p. 92. This review was originally published in *Dial*, New York, in February 1922.
123 For example, Charles G. Hoffmann, 'From Short Story to Novel: The Manuscript Revisions of Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*', op. cit.
124 Sandra Kemp, op. cit., p. ix.
'Here we left it,' she said. And he added, 'Oh, but here too!' 'It's upstairs,' she murmured. 'And in the garden,' he whispered. 'Quietly,' they said, 'or we shall wake them.'

The reader can only infer from such mysterious passages that the story is actually 'about' two ghosts whose presence in a house is felt gladly by its current occupant. Overriding any 'progression' of the narrative is the heartbeat of the house itself, to which the first-person narrator returns several times:

The shadow of a thrush crossed the carpet; from the deepest wells of silence the wood pigeon drew its bubble of sound. 'Safe, safe, safe,' the pulse of the house beat softly [...]  

[...] 'Safe, safe, safe,' the pulse of the house beat gladly [...]  

[...] The doors go shutting far in the distance, gently knocking like the pulse of a heart [...]  

[...] 'Safe, safe, safe,' the heart of the house beats proudly. 'Long years—' he sighs. 'Again you found me.' 'Here,' she murmurs, 'sleeping; in the garden reading; laughing, rolling apples in the loft. Here we left our treasure—' Stooping, their light lifts the lids upon my eyes. 'Safe! safe! safe!' the pulse of the house beats wildly. Waking, I cry 'Oh, is this your buried treasure? The light in the heart.'

The erotic link which develops between the narrator and the ghosts certainly retains the reader's interest in the story: existing on parallel planes, as it were, they roam the same territory, touch the same objects, experience the same sensual delight in various aspects of the house, seek out the same elusive 'buried treasure [...] the light in the heart'. However, in the final instance, it is the house itself which appears more alive than its residents. The muffled heartbeat of the house—at first merely a subtext, it seems—appears to pound ever more quickly and urgently as the story progresses, finally breaking through to the surface and making its presence felt in the climax of the story.

Another extremely experimental aspect of Woolf's short stories which

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125 Virginia Woolf, 'A Haunted House', *A Haunted House and other stories* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1943), p. 9. All page numbers cited hereafter refer to this edition. (This story was first published in *The London Mercury* in July 1920, and was reprinted in *Monday or Tuesday*, op. cit.)

126 Ibid., pp. 9 and 10.
has been neatly pointed out by Kemp is the way in which the 'inner voice' belongs to no one character or narrator:

Throughout the stories Woolf deliberately blends and blurs inner and outer voices; interpretation becomes a matter of ear; 'speaks' and 'thinks' are used interchangeably. As in much other modernist fiction, the inner voice of the stories is composed of the accents and inflections of the inner life. But for Woolf this inner voice belongs neither solely to one character, nor to the narrator or dominant narrative voice. 127

What is especially interesting in this context is that one of the stories which exemplifies this technique is, to my eye at least, a re-working of the central scenario sketched out by Woolf in 'Mrs Bennett and Mrs Brown'. Its title—'An Unwritten Novel'—even gestures towards the moment at which the story was conceived (that is, in the process of formulating a critical essay supposedly about the novel). In this story, the tale which the narrator weaves around the woman who sits opposite her on a train travelling through the south of England is filtered through the narrator's stream of consciousness, the result being a jerky and yet artfully narrated prose. Even the usually straightforward naming of characters becomes haphazard; the narrator descends onto names and plots alike through a process of casual rather than causal association, for example, she names the protagonist's imaginary sister as 'Hilda? Hilda? Hilda Marsh'. 128 The characters' identities do not stabilise even once they are named: in fact, the protagonist is always on the verge of slipping away from her creator—'what's your name—woman—Minnie Marsh; some such name as that?'). 129 The narrative develops in fits and starts, interrupted by parentheses: 'But this we'll skip', she writes, 'ornaments, curtains, trefoil china plate, yellow oblongs of cheese, white squares of biscuit', addressing the protagonist as 'you' and simultaneously grasping at and releasing potential plots: 'A parting was it, twenty years ago?' the narrator ponders, 'Vows broken?'. 130 The epiphany is double-edged, as the moment of crisis which approaches when 'Minnie' is

127 Sandra Kemp, op. cit., p. xxv.
129 Ibid., op. cit., p. 18.
130 Ibid., pp. 14, 15 and 16.
about to slip away is seemingly smoothed out into a flat one-dimensional
assertion of the truth of the story:

And what is happening? Unless I’m much mistaken, the pulse’s quickened, the
moment coming, the threads are racing, Niagara’s ahead. Here’s the crisis!
Heaven be with you! Down she goes. Courage, courage! Face it, be it! For
God’s sake don’t wait on the mat now! There’s the door! I’m on your side.
Speak! Confront her, confound her soul!

‘Oh! I beg your pardon! Yes, this is Eastbourne. I’ll reach it down for you. Let
me try the handle.’ [But Minnie, though we keep up pretences, I’ve read you
right—I’m with you now.] 131

However, this smooth pretence is disturbed when the smugly omniscient
narrator (‘I’ve read you right’) sees ‘Minnie’ being met by her son at the
station, not by the overbearing Hilda she had imagined. As ‘Minnie’ dissolves,
so too does the story teller: ‘That’s not Minnie. There never was Moggridge.
Who am I? Life’s bare as bone’. 132

Critical omissions and generic confusion
‘An Unwritten Novel’ is clearly Woolf’s own version of ‘that incident in the
train’ with which she is so much preoccupied in ‘Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown’.
The reader will remember that in her essay she even sketched out three different
versions of the incident ‘an English, a French and a Russian’. Is this then her
English offering, her own specifically English contribution to the literary
tradition about which she writes in ‘Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown’? It is not; but
only by virtue of the fact that it is a short story and not a novel. Similarly ironic
disparities and seemingly unconscious slippages between the two genres can be
found in another essay considered central to Woolf’s aesthetic of the modernist
novel, ‘Modern Fiction’:

   Examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. The mind receives
   a myriad impressions—trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the
   sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower of
   innumerable atoms; and as they fall, as they shape themselves into the life of

131 Ibid., p. 22.
132 Ibid., p. 23.
Monday or Tuesday, the accent falls differently from of old; the moment of importance came not here but there; so that, if a writer were a free man and not a slave, if he could write what he chose, not what he must, if he could base his work upon his own feeling and not upon convention, there would be no plot, no comedy, no tragedy, no love interest or catastrophe in the accepted style, and perhaps not a single button sewn on as the Bond Street tailors would have it.

Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end. Is it not the task of the novelist to convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit, whatever aberration or complexity it may display, with as little mixture of the alien and external as possible? We are not pleading merely for courage and sincerity; we are suggesting that the proper stuff of fiction is a little other than custom would have us believe it.

'Monday or Tuesday' is, of course, an allusion either to the story of the same name, or to the eponymous volume of short stories. The first version of 'Modern Fiction' was published in 1919, and deals mainly with modern novels.

As Rachel Bowlby notes, when Woolf later revised it for inclusion in The Common Reader, she reworked and expanded this paragraph quite considerably, adding the allusion to Monday or Tuesday (which had since been published in 1921) along the way. There is evidently some generic confusion here. Is it possible that this passage, which is repeatedly quoted by critics in order to provide some measure of Woolf's technique as a novelist—presumably following Woolf's own lead ("is it not the task of the novelist [...]?")—actually relates far more closely to the short stories? I would argue that this passage intimates a semi-conscious and unarticulated awareness on Woolf's part that it is the genre of the short fiction itself which enables her to write most freely and most experimentally. It is stories such as 'An Unwritten Novel' and 'A Haunted House' which capture the spirit of Woolf's desire to represent 'a myriad impressions', which really do render the writer 'a free man and not a slave', a prose writer who can 'write what he [chooses] and not what he must.'

Woolf was herself well aware of this, as is shown by her triumphant claim in 1920 that she has finally found a form for her novels:

134 Rachel Bowlby, note on 'Modern Fiction', op. cit, p. 184, fnote 7.
Suppose that one thing should open out of another—as in an unwritten novel—only not for 10 pages but 200 or so—doesn’t that give the looseness and lightness that I want: doesn’t that get closer and yet keep form and speed, and enclose everything? [...] Whether I’m sufficiently mistress of things—that’s the doubt; but conceive Mark on the Wall, K. G., and Unwritten Novel taking hands & dancing in unity.\textsuperscript{136}

The harmonious image of ‘dancing in unity’ which she deploys in order to describe the prose style which she will adopt in the novels of the 1920s, that of the three stories, ‘The Mark on the Wall’, ‘Kew Gardens’ and ‘An Unwritten Novel’, suggests the ease with which she hopes to move between novel and short story as companionable creative media. However, while this image intimates the creative importance of such connections, it does not validate those connections, just as ‘Modern Fiction’ fails to validate the short story as a genre in critical terms.

While, therefore, Woolf was evidently concerned to provide critical paradigms for the novel, and to explore its form in a modern context in relation to the output of her Victorian forbears, she seems to have been very little concerned with the place of the short story in the English modernist metropolis. The reasons for this may be very personal. The stories may indeed have been merely sketches dashed out with an eye to the next novel; they may have represented moments of respite from the heavier work of writing a full-length novel; in addition to this she was of course slightly piqued by the talent of Katherine Mansfield and may have chosen not to compete openly with her. However, we can also look to the generic preoccupations of modernism more generally and consider their impact upon Woolf as a critic as well as an artist. While Woolf is concerned to write from the position of the female outsider, her criticism on the novel shows her necessarily engaging with English literary tradition in less radical terms.Recognising the importance of conferring ‘order and dignity’ upon the novel as a genre, she internalizes some of the prejudices of the literary tradition and hierarchy about which she is writing. Thus she

\textsuperscript{136} Quoted by John Oakland, ‘Virginia Woolf’s Kew Gardens’, English Studies: A Journal of English Language and Literature, 68, 3 (1987), p. 265. (For further illuminating quotes in this vein, see for example Sandra Kemp, op. cit., p. xi.)
writes with great passion and at great length about the novel, particularly about its role in negotiating its own tradition, past, present and future. Fascinated by modernist experimentation and the negotiation with the past that it represented, and seduced by modernism's own prejudices, she fails to recognise the importance of the short story. Most importantly and most ironically, she fails to recognise in critical terms the enormous contribution made by her own work in the genre of the short story to the increasingly experimental writing process which resulted in novels such as *To the Lighthouse* and *The Waves*. This generic debt is merely intimated in the subtext and generic slippages of what have been considered core essays by Woolf on the genre of the modern novel. Even more ironic is the fact that, located generically at one remove from fashionable critical scrutiny, as it were, the short story seems to have provided Woolf with a protective refuge in the modernist metropolis from within which she could experiment to her heart's content, writing in a genre which, unlike her novels, does not have to presume to undertake a negotiation of tradition, a genre which, in her own words was 'completely opposed to the traditions of fiction'.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter I have attempted, through a detailed exploration of the culturally conservative tendencies of Kate Roberts's stories, to effect a shift in perspective on Virginia Woolf's critical theory and creative practice as a modernist writer. Looking beyond the rebellious antics of the more notorious artists of the avant-garde age, and even beyond the more experimental narrative strategies employed by Woolf herself, I have focused upon the Eliotian relationship between innovation and tradition that lay at the heart of her modernist project. My consideration of Kate Roberts's fictional output at this time reveals her to be a politically rigorous anti-modernist rather than a provincially unfashionable realist. Equally, my examination of Woolf's critical and fictional output during roughly the same period highlights significant disparities between the novel and the short story. Such disparities, I have argued, are intimately bound up with Woolf's commitment to an English literary tradition and with her desire to

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create a place for herself within that tradition. I have been concerned to show that, while Woolf herself argued that 'literature is not cut up into nations', she was well aware that the 'common ground' that was the English modernist novel was a terrain with a specific history, a terrain peopled by men as well as women, and, perhaps most importantly, a terrain to which only English citizens could gain access. Such an aesthetic politics has its culturally purist and exclusive aspects, of course, as did the politically informed literary and cultural programme that was Kate Roberts's lifework.

However, it is worth remembering, that, although both Roberts and Woolf were certainly committed to their cultural and literary heritage, as women they occupied an uneasy situation in relation to that heritage. There is a sense in which, in this context, at least, the short story became an enticing and liberating 'no man's land' to which they could withdraw from the restrictions of Welsh anti-modernism and English modernism alike, both of which were, in essence, re-affirmations of what were very different, but equally patriarchal, cultures. It is interesting, for example, to note the frequency with which critical discourse on the short story as it was shaped and moulded by Kate Roberts is frequently cloaked in feminine vocabulary. Dafydd Jenkins, for example, argues that, while Roberts's modern tendencies reveal a European influence, her stories are, however, still absolutely Welsh:

Kate Roberts took a recognised literary form and adapted it to Welsh material—almost as dress designers in recent years have made wedding dresses according to a relatively conventional pattern, and yet in Welsh wool.138

Similarly, Dewi Lloyd Jones argues that Roberts’s contribution to the establishment and furthering of the short story as a highly literary genre in Wales has been a nurturing process:

[I]t [the short story] was a very weak baby which grew to a fragile womanhood, without really knowing how to dress. She [Roberts] taught her how to dress—she made a woman of her.139

138 Dafydd Jenkins, D. J. Williams, op. cit., p. 42.
139 Dewi Lloyd Jones, quoted by Helen Ungoed Adler, op. cit., p. 143.
While such comments, along with the commonly deployed reference to Roberts as the 'queen of our literature', can be seen to undermine the status of the genre itself in a patriarchal society, it was the very fluidity and openness of the short story as a relatively new modern form which gave Kate Roberts not only the freedom to establish an indisputably Welsh form of the genre, but also to experiment with it as the medium for a female voice. Equally, while for Virginia Woolf her short stories and their cultural status seemed to her to matter less in comparison with the novel, they also provided her with a 'no man's land', a territory in which to experiment as much as she pleased, without fear of recrimination from a reviewing culture far more interested in the modernist novel. E. M. Forster, reviewing her story 'The Mark on the Wall' in 1919, describes how the story's protagonist

sees a mark on the wall just above her mantelpiece. Instead of getting up, as all well-conditioned Englishwomen should, and discovering it is a —, she continues to see it, rambling away into the speculations and fantasies that it inspires, but always coming back to the mark.¹⁴⁰

It is in her short stories, I would conclude, that Woolf is able to stray furthest from notions of what a 'well-conditioned Englishwoman' should do and write. Ironically, considering the extent and passion of her writing on the tradition of the English novel, it is her work in the genre of the short story which leads her to the high modernism of her novels of the 1920s.

This chapter has demonstrated the extent to which both Virginia Woolf and Kate Roberts were culturally conditioned writers. It has also pointed to their situations as women writers in their cultures, and to the sometimes uneasy and fragile writing identities of Welshwoman and Englishwoman alike. These were identities which were thrown into sharp relief by the experience of war; wars which served to strengthen and complicate the links which bound each woman to her culture. In writing about war, however, they had to fight another battle, to find a place for the woman's voice in what is perhaps the most male-

¹⁴⁰ E. M. Forster, 'Visions', op. cit., p. 68.
dominated of modern genres—the war novel. It is to this genre that I shall turn in Chapter 3.
CHAPTER 3

‘What “really” happened to Evans’: the war novels

Critical consideration of some of the novels of Virginia Woolf and Kate Roberts as war novels has been a relatively recent phenomenon. In the case of Woolf, it has been the result of a burgeoning feminist critical interest in the expansion of canonical notions of the genre to include novels written by women about war. Critical work on the Welsh war novel, in the meantime, has demonstrated an increasing awareness of the insufficiency of English perceptions of the genre for the purposes of Welsh literary criticism. I intend in this chapter to focus firstly upon Mrs Dalloway, primarily because it is Woolf’s most widely acclaimed war novel. Mrs Dalloway is also of particular interest in this context because its complex subject matter and contrapuntal narratives can be seen as suggesting an important theoretical challenge to gendered notions of the genre, which read war novels by men and women as purely ‘masculine’ or ‘feminine’ expressions of that genre. In addition to this, I shall argue that a crucial aspect of Mrs Dalloway is one which hinges upon a submerged subplot which has not yet been excavated and explored by critics. The relationship between Woolf’s victim of shell shock, First World War veteran Septimus Smith, and his wartime companion, Evans, is not merely another homoerotic coupling to be added to a list of several which are apparent in the novel. The naming of Septimus Smith—Woolf’s very English anti-hero—is itself significant, I shall suggest, and so, by extension, is that of Evans. Tracing the role played in Mrs Dalloway by Evans—the novel’s suppressed and, indeed, only entirely voiceless character—I shall seek to reconstruct a cultural context for Woolf’s ‘Welsh’ character through a reading of Tegwch y

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Bore [The Fairness of Morning], the second of Kate Roberts's two war novels.\(^5\) A further examination of both Tegwch y Bore and Traed Mewn Cyffion [Feet in Chains] will demonstrate how the war novel in Welsh was moulded by specifically Welsh notions of nationhood and resistance.\(^6\) Produced from within a profoundly patriarchal and increasingly nationalist society, the feminine inflections of Roberts's war novels are of especial interest, as they not only provide a female perspective on war and nationhood, but also infuse the genre itself with a peculiarly feminine aesthetic. Thus Tegwch y Bore becomes as much a romantic novel as it is a war novel, a dual generic interest which has revealing political consequences for the dénouement of the novel. The historical differences between Kate Roberts's two war novels also need to be noted, as one was published in the 1930s, and the other over twenty years later. The generational differences in perspective evident in Traed Mewn Cyffion (1936) and Tegwch y Bore (first published in weekly instalments in Baner ac Amserau Cymru during 1957 and 1958) point, of course, to the historical as well as the cultural variability of the genre. This is an issue which is relevant not only to the war novels of Kate Roberts, but also to those of Woolf—a question which will be considered in the final section of this chapter in relation to Woolf's final and terrifyingly prophetic novel, Between the Acts.\(^7\) A reassessment of Woolf's oddly fluid 'play-novel' will demonstrate how this work can be interpreted as the expression of a final, revelatory moment of cultural self-recognition for Woolf during the months leading up to her suicide in 1941. As such, it can be read as a failure of her favoured literary register—a register which she had mastered so effortlessly in Mrs Dalloway—that is, as a failure of parody.

\(^5\) Kate Roberts, Tegwch y Bore [Fariness of Morning] (Llandybie: Gwasg Christopher Davies, 1967).
\(^6\) Kate Roberts, Traed Mewn Cyffion [Feet in Chains] (Aberystwyth: Gwasg Aberystwyth, 1936).
\(^7\) Virginia Woolf, Between the Acts (London: The Hogarth Press, 1941).
‘Didn’t that give her a very odd idea of English husbands?’: *Mrs Dalloway*

The war novel has long since been recognised as a distinctive sub-genre of English literature. In his seminal work, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975), Paul Fussell traces the genre to the very year in which the war novel came into being:

It is a fact of literary history not always noticed that the year 1928, a decade after the war, is notable for two unique kinds of books: on the one hand, the first of the war memoirs setting themselves the task of remembering ‘the truth about the war’; on the other, clever novels exhibiting a generation of bright young men at war with their elders. In 1928 we have Remarque’s *All Quiet on the Western Front* and the first performance of Sheriff’s *Journey’s End*, as well as Sassoon’s *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man*, Blunden’s *Undertones of War*, Max Plowman’s *A Subaltern on the Somme*, and Hugh Quigley’s *Passchendaele and the Somme*. At the same time and on the same bookshop counters we find Aldous Huxley’s *Point Counter Point* and Waugh’s *Decline and Fall*.

Fussell’s presentation of the chronological development of the genre renders somewhat redundant war novels produced between the years 1918 and 1928, and also, of course, war novels produced by women at any time, before or after 1928. And yet ‘we have’ also Virginia Woolf’s *Jacob’s Room* (1922), *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) and *To the Lighthouse* (1927), all novels written by a woman prior to 1928, and all novels which deal with the effects of war. The gendered particularity of war as the subject of fiction was evidently a matter which exercised Woolf’s mind during the 1920s. In *A Room of One’s Own*, for example, she wrote:

But it is obvious that the values of women differ very often from the values which have been made by the other sex; naturally, this is so. Yet it is the masculine values that prevail. Speaking crudely, football and sport are ‘important’; the worship of fashion, the buying of clothes ‘trivial’. And these values are inevitably transferred from life to fiction. This is an important book, the critic assumes, because it deals with war, this is an insignificant book because it deals with the feelings of women in a drawing-room. A scene in a battle-field is more important than a scene in a shop—everywhere and much more subtly the difference of value persists.

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9 Josephine O’Brien Schaefer notes that *Jacob’s Room* ‘appeared six years before the big year’, in her article ‘The Great War and “This Late Age of World’s Experience” in Cather and Woolf’, *Virginia Woolf and War: Fiction, Reality and Myth*, op. cit., p. 134.
Feminist criticism on women's writing has taken Woolf's lead in questioning the cultural value assigned to war and its literary representation. Dorothy Goldman, for example, argues that:

If it is conceded that it was women's lack of battlefield experience that excluded their writing from literary consideration, then we grant warfare a central function in determining cultural significance; and if, conversely, women's writing is to be forgotten because women remained true to their own experiences, seldom wrote about mud, did not describe life in the trenches, then we enshrine men's perception of men's experience as the single determinant of literary culture.\(^{11}\)

While this reading of women's war writing aligns itself with Woolf's own position on the value assigned to novels according to their subject matter, conventionally 'masculine' or 'feminine', this in itself creates a problematic polarisation of war writing by men and women. How, for example, is one to approach a novel such as *Mrs Dalloway* according to the critical categories proposed by Goldman, given that, in so far as it relates to war, it is a novel about an ex-soldier and sufferer of shell shock? Other feminist critics have indicated a much broader field for the study of women's engagements with the genre. Nicola Beauman, for example, reminds the reader that, as far as prose writing of the interwar years is considered, 'it is in fact a rare novel that does not refer to the War in some way'.\(^{12}\)

However, the echoes of war in Woolf's novels are not merely a reflection in the broader sense of the age in which she lived: Judith Hattaway and Alex Zwerdling, for example, have both interpreted *Jacob's Room* as a protest against the 'national myth-making' engendered in English writing by the First World War, re-assessing Woolf's novel as a 'covert critique of the romantic posturing so common in the anthems for doomed youth'.\(^{13}\)

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12 Nicola Beauman, "'It is not the place of women to talk of mud': Some Responses by British Women novelists to World War I", in *Women and World War I: The Written Response*, op. cit., p. 129.

Flanders is not the prerequisite hero of the war novel predicated, according to Fussell, upon the patterns of the standard quest or Bildungsroman, involving 'journey', 'struggle' and, finally 'exaltation of the hero'. Woolf's portrayal of Flanders is satirical, in that he is not portrayed as manly, courageous and heroic, but rather as an ordinary young man of his own well-to-do class, who, had he lived, might well have drifted into a mediocre and disillusioned old age. Similarly, critics have shown how To the Lighthouse can be read as a 'full-scale modernist onslaught on the official version of World War I'. Others have been less eager to interpret this work as a novel of protest: it has also been suggested that To the Lighthouse actually harks back to an idyllic pre-war era when social and intellectual categories were fixed, unequivocal and secure.

Clearly, such subtle and contradictory readings suggest that neither novel slots neatly into the category of the war novel. Mrs Dalloway, by contrast, has been interpreted as unequivocally a war novel; Roger Poole, for example, suggests that it was in fact the finest war novel to appear in England:

There is a case for regarding Mrs Dalloway as the finest 'war novel' that World War I produced. Its empathetic reconstitution of a mind thrown off balance by the experience of sheer horror has not been attempted with such success anywhere else to my knowledge.

While, as Megan C. Burroughs has indicated, Woolf 'wrote much of Mrs Dalloway before retracing her steps and adding the Septimus plot line', the structuring principle of her final and published version of the novel is her treatment of the shell shock commonly experienced by First World War

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14 Paul Fussell, op. cit., p. 130.
15 Alex Zwerdling, 'Jacob's Room: Woolf's Satiric Elegy', p. 906.
16 Roger Poole, "We all put up with you Virginia": Irreceivable Wisdom About War', Virginia Woolf and War: Fiction, Reality and Myth, ed. Mark Hussey, op. cit., p. 81.
17 See, for example, John Burt, 'Irreconcilable Habits of Thought in A Room of One's Own and To the Lighthouse', English Literary History, 889-907; also Jonathan Bate, 'Arcadia and Armageddon: Three English Novelists and the First World War', in Études Anglaises, 34, 2 (1986), 150-162.
18 Roger Poole, "We all put up with you Virginia": Irreceivable Wisdom About War', Virginia Woolf and War: Fiction, Reality and Myth, ed. Mark Hussey, op. cit., pp. 79-80.
veterans. Only very rarely does she directly narrate Septimus Warren Smith's actual experience of the trenches: instead, much is inferred or remembered. Septimus's geographical dislocation and confusion on the streets of London, for example, have been traced to the First World War custom of naming trenches after famous streets and places in the capital, to create a sense of security, and to 'alleviate [the soldiers'] fear'. Woolf relays this sense of isolation through descriptions which themselves disregard the boundaries between street and trench. For example, when a car backfires, it has a violent effect upon Woolf's anti-hero:

Septimus looked. Boys on bicycles sprang off. Traffic accumulated. And there the motor car stood, with drawn blinds, and upon them a curious pattern like a tree, Septimus thought, and this gradual drawing together of everything to one centre before his eyes, as if some horror had come almost to the surface and was about to burst into flames, terrified him. The world wavered and quivered and threatened to burst into flames.

Woolf here explores the boundaries of Septimus's sanity by drawing the reader directly into his perception: when the world 'waver[s] and quiver[s] and threaten[s] to burst into flames' for Septimus, it also does so also for the reader. It is largely by means of such heightened subjectivity that the development of Septimus's deferred shell shock is portrayed by Woolf. On one occasion, however, she does actually narrate a brief and yet dense and highly suggestive history of Septimus's 'progress' in the war:

Septimus was one of the first to volunteer. He went to France to save an England which consisted almost entirely of Shakespeare's plays and Miss Isobel Pole in a green dress walking in a square. There in the trenches the change which Mr. Brewer desired when he advised football was produced instantly; he developed manliness; he was promoted; he drew the attention, indeed the affection of his officer, Evans by name [...] But when Evans [...] was killed, just before the Armistice, in Italy, Septimus, far from showing any emotion or

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19 Megan C. Burroughs, 'Septimus Smith: A Man of Many Words', University of Windsor Review, 22, 1 (1989), 73. Burroughs argues that Woolf drew on the lives of Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen in her creation of the character of Septimus Smith, and indicates that it was not until 1924 that she met Sassoon, by which time the writing of Mrs Dalloway was well advanced (71 and 73).


21 Virginia Woolf, Mrs Dalloway, op. cit., p. 15.
recognising that here was the end of a friendship, congratulated himself upon feeling very little and very reasonably. The War had taught him.\textsuperscript{22}

This brief passage encapsulating the causes of Septimus’s shell shock can be seen also as broadly encapsulating the narrative complexities of Mrs Dalloway as a war novel. I shall briefly discuss these in the order in which they are presented in Woolf’s résumé of Septimus’s trench experience quoted above: constructions of England and of Englishness (‘Shakespeare’s plays and Miss Isobel Pole in a green dress walking in a square’); notions of the English masculine ideal current during and immediately following the First World War (‘There in the trenches [...] he developed manliness’); and homoeroticism (‘He drew the attention, indeed the affection of his officer, Evans by name’). One image recurs in connection with each of these themes: that of the British Empire.

Firstly, then, Woolf points to the sharp relief into which notions of nationhood are thrown when they are assimilated into a warring consciousness. Roger Poole has suggested that Septimus is ‘all of us and all of us are him’, that he becomes (like Jacob Flanders) a representative of his generation, if not of all mankind.\textsuperscript{23} Poole does not indicate how the gender-identification of the reader may affect her/his relationship with the character of Septimus. Rather, he postulates that Septimus ‘occupies a privileged place in our consciousness. He is a sort of Everyman from the medieval spectacles’.\textsuperscript{24} Therefore, while the England for which Septimus goes to fight is peculiar to him as an individual—consisting as it does of the works of Shakespeare and the image of the first woman with whom he fell in love—the artificiality of that construction is what can be seen to be ‘universal’ in representations of England in the literary output of First World war veterans. In the face of a violent death, the abstraction of such identifications fades into insignificance: and yet they will not be obliterated, even in such circumstances. Lady Bruton, for example, cannot

\textsuperscript{22} Virginia Woolf, Mrs Dalloway, op. cit., pp. 77-8.
\textsuperscript{23} Roger Poole, ‘We all put up with you Virginia’: Irreceivable Wisdom About War’, Virginia Woolf and War: Fiction, Reality and Myth, ed. Mark Hussey, op. cit., p. 82.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., p. 83.
imagine that the Union Jack would cease to fly: 'To be not English even among the dead—no, no! Impossible!' Woolf's description of the passing of a stately car, in which, it is assumed, sits either the Prime Minister or the Queen (the same car which causes Septimus's world to 'waver' momentarily), indicates how common images of nationhood draw disparate individuals together into the space of a briefly, and yet instinctively, shared identity:

The car had gone, but it had left a slight ripple which flowed through glove shops and hat shops and tailors' shops on both sides of Bond Street. For thirty seconds all heads were inclined the same way—to the window. Choosing a pair of gloves—should they be to the elbow or above it, lemon or pale grey—ladies stopped; when the sentence was finished something had happened. Something so trifling in single instances that no mathematical instrument, though capable of transmitting shocks in China, could register the vibration; yet in its fullness rather formidable and in its common appeal emotional; for in all the hat shops and tailors' shops strangers looked at each other and thought of the dead; of the flag; of Empire [...] For the surface agitation of the passing car as it sunk grazed something very profound.

In this early passage, the 'something very profound', which draws these individuals together is consciously related to the Empire. As the novel progresses, Woolf's treatment of Richard Dalloway's and Peter Walsh's responses to the concrete manifestations of Empire, which they encounter on their travels around the metropolis, intimates no trifling element of nostalgia in the 'common appeal' of the grey, anonymous car as it glides along Bond Street.

While Richard Dalloway considers Buckingham Palace 'absurd', for example ('a child with a box of bricks could have done better'), he has fond memories of the age of Queen Victoria:

he liked being ruled by the descendant of Horsa; he liked continuity; and the sense of handing on the traditions of the past. It was a great age in which to have lived.

25 Virginia Woolf, Mrs Dalloway, op. cit., p. 160.
26 Ibid., pp. 17-18.
27 See, for example, Jeremy Tambling, 'Repression in Mrs Dalloway's London', Essays in Criticism, 39 (1989), 137-155.
28 Virginia Woolf, Mrs Dalloway, op. cit., p. 104.
Peter Walsh, recently returned to London from the colonies of India, also shows great respect for the civilisation for which London stands as a triumphant symbol, and yet, that respect is subtly inflected by the gently mocking, parodic register deployed here by Woolf. Peter Walsh reflects:

A splendid achievement in its own way, after all, London; the season; civilisation. Coming as he did from a respectable Anglo-Indian family which for at least three generations had administered the affairs of a continent (it’s strange, he thought, what a sentiment I have about that, disliking India, and empire, and army as he did), there were moments when civilisation, even of this sort, seemed dear to him as a personal possession [...] And the doctors and men of business and capable women all going about their business, punctual, alert, robust, seemed to him wholly admirable, good fellows, to whom one could entrust one’s life, companions in the art of living, who would see one through. What with one thing and another, the show was really very tolerable; and he would sit down in the shade and smoke. 29

While this passage closes, as did Richard Dalloway’s meditation, on a positive, affectionate note, it is undercut by the use of a vocabulary reminiscent not only of an imperial, ruling class, but also, and as importantly, in the context of this discussion, of the trenches of the First World War (for example, ‘good fellows [...] who would see one through’, ‘the show was really very tolerable’). 30 Similarly, particular phrases used by Septimus Smith’s doctors, Dr. Holmes and Sir William Bradshaw, are evidently neither misguided nor tactless words of encouragement, but themselves an insidious parody of the language and imagery used by officers before battle to instil courage into the rows of cannon-fodder standing to attention before them:

‘So you’re in a funk,’ he said agreeably, sitting down by his patient’s side. He had actually talked of killing himself to his wife, quite a girl, a foreigner, wasn’t she? Didn’t that give her a very odd idea of English husbands? Didn’t one owe perhaps a duty to one’s wife? 31

The coupling of nationality and masculinity in the phrase ‘English husbands’ is a significant one: being less than masculine, not putting up a ‘tolerable’ ‘show’ amounts to a failure to live up to the ‘heightened masculine ideal’ of the English forces during the First World War (and, by extension, of the British

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29 Ibid., p. 50.
30 See, for example, Paul Fussell, op. cit., pp. 179-190.
31 Virginia Woolf, Mrs Dalloway, op. cit., p. 82.
Empire). The similarity of the vocabulary employed by both army officer and Harley Street doctor once more blurs the boundaries between the trenches and the streets of the English capital, suggesting that the masculine ideals forced upon a generation of men were nurtured not only in the trenches but also, and much more insidiously, at home.

While conventional constructions of masculinity project the young soldier as manly, heroic, and courageous, this image is somewhat tempered by the widely acknowledged homoeroticism of the male bonding which developed in the insecure environment of the trenches, and it is in this historical context that the homosexualities explored in Woolf's narrative have most profitably been read. While commentators such as Fussell focus upon the ethereal and erotic quality of officer-private relationships as either paternalistic or aesthetic, but never sexual, the homoeroticism of the Septimus-Evans relationship is, by contrast, described in physical terms from the outset:

he drew the attention, indeed the affection, of his officer, Evans by name. It was a case of two dogs playing on a hearth-rug; one worrying a paper screw, snarling, snapping, giving a pinch, now and then, at the old dog's ear; the other lying somnolent, blinking at the fire, raising a paw, turning and growling good-temperedly. They had to be together, share with each other, fight with each other, quarrel with each other. 32

Emily Jensen comments that this is 'a strange image on first reading until we see its relation to the texture of the whole': the whole needs to be understood in the context of the 'displaced homoeroticism' of the relationship between the young Clarissa Dalloway and her childhood friend Sally Seton. 33 Jensen suggests that the reader finds in Clarissa and Sally the homosexual doubles of Septimus and Evans. The femininity implied by Septimus's shell shock—bearing in mind the connections which have been drawn between shell shock and that 'female malady', hysteria—and by his inferred homosexual relationship with Evans, is neatly counterpointed by the masculinity of Clarissa

32 Ibid., p. 77.
Dalloway’s bearing (‘a little rigid in fact’).  

Many of the female characters are portrayed as manly, such as the stately and overbearing Lady Bruton, or the ‘upright’ and courageous Lady Bexborough, ‘who opened a bazaar, they said, with the telegram in her hand, John her favourite, killed’; conversely, several male characters, not only Septimus Smith, are depicted as ‘not altogether manly’. A striking contrast is also implied between the apparent frigidity of Clarissa’s heterosexual relationships and the warmth and sensuality with which her meditations on love between women are infused. Considering for example the way in which she could not ‘resist sometimes yielding to the charm of a woman’, Clarissa self-consciously relates her response to ‘what men felt’ in such situations:

It was a sudden revelation, a tinge like a blush which one tried to check and then, as it spread, one yielded to its expansion, and rushed to the farthest verge and there quivered and felt the world come closer, swollen with some astonishing significance, some pressure of a rapture, which split its thin skin and gushed and poured with an extraordinary alleviation over the cracks and sores. Then, for that moment, she had seen an illumination; a match burning in a crocus; an inner meaning almost expressed. But the close withdrew; the hard had softened. It was over—the moment.

It is on grounds such as these that Clarissa Dalloway and Sally Seton have been read as the homosexual doubles of Smith and Evans.

It is certainly true that the youthful, formative experiences of Septimus and Clarissa can be traced along parallel lines. Clarissa, for example, has also lost someone close to her at a tender age, her sister Sylvia, who, like the venerated soldier-boy icon of the First World War, was ‘on the verge of life’ and extremely ‘gifted’. When she hears of Septimus’s suicide, Clarissa feels a ‘specific’ identification with him: ‘she felt somehow like him, the young man

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38 Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, op. cit., p. 70.
who had killed himself. Jensen boldly pushes this argument to its logical conclusion: ultimately, she postulates, Clarissa 'recognises that she has committed her own kind of suicide: she has in fact committed one of the most common suicides for women, that respectable destruction of the self', in the interests of heterosexual marriage. Masculine and feminine as socialised and sexualised categories are blurred, subversively it seems, through Woolf's focus on the ambivalence of the First World War iconizing of the soldierly ideal. The result is a war novel which pushes the genre beyond its own limits. Mrs Dalloway becomes more than a criticism: it is no less than a parody of the war novel itself, which, in honouring the men who had fallen, also honoured (whether intentionally or not is here immaterial) the British government and social system which had put them in the line of fire.

The 'seemingly well-constructed duality' inherent in such an interpretation of Mrs Dalloway as a war novel thus re-explores the First World War as a 'crisis of masculinity and a trial of the Victorian masculine ideal'. It is also worth noting, however, some of the class and cultural differences discernible in Mrs Dalloway, which have attracted far less critical commentary. An unusual and fascinating reading of the novel is offered by Jeremy Tambling, who concludes that:

The novel's failure, despite its local use of irony, to make something of social as well as sexual difference seems to be the blindness accompanying its insight. The moments when either Mrs. Dalloway or Peter Walsh recognise that this London does not suit them can be forgotten as they cannot be for Septimus Smith or Rezia —figures the novel keeps collusively on its margins. Septimus Smith could not really be Mrs. Dalloway's double. And neither he nor the others could, after all, attend Mrs. Dalloway's party.

40 Ibid., p. 178.
41 Masami Usui, 'The Female Victims of War in Mrs Dalloway', in *Virginia Woolf and War: Fiction, Reality and Myth*, op. cit., p. 151; the second quotation taken from Usui here is actually from Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture*, op. cit.
The ‘others’ also include figures such as Clarissa Dalloway’s servants and the much despised Mrs. Kilman. And yet, is Tambling not a little too dismissive of Woolf’s social critique? Is it really focused on issues of gender and sex alone? In his eagerness to question Freudian feminist interpretations of the homoerotic couplings and doublings in the novel, he seems to pay little attention to the fact that so much of the novel’s emotional investment is indeed focused on Septimus himself, permitting Woolf to explore the net within which he is held so tightly, the intricate net that is the British Empire. For while the British Empire can be seen as figuring in the novel in an oblique and often abstract way, Woolf frequently resorts to one of her favoured techniques in order to concretise and thus criticise its human consequences. I have already drawn attention to the way in which Woolf parodies the vocabulary of the English imperialistic, jingoistic and chauvinistic ruling classes. In Mrs Dalloway she also personifies the imperialising process, as it were, in the shape of two figures, ‘Proportion’ and ‘Conversion’.

Proportion is maintained by being a Sir William Bradshaw, in good health, in a laudable profession, in a secure marriage:

Worshipping proportion, Sir William not only prospered himself but made England prosper, secluded her lunatics, forbade childbirth, penalized despair, made it impossible for the unfit to propagate their views until they, too, shared his sense of proportion—his if they were men, Lady Bradshaw’s if they were women (she embroidered, knitted, spent four nights out of seven at home with her son).

Proportion maintains balance by creating divisions, such as the carefully coded gender divisions embodied by Sir and Lady Bradshaw. Proportion literally outlaws England’s ‘lunatics’ and outsiders. The application of Proportion in all things leads to the prosperity of England: Septimus, by contrast, is the ‘lunatic’ outcast, who, were he not restrained, would bring England (and the Empire) to

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43 Karen Levenback’s excellent article, ‘Clarissa Dalloway, Doris Kilman and the Great War’, Virginia Woolf Miscellany, 37 (1991), indicates how Woolf, through her portrayal of Doris Kilman, ‘suggests that the war-blindness (which on the homefront was manifest through a propaganda campaign designed to demean and isolate those of German origin) was alive and well in post-war London’. (4).

44 Virginia Woolf, Mrs Dalloway, op. cit., p. 89.
Proportion, in a nutshell, is the rod with which the Empire is ruled. The 'doctors and men of business and capable women all going about their business, punctual, alert, robust' who had seemed to be so 'wholly admirable' to Peter Walsh, have all internalised Proportion, and they in turn exert its power.

While Proportion can be seen as a characteristic of the ruling classes of the Empire, Conversion, on the other hand, is the process by which the ruling classes tame and govern the subjects of Empire, and through which those subjects are coerced into internalising British imperial values, and into adopting the mask of their oppressors. Conversion, according to Woolf, '[loves] to impress, to impose, adoring her own features stamped on the face of the populace'45. One of the most interesting aspects of Virginia Woolf’s critique of imperial values in Mrs Dalloway, I would suggest, is that she is concerned with the way in which they pervade both the colonies and the metropolitan culture itself, to the extent that certain classes and certain individuals in English society become equivalent to the colonial 'subaltern', Septimus Smith being a prime example.

Nevertheless, despite the radical nature of Woolf’s critique of Empire in Mrs Dalloway, it is a critique which remains rooted in Englishness.46 Even if it is a subversive parody, which succeeds in highlighting the oppressive aspects of the British Empire in its own provinces, it never really interrogates the Britishness of the Empire which it is so keen to deconstruct. There is, however, one liminal character in Mrs Dalloway who remains all but ignored, and an exploration of whom would be more than illuminating in this context. Septimus’s former friend Evans is also barred not only from Mrs. Dalloway’s party, but also, to all intents and purposes, from the novel: he is a character who

45 Ibid., p. 89.
46 Josephine O’Brien Schaefer also explores in her comparative reading of Jacob’s Room and Willa Cather’s One of Ours (1922) the culturally variable perspectives upon war evident in these novels, focusing particularly on ‘the senseless waste of war in Woolf, the sense of meaning and purpose war can bring in Cather’, (“The Great War and “This Late Age of World’s Experience” in Cather and Woolf’, Virginia Woolf and War: Fiction, Reality and Myth, ed.
is long since dead when the book opens. Roger Poole argues that Woolf’s
descriptions of what happened during the war in which Evans was killed are,
however, important. It is, according to Poole, the details scattered through the
text that give an ‘authentic’ feel to Smith’s peripheral world: ‘The reader can
thus “infer” what “really” happened to Smith and what “really” happened to
Evans’.47 And yet, it will be remembered that what ‘really’ happened to Evans
very quickly ceases to be of importance: it is Smith who becomes ‘Everyman’
for Roger Poole, not Evans: ‘There is something of Septimus Smith in every
one of us—the second part of the name, Smith, corresponds to this
universality’, he asserts.48 If this is the case, then to what ‘universality’ does
the second part of Septimus’s officer’s name correspond? Septimus Warren
Smith’s own name is certainly the result of no accident or coincidence: the
naming of Woolf’s character has arisen from careful meditation on the part of
the author, as is evident in her narrator’s comment that:

London has swallowed up many millions of young men called Smith; thought
nothing of fantastic Christian names like Septimus with which their parents have
thought to distinguish them.49

Septimus Smith is, if not universal, then at least representative of a certain class
of young man, a member of the aspiring lower middle classes of provincial
England. What of the many thousands of young men called Evans, who are
arguably represented in Mrs Dalloway by Septimus Smith’s former officer?
While ‘Smith’ is taken by Woolf and Poole alike to be an indicator (conscious
or unconscious) of Englishness, ‘Evans’, I would suggest, can equally be
interpreted as representative of (Welsh-speaking) Welshness in Mrs Dalloway,
and, as such, the role played by the character of this name takes on a specific
cultural significance. It should be recalled that Evans does more than play an
important role in the development of Septimus’s illness: he, or at least his
death, is its very cause. It is after his death, for which Septimus, trained in
manliness, cannot grieve, that the surviving English soldier begins to suffer

Mark Hussey, op. cit.), p. 135.
47 Roger Poole, “‘We all put up with you Virginia’: Irreceivable Wisdom About War’, Virginia
48 Ibid., p. 83.
from deferred shell shock. Evans’s voice becomes the recurring symptom of that illness; he comes back to haunt Septimus, singing and speaking to him. Septimus’s hysterical outbursts are actually responses to Evans:

He sang. Evans answered from behind the tree. The dead were in Thessaly, Evans sang, among the orchids. There they waited till the War was over, and now the dead, now Evans himself—

‘For God’s sake don’t come!’ Septimus cried out. For he could not look upon the dead.50

His intermittent cries to ‘Evans, Evans, Evans’, have the portentous effect of a tolling bell in the narrative, a crescendo of ominous utterances which prepare the reader for the moment of Septimus’s suicide.51

And yet, for all the importance of the role played by Evans in Septimus’s illness, the Welsh officer himself remains a silent character, named but not spoken. Very rarely does Woolf report Evans’s speech: for the most part we read only that ‘Evans was behind the railings!’ or that ‘Evans [...] was singing behind the screen’.52 Unlike Sally Seton, Evans’s supposed counterpart in the novel, Evans never has an opportunity to emerge from behind the tree/railings/screen to articulate his relationship with Septimus, to speak for himself, while Sally, on the other hand, punctures in a few sentences some of the homoerotic aura surrounding Clarissa in the novel:

What Sally felt was simply this. She had owed Clarissa an enormous amount. They had been friends, not acquaintances, friends, and she still saw Clarissa all in white going about the house with her hands full of flowers—to this day tobacco plants made her think of Bourton. But—did Peter understand?—She lacked something.53

Evans has no such opportunity, either to deny or to assert his sexual relationship with Septimus Smith. And yet, in the year in which Mrs Dalloway was published in London, the Welsh-language community, which Evans can be

49 Virginia Woolf, Mrs Dalloway, op. cit., p.76.
50 Ibid., p. 63.
51 Ibid., p. 131.
52 Ibid., pp. 24 and 124.
seen as representing, chose to do precisely that: to speak for itself. Plaid Cymru, the Welsh Nationalist Party, was established in 1925; its first president (from 1926 to 1939) was Saunders Lewis. As a reading of Kate Roberts's novel *Tegwch y Bore* will show, it was largely Welsh-speaking men's and women's experiences of war which acted as a catalyst in this political process, precipitating the development of a nationally defined voice which remains unheard in *Mrs Dalloway*.

‘[S]he was a Welshwoman, [...] this was not Wales's war*: *Tegwch y Bore*

If Kate Roberts's *Tegwch y Bore* (1967) is read as a prequel and sequel to *Mrs Dalloway*, then Evans re-emerges into British consciousness as Bobi Owen, a seventeen-year-old soldier from a North Walian quarrying village. Through such a reading, 'Evans'—or rather, the cultural group represented by Evans—can be seen to reappropriate his history and his place, and, ultimately, his cultural identity in *Mrs Dalloway*. *Tegwch y Bore* is among Roberts's lesser novels, for various reasons, including the fact that it was first printed in instalments in *Y Faner*, as a result of which the 'serial' and sometimes repetitive nature of the chapters appears a little clumsy in the book-length version. The novel seems long and rambling, and lacks the organic structure of Roberts's other novels, for example, *Stryd y Glep* [Gossip Row], also written after the Second World War. *Tegwch y Bore* has also attracted little critical attention, I would suggest, because it is a work in which Roberts can be seen to be reworking familiar material. Like her earlier war novel, *Traed Mewn Cyffion*, it focuses upon the cultural and emotional losses incurred by war, and like so much of Roberts's work in this strain, it is a highly autobiographical yet also cultural elegy, a mourning of the passing of a way of life as well as a mourning of loved ones lost for ever.

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54 See D. Hywel Davies, op. cit.
55 This aspect of the book is cited by Kate Roberts herself in a brief foreword to the novel as the main reason why she has delayed publication of the work in its entirety.
56 Kate Roberts, *Stryd y Glep* [Gossip Row] ( 
Nevertheless, unlike *Traed Mewn Cyffion*, the later novel focuses upon the reactions of a sister and not those of a mother, to the loss of a loved one. This is a book about the premature passing of youth, about growing to sexual, emotional and political maturity. As a novel about a young soldier faced with the horrors of the First World War, it demonstrates a specifically Welsh reaction to that war: Bobi’s coming to maturity is paralleled by a coming to political consciousness on the part of the Welsh-language community as a whole. However, as the events in the novel are all viewed through the eyes of a young female protagonist, and since the narrative which follows Ann through the grieving process after Bobi’s death is accompanied by a description of her courtship with Richard Edmund, culminating in marriage plans at the end of the novel, the book can also be read as a romantic novel. It certainly displays—particularly in the second half of the novel—many of the characteristics peculiar to the plot-driven romance. This generic mixture makes for an uneasy coalescence, which nevertheless finds a resolution in the final pages of *Tegwch y Bore*, mainly due, as I shall demonstrate, to the political sympathies which inform the writing of both strands of the book. Notably, in contrast with the model of the war novel suggested by Fussell, *Tegwch y Bore* does not operate as a triumphant *Bildungsroman*, relating the progress and prowess of a heroic soldier-figure. Roberts relates the soldier’s progress rather as a fall from grace. Similarly, the romantic subplot of *Tegwch y Bore* seems to defy convention: far from being a quivering, sensual heroine, Ann’s relationship with Richard seems to become less, rather than more, physical as the novel reaches its conclusion. The reasons for these apparent ‘deviations’ from the generic norm, I shall argue, can be found in the specifically Welsh situation from within which Roberts was writing.

The ‘Evans’ of *Tegwch y Bore* is the younger brother of Ann Owen, the novel’s protagonist: like many of his male contemporaries, he volunteers to join the army when war breaks out in order to escape the monotony of his apprenticeship to a draper in the nearest town. Bobi is described in particularly tragic terms from the outset, in spite of the fact that war does not come to the
Ann's early sense of foreboding is consistently coupled in the novel with her unwillingness to see Bobi losing his innocence by growing into a man. At Bobi's First Communion, for example, she ponders upon the social rather than the religious significance of the event:

This taking [of the Communion] was more than taking [it] as full members. It was an acceptance into adult society, a turning of one's back on childhood and innocence. The stone came back, and she felt Bobi's smooth hair on her face when he was a baby in her arms and she was sitting on the stone. His hair like an unopened buttercup, and closing like a cup around his head.

Looking at the vulnerable adolescent before her, Ann remembers Bobi as an even more vulnerable baby under her care. A later scene in the same chapel becomes further infused with nostalgia, this time combined with a fear reminiscent of Ann's earlier forebodings:

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58 Ibid., p. 24. Part of this passage is quoted by Derec Llwyd Morgan, *Kate Roberts*, op. cit., p. 15.
There was a good scattering of soldiers’ clothes in the audience, and Bobi was one. Ann realised that he could not change into his everyday clothes. He wore short trousers when he joined the army. This gave her a shock—that the boy had become a young man. That was the meaning of the difference and clashing between them. She wanted him still to be a boy, a boy in short trousers.

Ann’s desire for her brother to retain his boyishness is reflected in her assertion that one of her fears when he joins the Army is that he will ‘lose his innocence, and come to know things that a boy of his age shouldn’t know. If he came back alive, his attitude to home would have changed, sure enough.’ The parallel between Ann’s fears for Bobi’s future and her fears regarding his sexual maturity can be read as a retrospective exploration on the part of Kate Roberts of the gwerin experience of war. While Bobi does not survive the war, and it is therefore impossible to gauge how much his attitude to his home would have changed, Ann’s lover, Richard Edmund, who goes to the trenches as a member of the medical corps, does survive and return to his homeland. The novel closes with his meditation on how his attitude to Wales has been transformed by his experience of the First World War. He tells Ann:

“I have seen a lot of things since the war began, and one thing I have realised is that this world is very big, and that there are a lot of people very different to us in it, and that their ways and standards are different. I would not like to say at all that we are better than them, but I believe that some things will be quite different when this is over, there will be a slackening and breaking away from the past, and people will break away from their homes and will be able to do so without feeling anything. Home will not mean anything to them. And realizing this has made me want all the more to hold on to the old things and to cling all the more to home.”

59 Kate Roberts, Tegwch y Bore, op. cit., p. 200.
60 Ibid., p. 172.
61 Ibid., p. 343-344.
The increased strength of Richard's attachment to his home and country may seem to be merely nostalgic, a desire for the homeland as it was, untouched by war; and this nostalgic pull can be compared to that of the poetry of Englishman Rupert Brooke, for example. And yet, it was the First World War which functioned as a catalyst in the awakening of Wales's political consciousness, resulting in the establishment of the Welsh Nationalist Party in 1925. In this context, Wales as homeland, represented as a particular version of Welshness focused on the hearth of the rural gwerin families, became an important element of Welsh-language political discourse between the two World Wars. Critic Gerwyn Williams has indicated, for example, how Roberts's discourse of the gwerin is dependent upon contemporary notions of nationhood, asserting that 'it was in her patriotism that Kate Roberts's nationalism was rooted: one is the extension of the other'.62 Richard's final comments in Tegwch y Bore serve, therefore, to indicate the direction which that discourse was to take after the First World War, and emphasise that, rather than yearning for a pre-war Eden—after all, Bobi went to war to escape from the economic hardship and daily drudgery of his life in Wales—it will aim to recreate Welsh life as that of the gwerin class during better times, when the quarries were in full operation and the wages were good.

It is in the context of this political awakening that the theme of growth to maturity in Tegwch y Bore needs to be read. It is through this thematic connection between individual and community that Roberts very emotively draws attention to the historical fact that the First World War caused the Welsh gwerin to realize how little their own community-based and linguistically-specific culture was recognized by the country for which they had served (and for which many of their compatriots had lost their lives). Richard Edmund articulates this awareness with a mixture of bewilderment and bitterness when he says to Ann:

62 Gerwyn Williams, Tir Neb, Rhyddiaith Gymraeg a'r Rhyfel Byd Cyntaf, op. cit., p. 54.
‘I Gymru yr ydach chi a fi yn perthyn, ’does gan Gymru wleidyddiaeth ond
gweilidyddiaeth gwlad arall. Felly ’wyddon ni ddim am beth yr ydan ni’n
ymladd yn y rhyfel yma [...] Mi fasa’ch galar yn llai, petai Bobi wedi marw dros
Gymru.’

You and I belong to Wales, Wales doesn’t have any politics but the politics of
another country. So we don’t know what we are fighting for in this war [...] You
grief would be alleviated, if Bobi had died for Wales.’

This is an awareness which has been carefully built up throughout the second
half of the novel, ever since the early stages of the war. Only a year after the
outbreak of war, for example, Ann Owen herself is very clear as to the
disjunction between what she sees as her nationality, and the nation for which
the war is being fought: ‘By now she knew one thing, that she was a
Welshwoman, and that this was not Wales’s war.’ When another of Ann’s
brothers, Rolant, returns from the war suffering from shell shock, he, like
Septimus Smith in Mrs Dalloway, is accused of lacking courage, in spite of
having been an excellent soldier. Visiting Rolant in hospital in London, Ann
questions his doctor as the cause of his shell shock. Echoing Sir William
Bradshaw, the army doctor’s responses suggest faintheartedness to be the cause
of Rolant’s nervous problems; Ann, however, vigorously refutes this
hypothesis:

‘Oes yna rywbeth i ddangos i fod o’n llwfr pan oedd o yn Ffrainc?’
‘Nac oes, dyna sy’n beth rhyfedd, mae’i record o yn un da iawn, yn saethwr
medrus, ddigon da i fod yn sneipar.’
‘Efallai mai dyna yw achos i salwch.’
‘Twt, twt, ’dydi soldiwr da ddim ym meddwl am beryg, ac mi ddyylai pob un yr
un fath â fo feddw! am ei wlad a gwneud i orau drosti.’

‘Is there anything to show that he was a coward when he was in France?’
‘No, that’s the strange thing, his record is very good, an able gunner, good
enough to be a sniper.’
‘Perhaps that’s the cause of his illness.’
‘Tut, tut, a good soldier doesn’t think about danger, and everyone should think
like him of his country and do his best for it.’

63 Kate Roberts, Tegwch y Bore, op. cit., pp. 342-343.
65 Kate Roberts, Tegwch y Bore, op. cit., p. 275.
Like Bradshaw, the doctor makes the crucial connection between nationhood and masculinity; and yet Rolant, of course, is no English husband like Septimus, as Ann is only too quick to point out:

‘Ia, ond nid ymladd dros i wlad y mae fy mrawd.’ [...] ‘Dros bwy y mae o’n ymladd?’ ‘Nid tros i wlad, Cymru ydi ein gwlad ni.’ Edrychodd y meddyg arni yn awr fel petai’n gweld o amgueddfa yn eistedd ar y gadair. Rhedai ei lygaid dros ei hwyneb fel petai yn ei chwilio. ‘Dydw i ddim yn eich deall.’ ‘Na, fedr Sais ddim deall.’

‘Yes, but my brother isn’t fighting for his country.’ [...] ‘For whom is he fighting?’ ‘Not for his country, Wales is our country.’ The doctor looked at her now as if he saw a museum relic sitting on the chair. His eyes ran over her face searchingly. ‘I don’t understand you.’ ‘No, an Englishman cannot understand.’

Virginia Woolf, through her description of the way in which imperialist notions of nationality and masculinity are forced upon Septimus Smith, with fatal results, criticises the imposition of a self-destructive heroism upon an individual in the name of nationhood. Ann’s rejection of the doctor’s attempt to force those same notions upon her brother Rolant, however, demonstrates precisely why Septimus and Evans are not interchangeable soldier-characters. Such differences are also made clear at other points in the narrative: for example, Bobi’s own mother is unable to understand the various War Office communications regarding her son’s fatal illness, as they are in English, and her children have to translate them for her. These telegrams, which point to the obliviousness of the War Office to Mrs. Owen’s mother tongue—indeed her only tongue—become symbols of the obliviousness of Britain as a whole during the period to its internal cultural divides.

66 Ibid., pp. 275-276.
67 This is a repetition of the plot line of Traed Mewn Cyffion, in which the protagonist mother-figure, Jane Gruffydd cannot understand the English War Office telegram telling her of her son’s death, and has the news translated for her by a shopkeeper.
The political impetus of such a critique is clear, as has been noted by the relatively few critics who have commented on *Tegwch y Bore*. And yet, as the political consciousness and maturity of the Welsh-speaking people are reflected in and seen from the perspective of not only Bobi, Richard and Rolant, but also, and primarily, that of the novel’s protagonist, Ann, then the gendered aspects of that maturity also require some consideration. This is particularly important in view of the parallel between sexuality and nationhood in the novel.

Critics have noted that Richard Edmund, Ann’s young lover, is a ‘grey’, unappealing character, who does little to attract the empathy of the reader. They have also remarked upon the contrast between Ann’s often lukewarm sentiments for her lover compared with her much more strongly expressed feelings for her brother, Bobi. Delyth George, for example, argues that: ‘it is Bobi her brother, not Richard, who succeeds in sending some warmth through Ann’s body’. Attempting to trace the apparent displacement of Ann’s sexual emotions from Richard onto Bobi, Gerwyn Williams has noted that not only Kate Roberts’s own young brother, but also a close college friend, David Ellis, were killed in the First World War. He speculates that Roberts’s own sexuality is displaced onto a family relationship for the sake of respectability in this, a highly autobiographical novel. However, it is not the case that, from the outset, Ann responds physically to Bobi *rather* than to Richard. Describing their first moments of physical contact, for example, Roberts’s narrator makes it quite obvious that the young couple’s closeness cannot be mistaken for a purely emotional bonding:

Gafaelodd yntau yn ei braich, a’i chlosio ato. Aeth ias o gynhesrwydd drwyddi, gwahanol lawn i’r cynhesrwydd a deimlasai pan roes Bes Morris ei braich yn ei

68 For example, Dafydd Glyn Jones, “*Tegwch y Bore*”, *Kate Roberts: Cyfrol Deyrnged*, op. cit., pp. 133-134; and John Rowlands, “*Tegwch y Bore*”, *Kate Roberts: Ei Meddwl a’i Gwaith* [Kate Roberts: Her Thought and Work], ed. Rhydwen Williams (Llandu_bye: Gwasg Christopher Davies, 1983), n.b. pp. 137-138.

69 John Rowlands, “*Tegwch y Bore*”, op. cit., p. 137.


He took her arm, and drew her closer. A warm tremor went through her; very different to the warmth she had felt when Bess Morris had put her arm in hers the other night. This was a very exciting warmth, a warmth which did not provoke any desire in her to tell her secrets.

And yet, as the novel progresses, Ann does indeed become increasingly distanced—both physically and emotionally—from Richard. This distancing can be attributed, at least in part, to her growing obsession with Bobi, played out through the fears which she expresses for his safety. When she first hears that Bobi has joined the army, for example, she is just as deeply affected as if she had just heard that he had been killed. Apart from the portentous function of this description, which can be compared with the prescient passages quoted earlier, Roberts’s exploration of Ann’s emotions at this juncture also points to a disparity between her reactions to the dangers facing Bobi and Richard:

She could not explain either why she felt so much more depressed now than when she had heard that Richard had joined up, except that Richard was older and more capable of facing the world with his experience.

This disparity develops as the novel progresses, until finally, after Bobi’s death, Ann is hardly even able to communicate with Richard, and in fact becomes jealous of him; jealous that he has survived, while Bobi died. She tells her friend Mrs Huws: ‘I have come to think that it is unfair that Richard is alive and Bobi isn’t.’

Nevertheless, this is an aspect of the plot which is really only developed in the second half of *Tegwch y Bore*. As I have noted, the closeness and physical intimacy of Ann’s relationship with Richard are quite clear during the

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72 *Tegwch y Bore*, p. 71.
73 Ibid., p. 172.
74 Ibid., p. 172.
75 Ibid., p. 329.
opening chapters—it is only later on, when the war comes to shatter their lives, that this aspect of their relationship changes. It is also important to note that, during the first half of the novel, as Roberts relates Ann's progression to sexual maturity through her relationship with Richard, she portrays Ann as a rebellious young woman in conflict with a conservative society. Many of the earlier chapters focus upon the public embarrassments with which Ann is confronted in the small-town community of Blaen Ddôn as her relationship with Richard becomes public. This culminates in an episode in which Ann is seen drinking in a public house with him. This episode provides Kate Roberts with an opportunity to criticize the extreme moral positions taken by the supporters of the temperance movement so active in Wales during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Due to the close connections drawn here between physical and sexual lack of control, it also intimates the inability of the community openly to accept a young unmarried woman's courtship. By refusing to conform to that society, Ann comes to feel like 'one of the suffragettes prominent in the women's movements of the time.'\footnote{Ibid., p. 139.} The first half of the novel closes on this rebellious note: Ann decides to leave Blaen Ddôn, even if she does not secure another teaching job first.

Ann's rebellion, however, is transformed beyond recognition in the second half of Tegwch y Bore. Her energies are channelled into her struggle with an obsession with her younger brother, which prevents her from loving Richard as she should. Rather than looking to Kate Roberts's personal biography to resolve the question of sexual displacement in Ann's relationships with Bobi and Richard, I would argue that Ann's struggle can be probed more deeply if we consider further the parallel with the developing Welsh political consciousness depicted in the novel. Towards the close of Tegwch y Bore, Mrs. Huws looks back upon Ann's troubled time at Blaen Ddôn, indicating how revealing was the public house episode, for example, of the narrow-mindedness of Wales's small-town communities:
‘Yes,’ said Mrs Huws, gazing into the fire, ‘that’s the kind of people we Welsh are, narrow people, in a confined world. That’s how it was with that rum that you drank in the public house.’

‘No,’ said Ann hotly, ‘we are an old people, and yesterday counts for us, and that has got nothing to do with that rum.’

From being a proto-suffragette, Ann has become a ‘proto-nationalist’, a process which has involved the emergence of a nationalist political discourse based upon the hearth, values and lifestyle of the gwerin. The exchange quoted above shows that, far from changing her mind about the pettiness of Blaen Ddöl, Ann has come increasingly to see the gwerin fireside of her home (and the homes of gwerin families like hers) as representing a newly politicised Welshness. As Dafydd Glyn Jones points out: ‘As is shown by the fuss about a small glass of rum in the first half of Tegwch y Bore, it is the standards of Mrs Ifans and the people of Blaen Ddöl which are narrow, and not the standards of Ann’s home.’

Towards the end of the novel, a fusion occurs of the gwerin values of Ann’s family with those of Richard’s, which is effected through the transfer of property (symbolic of the gwerin lifestyle) from one family to another. It is ultimately upon this transferral that the thematic cadence and resolution of Tegwch y Bore depend. One way in which Richard remembers his parents—especially his mother—at Christmas, is to use her old tea service. He later tells Ann:

‘A wyddoch chi, mi deimlais beth mor braf oedd yfed te o gwpan denau, a hynny heb fod pobl ddiarth o gwmpas y bwredd.’

‘Fel petaech chi wedi rohi tret i chi’ch hun?’

‘Ia, wrth feddwl amdanoch chi.’

‘A dyna gysur ych Nadolig chi?’


79 Kate Roberts, Tegwch y Bore, op. cit., p. 129.
'And you know, I felt it was such a wonderful thing to drink tea from a fine cup, and that without strange people at the table.'
'As if you had given yourself a treat?'
'Yes, while thinking about you.'
'And that is your Christmas comfort?'

This seemingly trivial and simple act acquires a deeper significance when Ann breaks one of the cups in this tea set during Richard's absence. Vexed, she is only too aware of its sentimental value:

Efallai nad oedd y tŷ yn golygu llawer i Richard wedi i'w fam farw. Ond gwyddai fod y llestri, a dyma hithau wedi torri ar gyfanrwydd y set. Yna daeth rhywbeth yn araf i'w chof. Yr oedd gan ddwy wythau ddwy neu dair cwpan a soser o'r patrwm yna gartref, gweddill rhyw set. Yr oedd yn batrwm cyffredin. Fe ofynnai i'w mam am gwpan.80

Perhaps the house did not mean much to Richard after his mother died. But she knew that the dishes did, and she had gone and spoiled the completeness of the set. Then something came slowly into her mind. They had two or three cups and saucers of that pattern at home, the leftovers of some set. It was a common pattern. She would ask her mother for a cup.

With Ann's decision to replace the broken cup with one belonging to her mother comes an indication of the symbolic import of this episode. The fact that this is a 'common' pattern suggests common ground, a territory shared by the Edmund and Owen families in terms both of economics and of taste, thereby a sharing also of other gwérin values. Projecting her own mother onto the image of Richard's dead mother will make Ann's later recognition, that she must loosen her family ties, by marrying Richard and having a family of her own, not so much a loosening but, ironically, a strengthening of those very ties. It is intimated that this will be achieved through their reproduction in the wider community.

Along the way, Ann's earlier conflicts with her community over her relationship with Richard as an unmarried college graduate seem to have been forgotten, and in fact will be swiftly and conveniently resolved at the close of the novel when we leave the young lovers looking forward to getting married.

80 Ibid., p. 224.
It seems that the importance of Wales’s cultural situation has overtaken the individual issue of Ann’s sexual freedom. After the 1920s, Kate Roberts herself turned her attention from the women’s issues explored in her early drama and journalism to a more conservative discourse on gender in the pursuit of nationalist politics, and her protagonist Ann Owen can be seen doing exactly the same in this novel. I shall be exploring this issue further in Chapters 4 and 5 of this thesis—for the moment, I shall merely note the importance of this volte face in the context of Tegwch y Bore. Once a rebellious young woman eager to explore her developing sexual awareness, Ann becomes an almost asexual mother-figure: firstly, she is more concerned with the security of her brother than that of her lover, and secondly, she develops more of a passion with the transmission of gwerin values from generation to generation than with anything—or anyone—else. This is all understandable, given her tragic circumstances, and the changing political climate in Wales at the time. Nevertheless, it also serves as an important example of the way in which issues relating to women’s liberation were sidelined in Wales during the first half of this century by a political movement which, in its eagerness to restore the Welsh culture to its former glory, resorted to a highly conservative discourse on notions of womanhood, and especially on motherhood, the role of the mother being so crucial to the survival of the nation and culture. It becomes clear, therefore, that while the political progression in the novel from innocence (and ignorance) to maturity is a positive one, the narrative of Ann’s concomitant progression to sexual maturity signals the increasing repression of her sexuality, and further, that this repression is intimately bound up with developing notions of nationhood.

By the end of the novel, therefore, Ann miraculously rediscovers her love for Richard, and also begins to come to terms with Bobi’s death. The final submission of Ann’s rebellious sexuality within the union of marriage is, of course, a theme common to the overwhelming majority of romantic novels. As Dafydd Glyn Jones has remarked of Tegwch y Bore: ‘it is a love story, or at least it is a love story among other things. It is set during the First World War,
and it ends happily.\textsuperscript{81} Other critics have been less satisfied with this aspect of the book. John Emyr, for example, has commented on the abrupt change of tone which Ann’s sudden change in attitude towards her lover brings to \textit{Tegwch y Bore}, arguing that it jars upon the ‘tragic tone of the larger part of the novel.’\textsuperscript{82} Such reactions suggest that overlaying of one generic structure (the romantic novel) on another (the war novel) simply does not work. In aesthetic terms, this may be true, as the sudden change of heart engineered by an author evidently keen to rush her unwilling lovers towards the altar, seems less than plausible in the light of the events that came before and the lengthy early explorations of Ann’s very real confusion about her relationship with Richard. Nevertheless, it does seem more fruitful to consider both strands of \textit{Tegwch y Bore} in terms of their interrelation—if Roberts is so keen to marry off her characters, then this can be seen not only as an inevitable outcome of the romantic plot, but also as an important dénouement of the Welsh war novel specifically. Ann needs to be reunited with her suitor not only in order to fulfil romantic expectations, but also in order to effect the reproduction of \textit{gwerin} values which became so important to the Welsh-language community as a \textit{direct result} of the First World War. Thus the plot of both generic strands in the novel become one and the same—both romance and war lead to the same outcome in the end. In the process, Ann seems to abandon her individual and potentially rebellious sexual freedom, becoming instead a kind of \textit{Everyman}, on whom the future of the nation depends.

‘The epic absolute past’: \textit{Traed Mewn Cyffion}

Drawing upon Paul Fussell’s model of the war novel, Gerwyn Williams suggests that it is a definition which should be significantly broadened in order to include such important works as Gwenallt’s \textit{Plasau’r Brenin} (1934), an autobiographical novel which relates Gwenallt’s experience as a conscientious objector during the First World War:

\textsuperscript{81} Dafydd Glyn Jones, ‘Tegwch y Bore’, op. cit., p. 122.
\textsuperscript{82} John Emyr, \textit{Enaid Chyfwus}, op. cit., p. 27.
Gwenallt’s novel forces us to consider Welsh literature on its own terms and insists that we extend our usual definition of the war novel in order to include work which would never have been written had the war not happened. 83

A re-definition of the genre is all the more urgently required, Williams argues, because there are no war novels in the Welsh language which fulfil Fussell’s anglocentric criteria: there is no corpus of novels or memoirs which deal with the experience of the First World War in quite the same way as do the works cited by Paul Fussell (for example, Sassoon’s Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man). In fact, according to Williams, there was relatively little First World War prose fiction produced until the 1960s, an indication perhaps of the vast cultural differences between English and Welsh-language assimilation and literary representation of the experiences of war. In his study, Williams takes the crucial critical move of considering two of Kate Roberts’s novels as war novels in formal, aesthetic terms: Traed Mewn Cyfon (1936) and Tegwch y Bore (1967). This move is of utmost importance, as neither had previously been treated as such: the war had been seen as a background to the novel’s events and nothing more. John Rowlands, for example, proposes that the First World War functions as a backdrop to each novel:

It is easy to see this novel as a study of the effects of the tragedy of the First World War on characters who were young during the Indian summer of the preceding years. This is the background, certainly, but as with the ending of Traed Mewn Cyffion [...] it is only a background. 84

Gerwyn Williams, however, defines Traed Mewn Cyffion as a ‘an entirely Welsh reaction to the War’, quoting Saunders Lewis’s appreciation of the novel as an ‘act of defence of the nation’. 85 These comments, taken together, suggest the extent to which the war novel in Welsh became bound up with notions of nationhood and resistance from the very early stages of the genre’s development.

83 Gerwyn Williams, Tir Neb, Rhyddiaith Gymraeg a’r Rhyfel Byd Cyntaf, op. cit., p. 70.
85 Gerwyn Williams, Tir Neb, Rhyddiaith Gymraeg a’r Rhyfel Byd Cyntaf, op. cit., pp. 129 and 139.
Traed Mewn Cyffion, like Tegwch y Bore, opens before the outbreak of the First World War; however, the initial scenes in the first novel are set much earlier than those of Tegwch y Bore. While the reader of the later novel joins Ann and her friends as they leave university just a few years before the war, Traed Mewn Cyffion opens with a description of a prayer-meeting in a rural village in 1880. However, both novels draw to a close towards the end of the war: thus, although each covers similar ground in its closing pages, the first half of Tegwch y Bore and the majority of Traed Mewn Cyffion have very different foci. While Ann is a young teacher who loses her brother in the war, reconciles herself with her lover and prepares to leave her childhood and family home when she marries, Jane Gruffydd is a female representative of the older generation. Like Ann’s mother (and, of course, Kate Roberts’s own mother), she works on a tiny smallholding and brings up a large family, her husband is also a quarry worker, and she also loses a son in the war. But one striking difference between the two novels is that while, as I have demonstrated, the first half of Tegwch y Bore is replete with foreboding and dark predictions of the tragedy which lies ahead of Bobi, the main body of Traed Mewn Cyffion deals largely with the financial hardship typical of a gwerin family of the pre-war period. As a result, the war seems all the more remote, and the blow it deals all the more shattering and incomprehensible. It is only at the very close of the novel that Jane’s son Owen who, unlike his brother, refuses to sign up (not in the first instance out of a sense of patriotism, but because his parents need his schoolteacher’s wage) realises that his people need urgently to develop a political consciousness:

Ac fe agorwyd ei lygaid i bosibilrwydd gwneud rhywbeth, yn lle dioddef fel mudion. Yr oedd yn hen bryd i rywun wrthwynebu’r holl anghyfiawnder hwn. Gwneud rhywbeth. Erbyn meddwl, dyna fai ei bobl ef. Gwrol yn eu gallu i ddioddef oeddyn, ac nid yn eu gallu i wneud dim yn erbyn achos eu dioddef.86

And his eyes were opened to the possibility of doing something instead of simply enduring like a dumb animal. It was about time that somebody challenged this injustice and did something about it. Come to think of it, that was what was wrong with his people. They were courageous in their capacity to endure pain, but would do nothing to get rid of what caused that pain.87

86 Traed Mewn Cyffion, p. 192.
Traed Mewn Cyfflion has been discussed at length by critics: I should just like to add here a few comments about the epic qualities of Kate Roberts's first war novel. Derec Llwyd Morgan suggests that there is a 'certain Telemachian spirit' about the final chapter of Traed Mewn Cyfflion, a description which reflects the degree to which criticism of Roberts, particularly of this very novel, has been influenced by Emyr Humphreys' description of it as an epic:

In one way, Traed Mewn Cyfflion is an epic, and a variety of classical characteristics belong to it. It is a song (and we have a song here) about a small, close society in a mountainous area, and the root of the singing is the history of burden. Not history in the empirical, academic meaning, nor even biographical history, but rather history as it is related by the Henfeirdd and by Homer himself: a eulogy celebrating the existence of the burden as has every real epic from the Iliad up to Tolstoy's War and Peace.

Humphreys goes on in his essay to discuss the various aspects of the novel which make it an epic. As well as conforming to the epic according to Humphreys' model, all the cultural elements seen here as valorized in the novel became prominent in Welsh nationalist discourse at the time when Traed Mewn Cyfflion was published. This can be seen most clearly in Humphreys' description of the 'simple morality of the epic' of the novel as traceable to the 'excellence of the family and the basic virtues inherent to that excellence'. This novel, therefore, takes on the stature of an epic because of the peculiarly Welsh morality displayed by the gwerin family unit which it portrays. The significance of this projection of the epic onto a twentieth-century war novel becomes clearer if it is understood in terms of Mikhail Bakhtin's reading of the epic and its relationship with the novel as a genre. He writes:

Whatever its origins, the epic as it has come down to us is an absolutely completed and finished generic form, whose constitutive feature is the transferral of the world it describes to an absolute past of national beginnings and peak times. The absolute past is a specifically evaluating (hierarchical) category. In the epic world view, 'beginning', 'first', 'founder', 'ancestor', 'that

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88 See, for example, Emyr Humphreys, 'Traed Mewn Cyffion' in Kate Roberts: Cyfrol Deyrneged, op. cit.; also Derec Llwyd Morgan, 'Traed Mewn Cyffion', in Kate Roberts: Ei Meddwl a'i Gwaith, op. cit.
89 Derec Llwyd Morgan, Kate Roberts, op. cit., p. 11.
90 Emyr Humphreys, 'Traed Mewn Cyffion', in Kate Roberts: Cyfrol Deyrneged, op. cit., p. 51.
91 Ibid., p. 53.
which occurred earlier' and so forth are not merely temporal categories but *valorized* temporal categories, and valorized to an extreme degree [...] The epic absolute past is the single source and beginning of everything good for all later times as well [...]"^92

Just as Saunders Lewis invoked the name of Homer in order to classify, or rather, to classicize, Roberts's short stories (see p. 65 of this thesis), Humphreys' comments can be seen to be projecting an epic quality onto *Traed Mewn Cyffion* in order to make of it an epic for modern times, which if it does not remain sealed off in an 'absolute past', at least constantly evokes that past in order to measure and to applaud Kate Roberts's 'official version of the *gwerin*'.^93

In terms of form and style, *both* of Kate Roberts's novels about the First World War are a little unwieldy and unsatisfactory, especially when they are compared with the lyrical, condensed novellas (or 'long short stories' and 'short long stories' as she called them) which she wrote during the 1950s and 60s. Interestingly, however, *Traed Mewn Cyffion*, with its 'the epic heroine' Jane Gruffydd, has attracted only approbation from critics, while, *Tegwch y Bore*, by contrast, has been seen as a 'prosaic' work, which lacks the 'tremendous poetic force of the earlier novel'.^94 Even Gerwyn Williams, while he demonstrates an awareness of the extent to which Roberts's earlier novel was an 'official' and politically desirable version of the *gwerin*, follows the line that, of *Traed Mewn Cyffion* and *Tegwch y Bore*, it is the first novel which is the 'more powerful' as a war novel.^95 Comparing it to *Creigiau Milgwyn* [The Rocks of Milgwyn] by Grace Wynne Griffith, the novel with which *Traed Mewn Cyffion* shared the prose medal at the National Eisteddfod in 1934, he treats quite dismissively the work of female prose writers such as Grace Wynne Griffith, Grace Thomas and Awen Mona, referring to their war writing as being comparable to 'B-

^93 Gerwyn Williams, *Tir Neb, Rhyddiaith Gymraeg a'r Rhyfel Byd Cyntaf*, op. cit., p. 129.
^95 Gerwyn Williams, *Tir Neb, Rhyddiaith Gymraeg a'r Rhyfel Byd Cyntaf*, op. cit., p. 129.
movies'. In the work of these women, the war, according to Williams, provides only a functional backdrop to the progression of the romance (a comment which, of course, echoes critical comments made by Rowlands et al about Tegwch y Bore). Gerwyn Williams goes on to assert that: 'if Creigiau Milgwyn is a feminine novel, Traed Mewn Cyffion is a masculine novel'. The implication is that Roberts's first war novel does not deal merely with romance, the supposedly 'feminine' marker of Welsh-language war writing by women, but with an 'epic' experience, that of the gwerin in the face of a remote, incomprehensible and culturally destructive war. It also appears that Roberts's own romantic war novel, Tegwch y Bore, comes by association under the category of 'feminine' war novels, although Williams hastens to supply Roberts with a superior position within that inferior category: 'Intentionally therefore [...] Kate Roberts's romance is not the jelly-and-blancmange romance of one of the two Graces—neither Thomas nor Wynne Griffith.' However, as with the war novels written by the 'two Graces', Williams sees the war in Tegwch y Bore as an embodiment of fate which does nothing more than supply the impetus for the development and resolution of the love story. Similarly, he asserts that 'subjectivity reigns supreme in Tegwch y Bore', as if it is Roberts's concentration on Ann's feelings which make the novel more feminine and therefore less of a war novel. This, of course, contrasts strongly with the fact that in Traed Mewn Cyffion, Roberts writes about 'the people, in their response to the war, as a group facing the same crisis'. Bakhtin's argument, that 'the epic world of the absolute past is inaccessible to personal experience and does not permit an individual, personal point of view or evaluation', could supply in this context a further explanation as to why consideration of Tegwch y Bore as a war novel per se has been largely avoided by critics. While Dafydd Glyn Jones classifies Tegwch y Bore as a 'love story', John Emyr points out that 'there is little mention of any romance in Traed Mewn Cyffion'. Conversely, Dafydd Glyn Jones asserts of Tegwch y Bore that: 'One searches in vain through the

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96 Ibid., p. 118.
97 Ibid., p. 123.
98 Ibid., p. 151.
99 Ibid., p. 142.
100 John Emyr, op. cit., p. 130.
book for the author’s interpretation of the war as a political and social fact. If anything, there is more of this in *Traed Mewn Cyffion* than there is here.\(^ {102} \) Such criticism, I would argue, reflects a desire to force *Traed Mewn Cyffion* into a masculine mould of the Welsh-language epic war novel, and to read *Tegwch y Bore* as a more feminine—and therefore, it seems, less politicised—expression of the genre.

One of the main reasons why criticism of Roberts’s war novels has imposed this gender division upon them, I would suggest, is because Ann Owen belongs to a younger generation than Jane Gruffydd. Quite simply, Jane can be sealed up in an absolute and ‘valorized’ monolingually Welsh epic past and Ann cannot. While Jane cannot understand English at all, it is Ann and her brothers who translate into Welsh the War Office communications received by their parents. Ann cannot represent the rural Welsh monolingualism of which Jane herself is symbolic. Similarly, Ann cannot represent the particularly rural, *gwerin* femininity symbolized by Jane: physically strong from working out of doors, stoic and sturdy, women of Jane’s generation would have borne little resemblance to an urban schoolteacher. However, it will be remembered that *Tegwch y Bore* was written much later than *Traed Mewn Cyffion*; it was published in weekly instalments in the newspaper *Y Faner* between 1957 and 1958, and finally appeared as a novel in 1967. In the twenty years between the publication of her war novels, Roberts published three other long prose works—*Stryd y Glep* [Gossip Row] (‘a long short story in the form of a diary’), *Y Byw sy’n Cysgu* [The Living Sleep] (a novel) and *Tywyll Heno* [Dark Tonight] (‘a long short story’).\(^ {103} \) In each she explores in some depth the female subjectivity of her protagonists, each of whom lives not in rural Wales, but in a small Welsh town. This shift reflects, I would suggest, a distancing from the epic aspirations of political discourse of the interwar years towards an

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\(^ {101} \) Ibid., p. 128.

\(^ {102} \) Dafydd Glyn Jones, ‘*Tegwch y Bore*’, op. cit., p. 133 (quoted by Gerwyn Williams, *Tir Neb, Rhyddiaith Gymraeg a’r Rhyfel Byd Cyntaf*, op. cit., p. 143).

\(^ {103} \) Kate Roberts, *Stryd y Glep* (Denbigh: Gwasg Gee, 1949); *Y Byw sy’n Cysgu* (Denbigh: Gwasg Gee, 1956) and *Tywyll Heno* (Denbigh: Gwasg Gee, 1962).
acknowledgement (if not acceptance) of the cultural, demographic and linguistic shifts that were taking place in Wales.

It seems that, by the time Kate Roberts came to rework her war novel of the 1930s, her recent forays into female first-person narratives and interior monologues rendered impossible a return to the heroic mother-figure of Jane Gruffydd and epic narrative of Traed Mewn Cyffion. Experiences in the interim had also included her own marriage and the subsequent tragic loss of her husband, accompanied by a physical distancing from the rural feminine gwroldeb with which she was surrounded during her youth—it was now nearly four decades since she had left north Wales for the industrial valleys, moving later to the town of Denbigh in north-east Wales. These shifts might explain why the themes of love and war are so much more closely interlinked in her later novel, also why she struggled, perhaps unsuccessfully, to reach a satisfactory resolution of the two genres within which she was working in the dénouement of Tegwch y Bore.

The twenty-five year gap between the writing of each novel is, also, I would suggest, of a more formally generic significance. Bakhtin suggests the importance of the historical moment at which a work is published:

Thus the work enters into life and comes into contact with various aspects of its environment. It does so in the process of its actual realization as something performed, heard, read at a definite time, in a definite place, under definite conditions [...] It takes a position between people organized in some way. The varieties of the dramatic, lyrical and epic genres are determined by this direct orientation of the word as fact, or, more precisely, by the word as a historic achievement in its surrounding environment.104

By the time Tegwch y Bore was published, Welsh femininities were changing and developing in popular, political and literary discourse along lines which were far removed from the rural gwerin which had been the experience of so many Welsh women during the first decades of the century. It is the generic importance of the ‘definite’ moment at which a work reaches its public which
perhaps indicates why, in spite of the strong generic similarities between *Traed Mewn Cyfon* and *Tegwch y Bore*, critics have emphasised the romantic femininity of the later novel rather than its highly politicised retrospective exploration of the awakening of a Welsh nationalist consciousness. While this is perhaps a gender bias which brings to mind the similar dismissal in England of the war novels of Rebecca West and Mabel Brooks, for example, a consideration of the specific context in which each work was published demonstrates the historical and cultural variability of concepts of both genre and of femininity.

A civilisation on the brink of obliteration: *Between the Acts*

A comparative reading of Kate Roberts’s *Traed Mewn Cyfon* and *Tegwch y Bore* has, therefore, pointed to the historical as well as the cultural specificity of the Welsh-language war novel. It is perhaps time, then, to reconsider in this context the significance of the ‘definite’, historical, moment of literary production in the case of Virginia Woolf, through a reading of Woolf’s later war novel (and, indeed, her last novel) *Between the Acts*, published posthumously in 1941. The well-documented generic slippage of this play-novel itself poses a challenge to the reader seeking to locate a text within the ideologically and culturally delimited boundaries of genre, and it is for this reason that *Between the Acts* will merit further consideration in Chapter 4. As regards *Mrs Dalloway*, one of the most striking contrasts between the two war novels is that the earlier book is in many senses a straightforward parody, while the later work seems far more complex, the expression of a mind torn between the desire to criticize patriarchy and war (the kind of critique provided in *Mrs Dalloway*, and, in the form of political polemic, in *Three Guineas*) and a nostalgia for a civilisation on the brink of obliteration. This faltering note in Woolf’s once strident critique, and the sudden emergence of cultural as well as gendered self-consciousness occasioned by the imminence of the Second World

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104 Mikhail Bakhtin op. cit., p. 184.
106 See Karen Schneider, ‘Of Two Minds: Woolf, the War and *Between the Acts*', *Journal of*
War have been noted by several astute Woolf critics. Alex Zwerdling most memorably comments that:

Woolf's novel is rooted not only in the observation of the barbaric present but in an acute longing for an earlier, more civilized phase of English culture. Its setting is not the London of a powerful, sophisticated, industrial culture but a 'remote village in the very heart of England'.

*Between the Acts* is certainly marked from its very first page by a stable sense of tradition. Mrs. Haines, for example, opens the novel with an assertion of her English rural pedigree: 'Her family, she told the old man in the armchair, had lived near Liskeard for many centuries. There were the graves in the churchyard to prove it.' This sense of stability is further bolstered, at the very outset, by Mr. Oliver's description of the land on which the local village stands:

> From an aeroplane, he said, you could still see, plainly marked, the scars made by the Britons; by the Romans; by the Elizabethan manor house; and by the plough, when they ploughed the hill to grow wheat in the Napoleonic wars.

While the land has been differently marked according to the needs of the peoples of each period, the land itself remains, the changes which have been made to it no more than cosmetic alterations. Similarly, while the village pageant portrayed in the novel covers hundreds of years in the literary history of England, the villagers under their costumes remain absolutely recognizable. Of particular significance is the chorus of villagers in sacking, whose presence punctuates various scenes:

> Digging and delving, the villagers sang passing in single file in and out between the trees, for the earth is always the same, summer and winter and spring; and

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110 Ibid., p. 5.
spring and winter again; ploughing and sowing; eating and growing; time passes.\textsuperscript{111}

Amidst the changes documented by the pageant, the villagers remain as a group a point of social and cultural stability. Alex Zwerdling indicates the similarity between the cultural specificity of Woolf's villagers and Thomas Hardy's peasants, quoting Woolf herself, from her essay on 'The Novels of Thomas Hardy':

They drink by night and they plough the fields by day. They are eternal [...] They always have something typical about them, more of the character that marks a race than of the features which belong to an individual [...] When they disappear there is no hope for the race.\textsuperscript{112}

The cultural typicality of Thomas Hardy's Wessex peasants also finds an echo in another reader. Kate Roberts's Ann Owen, frightened and bewildered by the outbreak of war, seeks consolation in the pages of Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*:\textsuperscript{113}

She set to reading, and in spite of Tess's terrible end, she insisted upon reading more of Thomas Hardy's work. It pulled her along, and every chapter gave her confidence and made her brave. The suffering of these people was so authentic. They progressed from one disappointment to the next disappointment, and she felt that she was walking with them and sharing their experiences and their suffering.

Hardy's peasants, Roberts's *gwerin* and Woolf's villagers are representative of an epic type: *Between the Acts*, as Zwerdling remarks, is 'not

\textsuperscript{111} Ibid., p. 76.
\textsuperscript{112} Quoted by Alex Zwerdling, *Between the Acts and the Coming of War*, op. cit., 226.
\textsuperscript{113} Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* was first published in twenty-four instalments between July and December 1891 in the weekly magazine, the *Graphic*. It appeared in book form in December 1891. For further details, see James Gibson's introduction to *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (London: Everyman, 1993 [1984]).
\textsuperscript{114} *Tegwch y Bore*, p. 191.
really interested in examining character in its complexity'. Sallie Sears has pointed out that the 'pageant as a genre is deeply rooted in local history and custom', and thus Woolf's recreation of an epic past peopled by rural cultural types in the shape of the villagers is given a generic pastoral form which serves to emphasize the epic nature of their representation. Between the Acts is thus anchored upon cultural types in a way not dissimilar to Roberts's treatment of the gwerin in Traed Mewn Cyffion. Like Roberts, Woolf deploys this type in a bid to assert her cultural identity at a moment when that identity is on the brink of dissolution due to the threat posed by an aggressive 'foreign' superpower. Between the Acts shows how far Woolf has travelled on the road to cultural self-identification from her once bold assertion in Three Guineas that 'as a woman, I have no country'. Like Roberts she, at this definite moment, reverts to a pastoral landscape, a hallowed hearth and a rural epic type in order to re-present her country, 'my England', as she calls it. Karen Levenback has argued in her reading of 'War in the Village', an early review by Woolf of Maurice Hewlett's poem 'The Village Wife's Lament', that Woolf's empathy with the remoteness of the village wife from an incomprehensible and seemingly indiscriminate war is ultimately a form of self-identification:

As a reality and as a threat, then, the war was coming awfully close to home. Woolf saw that the possibility of personal death was real, but, like the village wife, she felt herself 'at the mercy of a force so remote that [...] she [could] hardly figure to herself what the nature of it [was].' Levenback subsequently criticizes Woolf's appropriation of the space of the village as a form of self-deception, an attempt to seek cover from the First World War under the 'illusion of immunity'. However, other critics have interpreted Woolf's later return to the village in Between the Acts as a positive

115 Alex Zwerdling, 'Between the Acts and the Coming of War', op. cit., 236.
117 Quoted in this context by Patricia Klindienst, Joplin, 'The Authority of Illusion: Feminism and Fascism in Virginia Woolf's Between the Acts', South Central Review, 6, 2 (1989), 91.
118 Quoted by Karen Schneider, 'Of Two Minds: Woolf, the War and Between the Acts', 99.
120 Ibid., p. 51.
act of self-affirmation in the face of the destruction of her country. It signifies, according to Bazin and Lauter, for example, a shift ‘in her later work from a concern for the survival and mental health of the individual to a concern for the survival of a culture’.  

However, all is not as it seems in the safe space of the village. For *Between the Acts* can be read not only as a play-novel, providing a dramatic and sobering interval between the two world wars, but also as a ‘play within a play’, in that it is a play-like novel which depicts the unfolding of a pageant. In this dramatic context, Woolf’s treatment of the village pageant takes on an ominous tone which all but destroys the significance of the novel as a defensive and yet affirmative moment of identification with an epic, rural past. The literary history spanned by the separate acts of the pageant from the time of Elizabeth I to that of the late nineteenth-century British Empire can be read as a celebratory, even nostalgic, survey of the literary heritage of England. However, Woolf’s treatment of literature in and ‘between the acts’ of the pageant indicates the extent to which these literary fragments also serve to detract from each other and from the literary heritage which they represent. Critics have noted how characters such as Isa wander around Pointz Hall quoting and misquoting from the classics of English literature: ‘In fact’, Alex Zwerdling concludes, ‘the whole literary tradition has ceased to be meaningful to the characters in the novel’. These botched literary fragments are also reflected in the ironic, parodic aspect evident in Woolf’s writing of the playlets themselves. Lady Harpy Harrenden, for example, confesses to comic effect in the Restoration playlet that: ‘Asphodilla I call myself, but my Christian name’s plain Sue’. The playlet thus simultaneously evokes and pokes fun at the customs of the periods in quotation and their literary representation. The literary fragments provided by quotes, misquotes and parodic playlets is further

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122 Alex Zwerdling, *Between the Acts and the Coming of War*, op. cit., 231.

reflected in the increasingly frenetic and fragmented reported speech of the audience ‘between the acts’:

‘No, I don’t go by politicians. I’ve a friend who’s been to Russia. He says ... And my daughter, just back from Rome, she says the common people, in the cafés, hate Dictators ... Well, different people say different things ... ‘Did you see it in the papers—the case about the dog? D’you believe dogs can’t have puppies? [...] ‘And what about the Jews? The refugees ... the Jews ... People like ourselves, beginning life again ... But it’s always been the same ... My old mother, who’s over eighty, can remember ... Yes, she still reads without glasses ... How amazing!’

Amidst these ‘scraps, orts and fragments’, references to the war—whether the First World War that is long since past, or to the Second World War that now seems imminent and unavoidable—are infrequent, hurried and quickly forgotten, signalling and passing judgement on the people’s desire to seek respite from the reality of war in oblivion. In this verbal chaos, Between the Acts can be read as the ultimate breakdown of meaning, of civilization and of historical progress, as, finally, ‘all utterances in the novel [...] sever themselves from “thought” as such; they may have “charge,” but they do not have meaning’.

Between the Acts does more, therefore, than span the literary history of England through the ages: it combines an increasingly deep-rooted nostalgia for a civilized England that is no more with an awareness that civilization has retreated beyond the point of no return to the savagery of a prehistoric barbaric past, resulting in worldwide warfare. While in Mrs Dalloway Woolf provided a parody of the masculine English war novel, Between the Acts seems, by contrast, to be a failure of parody, which in the end quite seriously prophesies the imminent breakdown of civilization, which Woolf believed the Second World War would bring.

124 Ibid., p. 74.
125 Ibid., p. 114.
Conclusion

It is through a comparative reading of war novels by both Virginia Woolf and Kate Roberts that I have sought in this chapter to pinpoint the shifts in the cultural and gendered self-identifications of each writer, and, more specifically, the aesthetic consequences of these changes and developments. Thus the parody deployed by Virginia Woolf in *Mrs Dalloway*, resulting in a searing critique of chauvinist imperialism, teeters in *Between the Acts* on the brink of nostalgia, as she realises that, far from being a woman who neither had nor wanted a country, she was in fact a woman who had and needed England. While in *Traed Mewn Cyffion*, for example, Kate Roberts deploys an epic narrative in a retrospectively-narrated war novel, Woolf exploits the epic potential of the pageant in order to seek 'immunity' in the village from the Second World War, but simultaneously perverts notions of historical progress and civilization. This is a moment of cultural self-acknowledgement which also has sexual implications. To remain an 'outsider' by virtue of one's sex was, in *Three Guineas*, a relatively straightforward matter; it was a refusal to engage in a society tyrannised by patriarchal warmongers, and nationalism, itself 'organic' to the *patria*, as it were, was very much a part of that society with which Woolf refused to engage. However, once it is acknowledged, in *Between the Acts*, that as an individual, as a *female* individual, she has a cultural investment in that *patria*, her sense of female identity as she herself represented it in works such as *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas* must undergo a radical repositioning. As a woman only too eager to engage in the nationalist literary defence of her long since oppressed minority culture, Kate Roberts provides an interesting point of comparison. As I have shown in my reading of Roberts's war novels, female sexual desire becomes repressed into the role of the *Everyman* whose importance in the process of ensuring the continuance of a cultural and linguistic heritage lies in her womb. Despite this conservative aspect of Roberts's war writing, it is her epic war novel, *Traed Mewn Cyffion*, which has received cultural and critical approbation, while her romantic, subjective and supposedly feminine war novel, *Tegwch y Bore*, has been left to languish on the shelves of many a library.
The war novel as a genre is a particularly contentious and contradictory area of study, I would suggest, because it brings into play issues of cultural as well as gendered identity, with particularly interesting results in the case of women writers. This chapter has considered the broader cultural context in which Virginia Woolf and Kate Roberts wrote their war novels. In the chapter which follows, I shall explore in detail the close relationship between artist and audience in far more specific, local contexts, in an exploration of the dramatic output of each writer.
CHAPTER 4
‘O’r tu ól i’r llen’ [From behind the curtain]: the plays¹

Neither Woolf nor Roberts is a celebrated playwright, and yet both wrote plays during the years between the two World Wars. Although it is over twenty years since Woolf’s *Freshwater: A Comedy* was published and thereby made available to the public for the first time, it has attracted scarcely any comment among critics.² Considered to be an amusing adjunct to the main body of her work, it is evidently not seen as a meaningful contribution to her oeuvre as a whole.³ And despite the fact that the plays which Kate Roberts co-authored with a group of fellow teachers between 1916 and 1920 were published at the time, and in fact sold extremely well, they also attracted little critical acclaim, while the plays which she composed alone in later years remain in typescript and manuscript.⁴ In terms of the accepted, albeit expanded, canons of the work of each writer, these plays represent a departure from their work in other genres. However, this is in itself something of an anachronism, a result perhaps of the plays having come to the attention of critics relatively recently. Seen in the historical context of their literary production, they represent not so much a departure from the more usual output of Roberts and Woolf, as literary starting-points, the co-ordinates of which have hitherto remained unplotted. Woolf’s playwriting activities, for example, can be seen as having been spawned by the Stephen and Bloomsbury traditions of light-hearted amateur entertainments, and therefore implicated even in her very early childhood.

⁴ Letters from her co-author Betty Eynon Davies frequently refer to enclosed royalties for *Y Canpunt* and *Wel! Wel!* (Kate Roberts Papers, National Library of Wales, Nos. 152, 226 and 932).
More seriously, Kate Roberts's plays represent her first consistent attempts at writing and publication, and the role played by the female collective within which she worked is of paramount importance. This chapter will trace the collaborative enterprise that was drama in the disparate local communities of Woolf and Roberts. Written in collaboration with fellow playwrights, fellow actors and/or with a very closely definable audience in mind, the dramatic works produced by both writers bring to the fore issues such as the relationship between artist and audience, individual and community, sexuality and society. The absolutely local scale on which these plays came into existence indicates that, in contrast with the more exclusive and therefore perhaps more easily codifiable aesthetic movements within which other genres functioned during this period, community drama was very much an art form of the people and for the people, whether those people were drawn from a small Welsh dramatic society in industrialised South Wales, or from a set of well-to-do enfants terribles in Bloomsbury. However, Woolf's *Freshwater* can also be read in the broader context of the female-authored chronicle plays popular during the period, while the output of Roberts's playwriting collective can be compared with the suffragette plays produced by similar collectives and individuals in England during the years leading up to the First World War. I shall highlight, therefore, the very localised contexts in which the plays of Woolf and Roberts emerged, but shall also emphasise the broader British literary and constitutional contexts in which both women wrote their plays.

**Collaboration and competition: *Y Canpunt***

Kate Roberts's plays have all but been ignored by critics, perhaps with good reason. Unlike some of her stories and later novels they are not great works of art, and in that sense their omission from the canon is not a literary misjudgement. However, they are, firstly, historically interesting, in that they tell us a great deal more about a period of Roberts's literary career which has not been much documented. They also tell us more about a genre

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5 Maggie B. Gale, *West End Women: Women and the London Stage 1918-1962* (London: Routledge, 1996), and *How the Vote was Won and other suffragette plays*, ed. Dale Spender
which during the 1920s was very much a genre of the people—community drama—an aspect of Welsh theatre which, as Hywel Teifi Edwards has recently argued, has not received enough critical attention to date.\(^6\) One of the most striking aspect of the plays, however, is that they reveal a consistent preoccupation with issues of importance to women specifically. It is upon this aspect that I shall concentrate in the discussion which follows, firstly in terms of the gender politics of the plays themselves in the broader context of the development of Welsh community drama, and also of British suffragette writing for the stage; and secondly, with regard to the important precursors to be found in these early plays for the more rebellious anti-heroines of Roberts’s later novels.

Traditional accounts of Kate Roberts’s literary career pay little, if any, attention to her plays, most of which were written at a very early stage in that career. Her oeuvre has generally been considered as falling into two halves: firstly, the ‘Arfon period’, which draws largely upon the rural North Walian landscapes of her childhood; and, secondly, the ‘Denbigh period’, in which her work reflects the increasing urbanisation of Wales, and the emergence of a Welsh-speaking middle-class. In a recent article, Mihangel Morgan radically disputes this literary geography, reminding readers that Kate Roberts’s career did not take her directly from Arfon to Denbigh, and that she in fact spent several years as a young teacher living in the valleys of South Wales:

Bobi Jones refers to ‘her first ‘Arfon’ period of stories’. But although it is true that most of the stories in her first three collections are based in some kind of Arfon, a significant proportion of them took shape when the writer was living in South Wales. Should not the first period of her career be referred to rather as her ‘Glamorgan period’?\(^7\)

As Morgan quite rightly points out, a re-assessment of this period of Kate Roberts’s literary career is all the more urgently required in view of the fact

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\(^7\) Mihangel Morgan, ‘Kate yn y Cwm’ [Kate in the Valley], *Cynon* [The Valleys Series: The Cynon Valley], ed. Hywel Teifi Edwards (Llandysul: Gwasg
that, when she came to Aberdare to take up a teaching post at the County Girls’ School in 1917, she was not even a published writer, whereas, by the time she left in 1928, she was ‘one of the nation’s most prominent literary and political figures’. As Morgan argues, it is in Kate Roberts’s plays that her true literary beginnings are to be found. However, as they were plays which were usually performed well before they were published, it is misleading to say that her career as a writer had not begun before she moved to Aberdare. Prior to her move to that town, Roberts had been teaching at Ystalyfera, another town in South Wales, and in 1916 had actually written and performed a short sketch, and collaborated in the writing of a play with some of her fellow teachers at the school there.

Although no manuscript of the sketch, ‘Yn Eisiau, Howscipar’ ['Wanted, a Housekeeper'], appears to have survived, its existence is recorded in the newspaper *Llais Llafur/Labour Voice*, which, in its regular report on the events held by ‘Y Ddraig Goch’ [The Red Dragon] group in the town, gives an account of a social evening held by the group on 11th November 1916:

> The proceedings were brought to a close by a very amusing sketch written by Miss Kate Roberts, B.A., entitled ‘Wanted, a Housekeeper’. The parts were taken by Mr. John Morgan B.A., as the Bachelor, while the characters of the aspirants for the position of housekeeper were filled by Miss M. Price B.A., Miss Kate Roberts (the authoress), Mrs. H. Morgan, L. and P. Bank; and Mrs Taliesyn Lloyd. The sketch had already aroused considerable interest.

This sketch, then, seems to have been the first play which Kate Roberts attempted to write on her own, but without a surviving manuscript it is difficult to speculate further. What we do know is that she was also by this time working as one of a female collective, which had already produced a

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*Although it is true that of the three plays which Kate Roberts wrote with members of her female collective it was *Y Fam* [The Mother] which was published first, in 1920, *Y Canpunt: comedi o Gwm Tawe* [The £100: a comedy from the Tawe Valley] was first performed on 1st March 1916 by the Red Dragon Society (and was subsequently published only in 1923), while *Wel! Wel!: comedi* [Well! Well!: a comedy], although not published until 1926, was performed as early as February 1920, by Aberdare Cymyrodorion drama company.*
play, entitled *Y Canpunt*.¹¹ One of the teachers involved in this project later wrote that:

> We all (Betty Eynon Davies, Nancy Price, Kate Roberts)¹² belonged to a Dramatic Society in connection with the school (Ysgol Sir Ystalyfera), and as there were few Welsh comedies published, and the audience much preferred them to plays in a gloomy vein, we decided to write one of our own about life in a South Wales town. That is how *Y Canpunt*, a comedy of Cwm Tawe, came to life.¹³

The emergence of a dramatic society at the school was not specific to this locality, but in fact reflected the burgeoning of community drama groups across Wales during the first half of the twentieth century. Due to the efforts not only of the National Eisteddfod, but also of figures such as Sybil Thorndike (prominent in the British Drama League) and Lord Howard de Walden, an English aristocrat and patron of the arts in Britain, drama was rapidly becoming the most accessible literary forum for aspiring writers in Wales.¹⁴ In 1912, de Walden established a Welsh play-writing competition, offering a prize of £100 (hence, it seems, the title of the collective’s first attempt at playwriting—while they were not successful on this occasion, their second play, *Y Fam*, did in fact win the de Walden prize in 1919).¹⁵ A generous patron of the drama movement in Wales, de Walden was sensitive to the need to produce theatre in Welsh, and in fact actively encouraged this. However, Roberts’s playwriting collective is peculiarly distinctive in this context, as it consisted only of women. Collaboration among women was not unusual in Welsh-language culture at this time: as both Jane Aaron and Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan have noted, the women’s temperance movements of both north and south Wales had encouraged co-operation in the forging

¹⁰ *Llais Llafur*, 11 November 1916, 2.
¹¹ Margaret Price, Kate Roberts and Betty Eynon Davies, *Y Canpunt: Comedi o Gwm Tawe* (Newtown: The Welsh Outlook Press, 1923).
¹² Nancy Price is the M. Price noted in the previously quoted report on ‘Wanted: a Housekeeper’.
¹³ O. Llew Owain, op. cit., p. 172.
¹⁴ Ibid., p. 173.
¹⁵ Ibid., p. 107: Owain notes that of the competition, Lord de Walden commented: ‘The offer of a prize of a hundred pounds was made to stimulate, not to reward, attempts at expression in dramatic form’. 
of a public voice and status for Welsh women as a group for the first time.\(^{16}\)

The temperance movement was doubly important, in that it not only fed into the later women's suffrage movement in Wales, but also produced important literary by-products, most significantly periodicals such as *Y Gymraes*, edited by Ceridwen Peris, which encouraged women both to write, and publish their work. It is not surprising, then, that the lists of Eisteddfod competitions and participants for this period show that women were becoming increasingly confident when it came to taking part in the literary competitions, including playwriting and performance competitions. In view also of the popularity of community drama, Kate Roberts's writing group at Ystalyfera was probably not the only such female literary collective working together at this time. (It is, however, difficult to generalise in this context, as so little research has been done; even Hywel Teifi Edwards's *Codi'r Llen* amounts only to a collection of photographs of drama companies of the period, which he has published with the aim of encouraging young scholars to undertake more detailed research in the field.)\(^{17}\) What is especially interesting about this group and its work is that it consisted of female unmarried teachers of a similar age, who had all (unlike their mothers) received education to degree level. They also belonged to a generation of women which was coming ever closer to full enfranchisement in the 1920s, and as a group they seem to have shared a proto-feminist attitude towards society. Ystalyfera during the First World War was a fertile breeding ground for a surprisingly radical collaborative creative enterprise.

However, it is probable that Kate Roberts and her fellow dramatists were also influenced, however obliquely, by the concerns and spirit of the English suffragette and feminist playwriting collectives of the time. Critic Sheila Stowell traces the beginnings of the suffrage drama movement to Elizabeth Robins's propagandist *Votes for Women!* (1907), which spawned


\(^{17}\) Hywel Teifi Edwards, *Codi'r Llen*, op. cit.
a ‘series of so-called “suffrage plays”, a species of “agitprop” drama that flourished from 1908 to 1914’.18

In 1908, recognising the propaganda possibilities of the theatre, suffrage supporters in the theatrical professions formed the Women Writers’ Suffrage League (WWSL) and the Actresses’ Franchise League (AFL), organisations which successfully enlisted dramatic art in the fight for women’s rights. The drama composed and performed by the WWSL and the AFL manipulates existing genres and styles, sometimes into obvious arguments for female enfranchisement but also into more generalised portrayals of women’s experience. These include both representations of woman’s continuing victimisation within the existing social and political system (depictions intended to urge spectators to challenge that system) and celebratory renderings of current and potential accomplishments. [...] Informed by and informing the movement that contained them, these pieces were an integral part of the propaganda machine of the cause, being conceived, written and performed for immediate and specific socio-political ends.19

Other critics have suggested that it was the ‘collaborative work made possible by the women’s suffrage movement [which] gave rise to several jointly written plays’, such as Cicely Hamilton’s and Christopher St. John’s [Christabel Marshall’s] The pot and the kettle and How the vote was won.20 And, as Maggie B. Gale has noted, many of the playwrights were professional actresses themselves, which perhaps accounts for the ‘predominance of female characters in their plays’.21 Gale, in a study which spans both post-war eras, shows how London women’s playwriting activity retained a profound concern in women’s issues even after the initial suffrage victory of 1918, and notes that, throughout the period, ‘[q]uestions around women and work, the family, mothering and the “female condition” in general are dramatically foregrounded’.22 While no archival material survives which might be used to attest to the extent of the influence of dramatists such as Elizabeth Robins, Cicely Hamilton or Gertrude Vaughan—or, indeed, those who came after them, such as Clemence Dane—on Kate Roberts and her fellow playwrights, Roberts’s correspondence does show that she travelled to the theatre in London, and it

19 Ibid., pp. 2-3.
21 Maggie B. Gale, op. cit., p. 9.
is reasonable to assume that she was very much in touch with the kind of work that was being staged there at the time. It is likely that she either saw, or at least read about, some of the many suffrage-influenced plays which were being written and performed by women-only collectives. Bearing in mind that, even after 1918, the issues treated in plays by women tended to be precisely those issues 'which both fuelled public discussions and created debate within the women's movement and the popular press of the time', then it seems even more likely that these were debates in which Roberts was well versed (as her political journalism would later show).

The Ystalyfera collective's first communal effort—Y Canpunt, first performed in 1916—certainly suggests a subversive, protofeminist attitude towards a deeply patriarchal society. It is essentially a drawing-room farce which follows the attempts of a young couple to obtain from a family relative one hundred pounds which should rightfully be theirs. The slapstick humour reaches its climax with the scene in which the female protagonist—Mari—pretends to flirt with another man in order to frighten her lover's aunt into giving up the money if she wants to see this young man remain available for her own daughter. The dialogue becomes increasingly dependent upon innuendo—the young man, Sam Price, says to Mari for example, 'Oh, we're both in the same box. [lovingly] I like being in the same box as you'. Finally, the aunt, Mrs Davies, agrees to hand over the £100 inheritance which had been promised to her nephew Jim, at which point Mari is shown to be a sexually proper young woman after all, who had been forced into flirtation and pretence by the hypocrisy and meanness of the aunt. Mari's seemingly dubious qualities finally emerge as intelligent, assertive and necessary strategies which she has adopted quite deliberately.

22 Ibid., p. 3.
23 For example, Kate Roberts Papers, National Library of Wales, letter No. 276, author unknown, shows that Roberts had been to see a play by St John Irvine in the Globe Theatre sometime between 1937 and 1939 (probably 1939). Also, when she was living in the south Wales valleys she evidently travelled to Cardiff frequently to see plays there: in a letter to Morris Williams, for example (c. 1928), she recommends 'The Constant Nymph', which she has just seen at the New Theatre. (Kate Roberts Papers, National Library of Wales, Nos. 3577-98).
24 Maggie Gale, op. cit., p. 3.
25 See footnote 9 of this chapter for details of approximate dates of first performances.
It is she who is shown to be the most resourceful and determined character of the couple, qualities which are displayed on stage through her strong and assertive bodily gestures:

Mari: (yn cymryd braich Jim) Dere mlan Jim bach. Chi ydi 'nghhariad i, wedi'r cwbl, ond rown i wedi penderfynu cal y canpunt 'na!

[Y ddau yn mynd allan]

Llen

Mari: (taking Jim's arm) Come along, Jim dear. You are the one for me after all, but I was determined to have that £100!

[Exit Jim and Mari]

Curtain 27

Comedy and farce are the means by which the dramatists make a serious point—Mari's qualities include an awareness of the vagaries of sexual attraction and an ability to manipulate it in order to get turn a seemingly impossible and unfair situation to her advantage. Mrs. Davies's condemnation of Mari is in fact quite clearly a damning denunciation of the social values of Mrs. Davies herself:

Mrs Davies: Yn un peth, ma'n ferch i was ffarm, ac yn dod o'r lle ofnadw 'na, Cwm Llyffannod. All hi ddim siarad Sysneg, a gall hi ddim behafio'i hunan mewn cwmpni[.] 28

Mrs. Davies: For one thing, she's the daughter of a farmhand, and she comes from that awful Llyffannod Valley. She can't speak English, and she doesn't know how to behave herself in company[.]

All the qualities which Mrs. Davies abhors in Mari, her country ways and her inability to speak English, become in the play the markers of the audience's emotional investment in Mari as an anti-heroine. Unlike her unscrupulous aunt, she has not internalised English values; true to her language, and to her culture, she is true to herself. Thus her sexual self-awareness and power become amalgamated into her cultural and linguistic superiority, forging in Y Canpunt an image of Welsh womanhood which is radically at odds with Victorian notions of femininity which still held sway in Nonconformist Wales following the First World War.

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26 Y Canpunt [The £100], op. cit., p. 27.
27 Ibid., p. 31.
28 Ibid., p. 23.
Of the three plays written by the Ystalyfera collective between 1916 and 1920, however, it is only *Y Canpunt* which can be said to attain a subversive proto-feminist critique on a par with English suffragette plays of the period. The Welsh collective's second offering, *Y Fam* [*The Mother*] —welcomed by such highbrow critics as Saunders Lewis for its 'feminine note'—is, by contrast, suffused with a clumsy didacticism, and peopled by (ironically enough) precisely the Victorian stereotypes of femininity which had been so cleverly deconstructed in *Y Canpunt*. While the collective's third play, *Wel! Wel!* [*Well! Well!*] (1920) is far more light-hearted than *Y Fam*, offering a witty satire of village gossip, it is just as conventional in terms of its gender politics. Such inconsistencies reflect perhaps the requirements of the collective's audience: it seems significant, for example, that the collective received approbation in the form of the prestigious de Walden prize for the most conventional of its works. There is also, however, the vexed question of the precise constitution of the Ystalyfera collective: while it seems that the core members of the group were Kate Roberts, Margaret Price and Betty Eynon Davies, other female colleagues, for example Sybil Stephens, appear to have been loosely affiliated, while on some occasions Betty Eynon Davies and Kate Roberts worked together without the collaboration of other group members (as was the case with *Y Fam*). Such shifts evidently render unclear the question of authorship, and it could be argued that in this sense, too, the group, however unwittingly, offered a subtly gendered challenge to traditional notions of textual and sexual authority—as did their English female contemporaries.

One consequence of this confusion over authorship has been an abiding critical unwillingness to acknowledge the extent of Kate Roberts's contribution to the collective's work. Mihangel Morgan, for example, has argued (somewhat unconvincingly) that Kate Roberts had very little to do with *Y Canpunt* and *Wel! Wel!* because they are written in south Walian.

29 Betty Eynon Davies and Kate Roberts, *Y Fam*, (London and Cardiff: The Educational Publishing Co., 1920). Saunders Lewis, reviewing the play in *The Western Mail*, wrote: 'It is curious how seldom women have attempted play-writing, and how rarely they have succeeded in it [...] the two authoresses of 'Y Fam' [...] are women dramatists. They do not imitate men. And at so early a stage in the story of Welsh play-writing it is a pleasure
dialect.\textsuperscript{30} Even at the time, Saunders Lewis, despite his polite approbation, certainly seemed to think that Kate Roberts had barely contributed to the other plays which she wrote with the collective. In 1927, for example, he commended \textit{Wel! Wel!} [\textit{Wel! Wel!}], while questioning whether it was Roberts's own work at all:\textsuperscript{31}

How much of you is there in \textit{Wel! Wel!?} A lively, funny and true little slice of Welsh life. It gave me pure pleasure, although I know that it is with your left hand that you help the other two, and that you keep your right hand for your stories and novels.\textsuperscript{32}

Only a year previously, Roberts had published her first collection of short stories, prompting Saunders Lewis to adopt her as his literary protégée. However, it seems ironic that he should be so dismissive of 'the other two', Margaret Price and Betty Eynon Davies, as it could be argued that it was Kate Roberts's work with the collective in the years during, and immediately following, the First World War which gave her the confidence to begin submitting her short stories to eisteddfodic competitions, and also to literary magazines such as \textit{Cymru} and \textit{Y Llenor}.\textsuperscript{33}

\textbf{A solitary rebellion: 'Ffarwel i Addysg'}

A later play, which Roberts composed alone and submitted to the National Eisteddfod at Bangor in 1931, suggests that many of the themes and attitudes explored in \textit{Y Canpunt} were, however, close to Roberts's heart, so much so that she persisted in the composition of dramatic works on these themes long after the Ystalyfera collective had dispersed. In 'Ffarwel in Addysg' [A Farewell to Education], the subversive preoccupations of \textit{Y Canpunt} re-emerge, albeit in a muted and far more sombre form. As I shall

\textsuperscript{30} Mihangel Morgan, 'Kate yn y Cwm', op. cit., p. 296.
\textsuperscript{31} probably put on for the first time in February 1920, but not published until 1926 (Newtown: The Welsh Outlook Press, 1926).
\textsuperscript{32} Quoted by Nia Williams, p. 52.
\textsuperscript{33} It is worth noting also that Saunders Lewis had very little time for amateur dramatics generally. Of his early theatre reviews, Bruce Griffiths writes that: 'there are none of the mock-modest disclaimers to be an expert, so usual in Wales. He writes as one opposed to the sordid realism of the Ibsen tradition, and is thus highly critical not only of the amateurish acting and production, but also of the mundane content, so characteristic of Welsh kitchen drama of the period'. (Saunders Lewis (Cardiff: University of Wales Press [Writers of Wales series], 1979), pp. 7-8.)
argue in the following section of this chapter, these themes were in fact central to much of her work, especially her later novels, and it is therefore even more vital that ‘Ffarwel i Addysg’ is rescued from obscurity and restored to the canon of Roberts’s oeuvre.

Like *Y Canpunt*, ‘Ffarwel i Addysg’ is subtitled ‘a comedy’; like *Y Canpunt* it focuses unflinchingly on the social dynamics of relationships between the sexes, in a dramatic analysis which is concentrated upon the interaction of a young courting couple, Gwen and Dafydd. However, while in the earlier play these discussions were light-hearted, and even farcical, in ‘Ffarwel i Addysg’ the allegedly ‘comic’ element is almost non-existent. The sexual innuendo is still there—and is in fact less subtle than it was in the earlier play—but it is here infused with a cynical sarcasm as opposed to ironic jest. In the opening act of the play, for example, a group of young female university students discuss relations between the sexes:

Hannah: Mi gaiff Doris Grayson garu faint a fynno hi heb i neb ddweud dim wrthi.

Olwen: Caiff os caru ydych chi’n galw mynd allan efo bachgen mewn cwch ar ddydd Sul.

Annie: Ie, ond mae hi wrthi’n wyneb agored, ac mae Gwen a’i holl fywyd yn trio cuddio.

Olwen: Welsoch chi rywun yn caru’n wyneb agored ryw dro? […]

Annie: Ie, ond nid caru yw cusau.

Lizzie: Beth arall ydyw o?

Olwen: Llawer mwy a llawer llai.

Annie: ’D’oes dim eisiau i bobl fynd allan efo’i gilydd, hyd yn oed i garu.

Olwen: (Yn wawdlyd) Na, mae lot yn caru yn y ty.

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34 Kate Roberts, ‘Ffarwel i Addysg: comedi mewn tair act’ [A Farewell to Education: a comedy in three acts], manuscript and typescripts held at the National Library of Wales, (Kate Roberts Papers nos. 2515, 2516 and 2517). All page numbers cited hereafter refer to typescript no. 2516.

Hannah: Doris Grayson gets to go courting as much as she likes without anyone saying anything to her.

Olwen: Yes she does, if you call going out in a boat with a boy on Sundays courting.

Annie: Yes, but she's doing it openly, and Gwen spends all her life trying to hide.

Olwen: Have you ever see anyone courting openly? [...]  

Annie: Yes, but courting doesn’t mean kissing.

Lizzie: What else is it?

Olwen: A lot more and a lot less.

Annie: People don't have to go out with each other, even to go courting.

Olwen: (slyly): No, a lot of people do their courting at home.

In this discussion sexual knowledge is linguistically and culturally specific: as the Welsh word ‘caru’ means ‘to love’, ‘to court’ and ‘to make love’, it is difficult to distinguish between these interrelated levels of social and sexual intercourse. The more sexually aware of these girls negotiates these parallels to mischievous advantage. It is their cynical attitude which informs the first act of the play, as it develops into an exploration of Gwen’s own interpretation of her relationship with Dafydd. The progression of this relationship through the play is not merely of narrative interest, as in each act the scene shifts, firstly from the girls’ study/bedrooms to the lodgings of Gwen’s young lover, Dafydd who is set to enter the Nonconformist Ministry, and finally to the humble home of a quarryman, Gwen’s father. Each act represents a microcosm of certain aspects of Welsh society. Firstly, there is the college which enforces hypocrisy upon the girls with its rules and regulations. Secondly, at Dafydd’s lodgings, the less admirable qualities of this future minister, and Nonconformity in general, are revealed to the audience. In the final act, the quarryman’s cottage can be seen as representing the customs and values of the Welsh-speaking gwerin at the turn of this century. While each is criticised in turn, it is ultimately (as in Y

36 John Emyr describes Kate Roberts’s treatment of the figure of the minister in various of her works, including ‘Ffarwel i Addysg’ in John Emyr, Enaid Clwyfus: Golwg ar Wolith Kate Roberts, op. cit., n.b. pp. 103-116.
Canpunt), the gwerin values which are seen as honest, open and superior to those of either the urban, anglicised university or the self-seeking Nonconformist future minister. On hearing that Gwen has been expelled from college for staying out late at night, for example, her father Rhisiart has difficulty believing the reasons given to her for her expulsion:

**Rhisiart:** ...Ond dwad i mi gwirionedd, beth wnaeth Gwen i haedd u'r ffasiwn beth?

**Sara:** Dim ond peth wnes[t] ti a minnau ugeiniau o weithiau cyn bod yn ei hoed hi—mynd allan i garu.

**Rhisiart:** Mae 'n rhaid 'i bod hi wedi gwneud rhywbeth gwaeth na hynny.

**Sara:** (Yn ddiamnedd) Naddo, naddo, ond dyna'u rheolau nhw. 37

Rhisiart: But tell me the truth, what did Gwen do to deserve such a thing?

Sara: Only what you and I did scores of times before we were as old as she is—went out courting.

Rhisiart: But she must have done something worse than that.

Sara: (impatiently) No, no, but those are their rules.

More blatant is the criticism reserved for Dafydd, who is both a flirt and yet also a demanding potential husband who is merely biding his time until he meets a woman who will fit the mould of a minister’s wife, a ‘piece of wood’, as his friend Rolant comments sardonically. 38 Dafydd is well aware that Gwen will not make a minister’s wife, as, by her own admission, she follows her own instincts and understands full well that she is being condemned for doing something which she sees as only natural. 39 However, during this period of adversity, she, like Mari in Y Canpunt, develops into an anti-heroine, albeit a far darker and more tragic figure than her humorous predecessor. By the end of the play she rejects Dafydd’s proposal of marriage, preferring instead to take up a post as an Uncertificated Teacher until she can save up enough money to buy and run her own shop. Her

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37 Kate Roberts, ‘Ffarwel i Addysg’, op. cit., p. 25.
38 Ibid., p. 15b.
rejection of society’s hold on her—as a student, as a potential teacher, as a potential wife—is absolute:

**Gwen:** Na fedra i ddim Dafydd (Gyda swn wylo yn ei llais) R’ydw i wedi mynd trwy lawer er nos Sadwrn, ac mac hynny wedi fy nghledu fi i bethau mwy. Mae o wedi fy helpu fi i weld i’r dyfodol, a gweld fy mod i’n gwneud y peth gorau.  

**Gwen:** No, Dafydd, I can’t. (With a catch in her voice) I’ve been through a great deal since Saturday night, and it has hardened me to greater things. It has helped me to see into the future, and to see that I’m doing the best thing.

Roberts’s treatment of her protagonist in this respect shows a remarkable similarity to the work produced by her female contemporaries over the border: just like her English sisters, Gwen rejects marriage in favour of ‘an heroic celibacy that allows [her] to break free of the “closures” conventionally imposed upon the forms [she] inhabit[s]’. Just like her English counterparts, Roberts also demonstrates the transformative potential of the bonding of women across the generations in a scene in which Gwen discusses her expulsion with her aunt (notably not her own mother): ‘I can talk to you better than I could to Mam. I could never be free to talk about things like this with my closest relatives.’ ‘Ffarwel i Addysg’ is clearly a self-consciously gendered play comparable to those being produced by English women playwrights at the time, and it is no surprise, therefore, that it provoked a profoundly gendered response from Saunders Lewis when Roberts sent it to him to read:

It could easily win a prize at the national eisteddfod, and so, if you are short of money, send it. (I don’t have to try to be sugary?) But it is not on a par with the short stories in your name—(no more than the plays of tens of novelists in other languages). There are many keen, penetrating and deep observations in it, also a lot of strength in places—but it is not dramatic [...] In a play you shouldn’t begin with [Gwen], make her action the main factor, and then throw it aside. What should be the subject of the play? If it’s college life, the big scene should be in the senate meetings—all the teachers, the girl before them, the malicious warden, and the boy, then [Gwen] breaking into her hysteria and the characters of the male and female teachers appearing through it all. So, there would be only two main subjects (1)
young love and jealousy (2) the atmosphere in Welsh colleges, and the jealousy there as well, the jealousy of the old towards the young and the jealousy of an older woman towards a sensual young girl.\footnote{Saunders Lewis, in a letter to Kate Roberts dating from April/May 1931 (editor’s note) \textit{Annwyl Kate, Annwyl Saunders: Gohebiaeth 1923-1983}, op. cit., p. 84.}

Saunders Lewis’s suggestion with regard to the need to make the play more dramatic seems sound—he was, after all, a brilliant dramatist himself. However, by opting for a larger set, with a concentration on group scenes, and a focus on the college and college life more generally, he is leading Roberts (and her young protagonist) into a far more public forum, which changes the nature of the play entirely. In focusing on public spectacle rather than on private emotion, on external rather than internal drama, Saunders Lewis sees Gwen’s emotional outburst as merely an expression of that deeply charged ‘female malady’, hysteria. Similarly, his manipulation of the relationship between women results in jealous rivalry rather than bonding between the old and young. In such a reading the social and proto-feminist force of Roberts’s play is lost altogether—a force which is, notably, to be found in the work of her English counterparts who, following the First World War, became increasingly concerned with the ‘oppositional relationship’ between public and private, and its repressive effects upon women.\footnote{Maggie B. Gale, op. cit., p. 24.}

Despite Lewis’s stringent criticisms, Roberts submitted her play to the Eisteddfod without making any of the changes which he had suggested. ‘Ffarwel i Addysg’ did not win a prize, and was never published. Even the judge of the competition, who evidently rated Roberts’s play very highly, suggested that the play would perhaps not be very popular.\footnote{D. T. Davies, manuscript held with records of the National Eisteddfod at the National Library of Wales (Bangor 1931; 14 [1886-1950]).} However, a later, untitled manuscript fragment (dating from the early 1960s), suggesting a play or sketch on a similar theme can be found among Kate Roberts’s papers.\footnote{National Library of Wales, Kate Roberts Papers, No. 2518 and 2523 (the latter dated in the catalogue as c.1964). Some of the material in this sketch is in fact reminiscent not only of ‘Ffarwel i Addysg’, but also of the novel \textit{Tegwch y Bore}, which Kate Roberts had begun to write in 1958. It is clear from Saunders Lewis’s letter that the name which Roberts gave
published, or even performed; and yet, over thirty years after the work of the
Ystalyfera collective came to an end, Kate Roberts was still writing plays on
the same theme. Clearly, she had not lost interest in the subject. However,
her lack of success in the genre had discouraged her from attempting to
voice her concerns publicly in the form of the community play. She had
evidently taken to heart Saunders Lewis’s criticism that ‘Ffarwel i Addysg’
was ‘not dramatic... There’s too much—the stuff of a novel—in your
drama’. 47

‘Mi wrthryfela i’ ['I shall rebel']: Tywyll Heno and Tegwch y Bore
It was in precisely the genre suggested by Lewis, the novel, that Kate
Roberts was to pursue further the thematic preoccupations of ‘Ffarwel i
Addysg’ and Y Canpunt. Although the critique of Nonconformist society
offered by Roberts in her later novels and short stories can be considered
muted in comparison with the satire of Y Canpunt and ‘Ffarwel i Addysg’,
these early plays are nevertheless important precursors of the later works,
and their significance as such has never been acknowledged. While Kate
Roberts was involved in the composition of the plays during the 1920s, she
also published two collections of short stories, the second of which,
Rhigolau Bywyd [The Ruts of Life], published in 1929 (discussed in some
detail in Chapter 2 of this thesis), consists of a series of sober meditations on
the subject of marriage, its disappointments, frustrations and boredom. We
also see a series of women dissatisfied with their marriages or their place in
society in the novels which Roberts wrote after the Second World War
(Stryd y Glep [Gossip Row], 1949 and Y Byw sy’n Cysgu [The Living
Sleep], 1956). 48 In two novels written in the late 1950s and early 1960s,
however, we come to what can be considered as pure re-incarnations of
Gwen, the rebellious anti-heroine of ‘Ffarwel i Addysg’. In both Tywyll

47 Saunders Lewis in a letter to Kate Roberts dating from April/May 1931 (editor’s note),
Annwyl Kate, Annwyl Saunders: Gohebiaeth 1923-1983, op. cit., p. 84.
48 Kate Roberts, Stryd y Glep (Denbigh: Gwasg Gee, 1949), and Y Byw sy’n Cysgu
(Denbigh: Gwasg Gee, 1956).

to her young protagonist in an early draft of ‘Ffarwel i Addysg’ was Annie rather than
Gwen; Ann is the name of Roberts’s protagonist in Tegwch y Bore, thus suggesting another
connection between the two young anti-heroines.
Heno and Tegwch y Bore, the reader finds a female protagonist oppressed by the petty constraints of Nonconformist society, an individual whose relationship does not satisfy her, and whose personal morality harks back to the simple but honest mores and values of the gwerin at the turn of the century, and, perhaps most importantly and intriguingly of all, a frustrated dramatist.

Tywyll Heno, published in 1962, is an exploration of the mental breakdown and recovery of a minister’s wife, Bet Jones, an older, sadder version of Gwen, the protagonist of ‘Ffarwel i Addysg’. Roberts’s portrayal of Bet prompts the reader to imagine that in this novel we find out what would have happened to Gwen had she married and become a minister’s wife. In a recent reading of the book, Katie Gramich suggests that:

[although the novella is ostensibly about the loss of religious faith, obviously something very serious for the wife of a clergyman, I feel that this apparent theme is a partial disguise for a far more far-reaching critique of patriarchal Welsh society. Bet feels straitjacketed by the role she is forced to play and particularly by the way in which her sexual desire is expected to be muted and restricted. The narrative makes it plain that Bet is sexually attracted not only to her husband’s more iconoclastic friend, Wil, but also towards her adventurous and independent female friend, Melinda. Jane Gallop makes the point that ‘Freud links hysteria to bisexuality; the hysteric identifies with members of both sexes, cannot choose one sexual identity […] If feminism is the calling into question of constraining sexual identities, then the hysteric may be a proto-feminist.’49

Gramich concludes that Tywyll Heno is an ‘important feminist text’, and that it shows Roberts ‘covertly bringing to her work a highly contemporary feminist consciousness’.50 In an early response to the novella, first published in 1968, John Rowlands similarly suggests that the novella is far more than an exploration of Bet’s loss of faith:

Her inability to communicate with other people is a more obvious problem that her lack of religious faith. She is an extraordinary woman—an artistic woman if you like—who is driven to distraction by an ordinary, conventional society. And what makes her pain all the worse is the fact that she has to play the role of a minister’s wife without violating in any way the

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50 Ibid., p. 29.
lifeless decorum of chapel society. She was forced to play the most incongenial of roles—to act, to save face, and to please people. Her crisis would not have been so distressing had she been free to be herself.  

Rowlands develops this interpretation of Bet as an ‘artist’ to include her highly sensitive and, indeed, sensual, awareness of the world around her, and also her own self-identification with Heledd, described succinctly by Katie Gramich as ‘the bereaved sister who laments in the ninth-century elegy ‘Cynddylan’s Hall’.’ 52 The role-play which Rowlands describes, and the effect it has of stifling Bet’s own identity until she can bear it no longer and gives in to madness, are, however, not as significant as the fact that Bet is also literally and not metaphorically an artist, a creator, as her retrospective monologue describes not only the onset and development of her breakdown, but also the conception and creation of a play which she writes, intending to put on a production herself, involving local children.

When the reader first makes Bet’s acquaintance, she is recovering from her breakdown and is looking back on the whole disorienting experience of her madness. One of the first episodes which she relates is

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52 Katie Gramich, op. cit., p. 27. Joseph Clancy provides a fuller explanation in The World of Kate Roberts, op. cit., pp. 369-340:

The title of the story comes from an anonymous ninth-century poem, ‘Stafell Cynddylan,’ one of a group of poems in which the speaker is Heledd, the last survivor of the royal family of seventh-century Powys, as she mourns for the destruction of her home and the deaths of her brothers—in particular, Cynddylan—in a battle near the site of modern Shrewsbury. Kate Roberts’ narrator refers to and quotes from the poem at several points in the story.

He then quotes his own translation of some of the most relevant stanzas, including the following:

\[
\text{The hall of Cynddylan is dark tonight,} \\
\text{No fire, no pallet.} \\
\text{I’ll keen now, then be quiet.}
\]

\[
\text{The hall of Cynddylan is dark tonight,} \\
\text{No fire, no candle.} \\
\text{Who but God will keep me tranquil?}
\]

\[
\text{The hall of Cynddylan is dark tonight,} \\
\text{No fire, no bright gleaming.} \\
\text{For your sake my heart’s aching.}
\]
her husband Gruff’s visit to her in hospital, when he tells her that he had produced and put on her play the night before. This seems at first to be a minor detail, but once Bet returns to her ward and muses on the long and lonely period of her breakdown, the significance of the play and its creation begin to emerge. From the very beginning of this retrospective narrative, any mention of the play is always linked to the first moments of blank horror experienced by Bet as she begins to sense that all is not well. It is in fact the play which becomes her only bulwark against the trauma of that encroaching darkness. When Melinda expresses her concern that Bet looks unwell, Bet simply looks at her without responding:

"I couldn't tell her about the fits of depression that I'd had or about the candlelight that entered my heart after I decided to finish my children's play."  

It is her work on the play which continues to send out a small ray of hope in the darkness which enshrouds her as she slowly loses her faith and sanity:

"My play was engrossing my mind and keeping unpleasant things out, so much so that my breast would shiver and my breath would catch in my throat, and I'd have to run to the back kitchen and do any sort of thing to move and express my enthusiasm. I felt the weights lifting slowly from my bosom like the pendulum of a clock rising as it's wound."  

"... From outside a small candle was shedding light, like the electric light above the front door when the house was dark - that was the play."  

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55 Kate Roberts, *Tywyll Heno*, op. cit., p. 41.
56 Ibid., 57.
58 Ibid., p. 259.
The play becomes the centrepiece of the novel, a point of concentration which Roberts uses as the focus of and impetus in her portrayal of the progress of Bet's breakdown. Significantly, it is Bet's involvement with the play which alienates her from other women, apart from her close female friends Melinda and Mrs Bryn. It because of the play that Bet comes into confrontation with the chapel's Women's Association, whose members seemingly plot against her to leave her without a place to rehearse, and it is because of the meddlesome and gossipy female members of her husband's congregation that Bet's peace is disturbed. During the course of one afternoon she is distracted by two callers, both of whom appear to be well meaning in the first instance, but become increasingly menacing and sinister figures during the course of the conversation:

Symudodd a rhoi ei phwysau ar Gilbost y drws, o’r lle y gallai weld i mewn i’r gell.
‘Na,’ dydy Mr. Jones ddim yn i gell,’ meddwn i.
Symudodd hithau’n sydyn i ganol y grisyn. Syllais arni. Yr oedd yn ddynes landeg, yn tuedd i fod yn flonegog; ei gwalt yn donnau perffaith; ei blows wedi ei smwddio’n raenus a rhai o'i dillad isaf lesog i’w gweld trwyddo, ei wddw’n ddigon isel i ddangos chwydd ei bronau. A oedd y merched yna yn ceisio cael Gruff i gymryd diddordeb, yn ddynt hwy drwy iddynt hwy gymryd diddordeb yng ngwaith yr eglwys?²⁹

She moved and leaned against the frame of the door, from which she could see into the den.
‘No, Mr. Jones isn’t in his den,’ I said.
She moved quickly to the middle of the step. I gazed at her. She was a handsome woman, tending to fat; her hair was in perfect waves; her blouse had been glossily ironed and some of her lacy underclothes could be seen through it, its neck low enough to show the swell of her breasts. Did these women try to get Gruff to take an interest in them by their taking an interest in the work of the church?²⁶⁰

When this (unnamed) woman calls at the house, Bet has been sitting in the kitchen enjoying a cup of tea and observing the world around her. Her observations reveal an artist's eye for detail. She describes a tree in the garden next door not merely as an object, for example, but as an ever changing, living, breathing thing: when she disturbed by her unwelcome callers it is the loss of this moment of private contemplation which vexes

²⁹ Kate Roberts, Tywyll Heno, op. cit., p. 71.
her and which clamours for her attention, in the shape of the tree: ‘The tree was inviting me back, with its arm beckoning, “Come”’.\(^{61}\) It is women such as this who repeatedly (and deliberately, it seems) frustrate Bet’s artistic ambitions, not only in their petty interference with her rehearsal arrangements, but also by interrupting the creative process itself.

This frustration plays no small part in Bet’s eventual breakdown. She comments frequently on the women’s interest in the chapel as an extension of their homes, rather than a place of worship, and, at the moment at which she is overwhelmed by her insanity during the prayer meeting, it is at such women that she directs her bile. When she sits listening to a fellow chapel member rationalising the impossibility of war, she finally loses both her patience and her mental control:

> Cododd ei lais, ‘Na, ni ddaw rhyfel byth, ‘Yr Arglwyydd sy’n teyrnasu, gorfoledd y ddaear’. Aeth y festri’n dywyll imi; gwelwn wyneb Gruff megis trwy len, pan waeddais, ‘Na, ‘dydach chi ddim yn iawn, y peisiau sy’n teyrnasu, gorfoledd y ddaear.’ Nid oeddwn yn ymwybodol o neb na dim; ond teimlais fraich Gruff amdanaf a’i fod yn fy nghario fel mochyn bach mewn ffair i gegin y capel.\(^{62}\)

*He raised his voice, ‘No, war will never come; ‘the Lord reigns, let the earth rejoice.’ The vestry went dark to me; I saw Gruff’s face as if through a veil, as I shouted, ‘No, you’re wrong, it’s the petticoats reign, let the earth rejoice.’ I wasn’t conscious of anyone or anything; but I felt Gruff’s arm around me as he carried me like a piglet at a fair into the chapel kitchen.*\(^{63}\)

Bet is subsequently admitted to a psychiatric ward, where she is surrounded by other mentally disturbed women. While the existentialist angst of Roberts’s contemporary, Jean-Paul Sartre, stemmed from the notion that ‘hell is other people’, for Bet, by contrast, tortured and traumatised by the madwomen surrounding her, hell is other women. She wonders: ‘Why have I always thought of the devil as a man? The devils are women, […]’.\(^{64}\) It is from this ward that she looks back over her experiences, and her retrospective monologue is thus framed by descriptions of her in these

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61 Ibid., p. 268.
62 Kate Roberts, Tywyll Heno, op. cit., p. 86.
64 Ibid., p. 229.
infernal surroundings. When the reader returns with Bet to the ward at the end of the novella, the image of her surrounded by her neurotic tormentors creates a highly effective and exaggerated parallel with the circle of petty chapelwomen who have dogged and frustrated her artistic ambitions. The undermining effects of the chapelwomen's repressive and ungenerous behaviour—so far removed from the empowering sisterhood of the Ystalyfera collective—suggests a specifically Welsh critique on Roberts's part of Nonconformist institutionalization of communal activity, particularly in terms of its effects upon women.

Similarly, in Tegwch y Bore (the war novel discussed in the previous chapter of this thesis), Kate Roberts's young protagonist, Ann, is dissatisfied both with her relationship and with the narrow-mindedness of Blaen Ddöl, the small town where she has taken up a teaching post, which she compares unfavourably with her native rural close-knit community. After she attracts scandal when she is seen drinking rum in a local public house with her boyfriend, Ann tells a friend how petty she finds the society of Blaen Ddöl:

"R ydw i'n dychryn wrth feddl fy mod i'n byw mewn lle, lle mae peth cyn lleied yn achosi cymaint o helynt.'
"Ydi, mae gefynnau cymdeithas yn cau yn dynn am rywun, ac am wn i mai'r unig ffordd i fod yn hapas ydi derbyn y gefynnau heb wrthryfela.'
"Mi wrthryfela i,' meddai Ann.

'It terrifies me when I think that I live in a place where such a small thing causes such a fuss.'
'Yes, the fetters of society close in tightly around you, and as far as I know the only way to be happy is to accept the fetters without rebelling.'
'I will rebel,' said Ann.

Significantly, this friend is Mrs Huws, the preacher's wife, and although she is clearly far more resigned to her lot than the preacher's wife in Tywyll Heno, she plays an important role in the novel as Ann's sympathiser. However, in this novel, it is Ann herself who is the anti-heroine—'she felt as if she was one of the suffragettes and was at the head of the women's..."
movements of her time'—and she, like Bet in Tywyll Heno, finds some consolation in the writing of a play for her schoolchildren.  

Really, it wasn't seeing the children acting which gave her the most pleasure, but altering the story and making a small drama of it [...] The night that she went back to her house from the minister's house and started on it, there had been some leap in her spirit which drove her on through the days of work and which sent Richard to the second place in her mind for days.

Although the composition of the play does not have the same importance in this later novel, the repeated focus on the protagonist as dramatist does suggest that for Roberts's anti-heroines the creative act involved in the writing of plays provides an opportunity to escape the constraints of Welsh society.

Kate Roberts: post-suffrage feminist playwright?
The neglect which Kate Roberts's plays have suffered to date has resulted not only in the loss of material of importance to the cultural historian, despite the fact that their historical and thematic interest outweighs their literary value. To unearth these discarded works and to restore them to Kate Roberts's canon is to find important precursors for the rebellious anti-heroines of some of the later novels. It also points to one of the hitherto neglected aspects of Tywyll Heno and Tegwch y Bore, namely the use of playwriting as a trope for a Welsh woman's creative, sexual and social dissatisfaction.

While the drama was still a very young genre in Wales at the time of Roberts's own playwriting activity, it appeared to establish an aesthetic and

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67 Ibid., p. 139.
68 Ibid., pp. 120-1.
69 John Emyr notes the importance of such creative activity for these characters, in Enaid Clwyfus: Golwg ar Waith Kate Roberts, op. cit., p. 126.
gender bias fairly rapidly. The only published survey of drama of the period, O. Llew Owain’s *Hanes y Ddrama yng Nghymru 1850-1943* [The History of Drama in Wales 1850-1943] (1948), focuses largely on the work of respected male figures such as Cynan, although the lists of Eisteddfod winners in its appendix includes several women whose dramatic work remains largely unresearched.\(^7\) The secular aspect of theatre as a social activity is evidently another area of contention and contradiction, as contemporary commentators were torn between approbation for what was an important tool with regard to the regeneration of the Welsh language and culture, and moral concern that it would provide an alarmingly secular alternative to religious worship. Notably, in the hands of the Ystalyfera collective, the drama became not so much a ‘power for the advancement of morality and patriotism’ as a young, secular genre, a form which left them free to write as they chose, to create ‘plays of [their] own’.\(^7\)

To consider a play such as ‘Ffarwel i Addysg’ not only in its Welsh context but also in terms of the struggle for women’s political and social emancipation is to be reminded of the common ground shared by British women from different backgrounds and different cultures. In this case, if not in others, their cause was a common one; as British citizens, the enfranchisement that they sought was the same. Working in a new genre and deploying drama as a less serious literary outlet than the other genres in which she was developing her talents, Roberts achieved in ‘Ffarwel i Addysg’ a dramatic discourse on the female condition which transformed the process of nationalist myth-making—that is, the culturally conservative championing of *gwerin* values—into a radical socio-feminist critique practically unparalleled in the rest of her work. Even those of her later works, particularly her novels and novellas, which explore the frustrations and disappointments of female protagonists, deploy a relatively muted oppositional discourse. The writing of the dramatic works, by contrast, was nurtured within the empowering sisterhood of the female collective between 1916 and 1920, at a time when Kate Roberts was as socially subversive a

\(^7\) O. Llew Owain, *Hanes y Ddrama yng Nghymru 1850-1943*, op. cit.
figure as her protagonist Gwen, young, unmarried, financially independent and well educated. The plays were written from within a series of geographical displacements from her native home in rural, monolingual North Wales to towns across the bilingual South Wales valleys, and perform the confusion of female social, sexual and cultural identities in a dispassionate Welsh Nonconformist society.

**Virginia Woolf and Bloomsbury at play: Freshwater**

Suffrage critic Dale Spender provides a vivid description of the first meeting of the Actresses’ Franchise League established by Elizabeth Robins:

In December 1908 the first public meeting of the Actresses’ Franchise League was held in the Criterion Restaurant in London. It was a glittering affair with four hundred actresses present, including some of the stars such as Ellen Terry, Violet Vanbrugh, Eva Moore and Decima Moore, Evelyn Sharp and Cicely Hamilton. That so many actresses attended indicated that the actresses had already in large measure been ‘converted to the cause’ and many of them were members of the militant groups (the Women’s Social and Political Union, and the Women’s Freedom League) or of the constitutional group (the National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies).72

Surprisingly, considering Virginia Woolf’s political sympathies, she makes no mention of this aspect of Ellen Terry’s career in an essay which she wrote about the actress in 1941. Primarily an interpretation of Ellen Terry’s autobiography, the essay attempts to grapple with many different faces which Ellen Terry presented to the world, and, failing to make sense of them, finally permits them to co-exist in elegant, excessive chaos:

> Which, then, of all these women is the real Ellen Terry? How are we to put the scattered sketches together? Is she mother, wife, cook, critic, actress, or should she have been, after all, a painter? Each part seem the right part until she throws it aside and plays another. Something of Ellen Terry it seems overflowed every part and remained unacted. Shakespeare could not fit her; not Ibsen; nor Shaw. The stage could not hold her; nor the nursery.73

71 Ibid., p. 131.

72 Dale Spender, introduction to *How the Vote was Won and other suffragette plays*, op. cit., pp. 10-11.

What is even more surprising about this essay is that it makes no reference, or even allusion, to the play which Woolf had herself written about Ellen Terry nearly twenty years previously. *Freshwater*, the first draft of which was written in 1923, is primarily remembered as a family farce, written by Woolf to entertain her nearest and dearest in true Bloomsbury style. However, in its focus on Ellen Terry and Julia Margaret Cameron, Woolf's own great-aunt, with whom Terry came into contact during her brief marriage to the painter G. F. Watts, it can also be read in the context of the female-authored pageant and chronicle plays popular during the period. These plays recorded the lives of important cultural and historical female figures for posterity, and presented them to a contemporary audience in a bid to commit them to women's collective memory and to reconnect them to their female forbears. Woolf, herself a recorder of women's histories, would surely have been sympathetic to such politicised writing by women. In the discussion of this chapter which follows, I shall explore some of the tensions between these two aspects of *Freshwater*—family farce and feminist revisionist history—and shall consider the issues of genre and audience which can be seen as having given rise to those tensions.

Like Roberts's dramatic works, Virginia Woolf's play, *Freshwater*, is subtitled 'a comedy'. As Thomas S. W. Lewis has observed, the writing of *Freshwater* in 1923 provided Woolf with a little light relief from the more demanding task of composing 'The Hours' (which would later be renamed *Mrs Dalloway*). In a diary entry written during this period, Woolf comments on the surprisingly rich creative experience into which the writing of *Freshwater* was evolving:

*I wish I could write The Hours as freely and vigorously as I scribble Freshwater, a comedy. It's a strange thing how arduous I find my novels; & yet Freshwater is only spirited fun; & The Hours has some serious merit. I should like though to get speed and life into it. I got tempted, a week ago, into comedy writing, & have scribb[l]ed daily; & trust it will be done tomorrow.*  

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Woolf seems never to have lost this sense of 'spirited fun', even during the process of revising the play over a decade later for a performance held in January 1935 in honour of her niece Angelica Bell’s sixteenth birthday. As the performance approached she reminded herself that it was just a part of the Bloomsbury Christmas festivities—'Freshwater a farce—for a joke'—and was seemingly unworried by the prospect of revealing the play to her most immediate public, the very private audience that was Bloomsbury.\(^{75}\) Compared with the agonies which she experienced during the months leading up to the publication of her novels, her attitude towards *Freshwater* seems almost cavalier. Less than a month before the performance, she wrote in her diary: 'The play rather tosh; but I'm not going to bother about making a good impression as a playwright'.\(^{76}\)

As *Freshwater* was only ever performed once, in the amateurish and playful environment of a Bloomsbury evening entertainment, to which the eighty members of the audience were permitted access only by invitation, it remained a well-kept literary secret until it was found among Woolf's papers after her husband's death in 1969. It was finally published by Lucio Ruotolo in 1976: while he provides extensive editorial notes on the play (and also includes in the form of an appendix the earlier draft of *Freshwater* written in 1923), Ruotolo emphasises in his preface the entertaining nature of the enterprise, quoting Virginia Woolf's own account of the whole as 'this "unbuttoned laughing evening"'.\(^{77}\) The second version of *Freshwater* does not render the earlier version redundant, as it is in fact the earlier text which can be used to fill in some of the gaps in the more elliptical 1935 version. Such an inclusive reading may usefully reflect an abiding confusion over which version was actually used in performance: Ruotolo argues convincingly that copies of both were circulating during rehearsals, and the final performance may well have been, therefore, an amalgamation of both texts.\(^{78}\)

\(^{75}\) Ibid., 265  
\(^{76}\) Ibid., 270.  
\(^{77}\) Quoted by Lucio Ruotolo, *Freshwater: A Comedy*, op. cit., preface, p. viii.  
\(^{78}\) Lucio Ruotolo, *Freshwater: A Comedy*, op. cit., preface, pp. x-xi, and pp. 75-76.
Ruotolo concludes that this dilettante performance was in fact enhanced for Woolf by its amateurishness, asserting that ‘the production, however marred, as well as the writing of Freshwater, clearly gave her pleasure’. Part of that pleasure was probably drawn from the fact that her characters—who become true caricatures in Woolf’s miscreant hands—were taken from life. In Freshwater, Woolf encapsulates several disparate events into one day in the lives of her great-aunt, the photographer Julia Margaret Cameron, the painter G. F. Watts, Poet Laureate Alfred Lord Tennyson, and Ellen Terry, a young actress (and G. F. Watts’s wife at the time), all of whom lived at Freshwater Bay on the Isle of Wight during the 1860s. Mrs. Cameron’s passion for the camera was well known to her descendants, and she was notorious for the length of her exposures and the blurred focus of her photographs. She spent much of her time with her neighbours G. F. Watts and Lord Alfred Tennyson, and the interrelated interests of all three individuals in allegory as an intrinsic element of their artistic endeavour, whether through the medium of photography, visual art or poetry, can be seen in Cameron’s photographs, many of which were heavily influenced by Watts’ portraits, while others, such as ‘The Parting of Sir Lancelot and Queen Guinevere’ provide photographic interpretations of Tennyson’s Idylls of the King and Maud. The actress Ellen Terry was married to Watts for less than a year at the age of sixteen, and Julia Cameron’s servants Mary Hillier and Mary Ryan, who also make appearances in Freshwater, were also models and muses to their mistress.

Critics have described Freshwater variously as a ‘skit’, a ‘whimsical satire’, and a ‘social distraction’. Even Hermione Lee, whose recent biography of Woolf has sought—with much success—to re-assess Woolf’s life and work by re-examining the points of tension and contradiction evident in the processes of literary production, has dubbed Freshwater Woolf’s ‘absurd Victorian play’. This adherence to the aesthetic

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79 Ibid., p.
80 Mike Weaver, Julia Margaret Cameron, 1815-1879 (Southampton: John Hansard Gallery, 1984), p. 74.
81 David Richman, ‘Directing “Freshwater”’, Virginia Woolf Miscellany 2, 1974 (1-2), 1;
programme which *Freshwater* sets for itself as ‘a comedy’, is extremely persuasive in the context of the Stephen family tradition of group entertainment. Quentin Bell records the early performances put on by the Stephens even as small children:

There was also an entertainment of a different kind: *Clementina’s Lovers*, written by Thoby and acted by all the children for the benefit of the maids. Such performances were always advertised by means of a handbill which began thus:

DENIZENS OF THE KITCHEN
COME IN YOUR THOUSANDS!!

The audience usually consisted of one housemaid but on this occasion there were two[.]83

Hermione Lee also notes family tableaus at St. Ives in 1892, and suggests that the close relationship between play, performance and composition in the young Stephens’ lives had lasting effects upon Woolf’s writing. Lee reads the children’s family newsletter, the *Hyde Park News*, for example, as ‘a licensed outlet for rudeness and aggression, and for a subversion of family sentiments’ and argues that it was this mischievous relish for ‘in-jokes’ which would evolve into the Dreadnought Hoax, into *Orlando* and *Freshwater*.84 Stephen family plays and entertainments would also mature into Bloomsbury performances, play-reading evenings, sketches, and also the successful Memoir Club for which Virginia Woolf wrote her autobiographical pieces, ‘22 Hyde Park Gate’, ‘Old Bloomsbury’ and ‘Am I a Snob?’.85

Bloomsbury diversions such as *Freshwater* need therefore to be seen as having their antecedents in the Stephen family at play, and, most particularly, in the deliberately subversive nature of even those early entertainments. In the case of *Freshwater*, this involves poking fun at Aunt Julia Cameron; at her blurred Victorian photographs, at her artistic ideals as

typified by the portraiture of G. F. Watts, and at her romantic inclination for allegory. Woolf reserves most of her satire, however, for Julia Cameron's renowned and sentimentalized lack of focus in her photographs. In the revised version of 1935, the repetition and rhythm of the following passage serve only to increase its comic effect:

Mrs. C.
And my message to my age is
When you want to take a picture
Be careful to fix your lens out of focus.
Lens out of focus.

But what's a rhyme to focus?

Mr. C.
Hocus pocus, hocus pocus,
That's the rhyme to focus.
And my message to my age is—
Watts—don't keep marmosets in cages—

John and Nell
They're all cracked—quite cracked—

And our message to our age is,
If you want to paint a veil,
Never fail,
To look in the raspberry canes for a fact.

Nell
To look in the raspberry canes for a fact! 86

Thomas S. W. Lewis asserts that 'most of the play's absurdities rest on the divorce of art from Victorian reality, and Victorian reality from Bloomsbury'. 87 Tennyson's reading of a pivotal passage from Maud, for example, is interrupted by a less than decorous rustling of the raspberry canes outside, in which Ellen Terry's lover, John Craig, has concealed himself:

Tenn.

She is coming, my own, my sweet;
Were it ever so airy a tread,
My heart would hear her and beat,
Were it earth in an earthy bed;

85 Discussed in Chapter 1 of this thesis.
87 Thomas S. Lewis, review of Freshwater, Virginia Woolf Miscellany, op. cit., 6.
My dust would hear her and beat,
    Had I lain for a century dead;
Would start and tremble—

Mr. Cameron (who is looking out of the window)

Ahem! I think that's a fact in the raspberry canes.

Tenn.

Facts? Damn facts. Facts are the death of poetry. 88

That Queen Victoria herself also had a residence on the Isle of Wight during this period merely provides a further implication that this small artistic community serves in *Freshwater* as a microcosm of the Victorian values which had come to seem ridiculous to a younger generation. Such values are mercilessly and repeatedly satirized in the play. When Watts confronts Ellen Terry's young lover, John Craig, for example, Craig responds spiritedly:

Craig:
Hang it all, Sir. I've a large house in Gordon Square.

Watts:
Have you indeed, Sir. And where pray is Gordon Square?
Craig:
W.C. 1.
Watts:
Young man, have a care, have a care. Ladies are present. 89

It is by means of such 'in-jokes' that Woolf asserts Bloomsbury's confident sense of its own identity as a group of *enfants terribles* who have broken free of the chains of their Victorian elders to create a revolutionary and artistic society of their own.

Even the youngest, and potentially the most rebellious, member of the Freshwater society depicted by Woolf in her play appears to be entirely contained within the Victorian iconography which Woolf derides. The

89 Ibid., 1935 version, pp. 40-41.
young actress Ellen Terry is gently mocked for her glottal stops, for her lack of intelligence (she is unable to think of a work rhyming with ‘fly’ for example), and leaves her artist husband for a philistine who displays a healthy interest only in kippers, and in the physical as opposed to the artistic delights afforded by her body. However, it is clear that, as muse and model to Watts, Tennyson and Julia Cameron, Ellen has no hope of retaining any identity for herself and no alternative but to attempt to escape. When Ellen goes missing and is feared drowned, Julia Cameron laments only the loss of her model, while Tennyson is inspired to write a poem:

Tenn:

There is something highly pleasing about the death of a young woman in the pride [sic] of life [...] Wearing the white flower of a blameless life. Hm, ha, yes, let me see. Give me a pencil. Now a sheet of paper. Alexandrines? Iambics? Sapphics? Which shall it be?

Present or absent, Ellen matters to the artists as a muse, but never as herself.

While this aspect of Ellen Terry’s life is presented in a highly comic context in Freshwater, a darker subtext is nevertheless occasionally intimated, when Woolf suggests a more subversive anti-heroine in Ellen than the figure of fun which she presents to her audience:

Tenn:
Ahem. I have written the first six lines. Listen. Ode on the death of Ellen Terry, a beautiful young woman who was found drowned.

[Enter Ellen. Everybody turns round in astonishment.]

Mr C.:
But you’re in Heaven!

Tenn:
Found drowned.

Mrs C.:
Brandy’s no use!

Nell:
Is this a madhouse?

90 Ibid., 1935 version, p. 42.
91 Ibid., 1935 version, p. 34.
Mr C:
Are you a fact?
Nell:
I'm Ellen Terry.92

It is at this moment that Ellen reasserts her individual liberty, and it is significant that it is at this point that she reappropriates her own name, in place of the various alter egos which she had previously adopted, as 'Modesty', 'Poetry' and 'Chastity', sitting motionless and captive, slave to the paintbrush, camera and pen alike.93

Feminist revisionism and the chronicling of women's lives

As Ellen Terry's biographer, Nina Auerbach has been eager to challenge Woolf's portrayal of her in Freshwater, reminding the reader that the amusing Victorian habits mocked by Woolf were in fact the very texture of Ellen Terry's everyday life:

All Watts's paintings concentrate on Ellen Terry's bust and her face, suggesting mobility but banning motion; like Cameron's photographs, they cut off her legs. In the first version of Freshwater, Woolf mocks this persistent leglessness as a fossil from a funny Victorian past: 'Legs, thank God, can be covered,' Julia Cameron flutters. But Woolf's funny past was Ellen Terry's threatening present [...].94

Auerbach also points to the tension between the two versions of the play, arguing that the 'second, more sombre Freshwater (1935) is closer to the iconography of Ellen Terry's life', suffused at it is with 'ominous references to Ophelia and drowning'.95 However, while the later version of Freshwater is more sombre, it still retains its farcical humour, resulting in a sinister black comedy in which the longer, self-explanatory (and often quite serious) soliloquies of the 1923 version are compressed into a highly condensed and intertextual pastiche. In the 1935 version for example, Ellen

92 Ibid., 1935 version, p. 35.
speaks very little, and when she does, she appears extremely naive, or at least bewildered with regard to her own position in this artistic grouping

**Mrs. C.:**
Another picture! A better picture! Poetry in the person of Alfred Tennyson adoring the Muse.

**Ellen:**
But I'm Modesty Mrs Cameron; Signor said so. I'm Modesty crouching at the feet of Mammon, at least I was ten minutes ago.

**Mrs C:**
Yes. But now you're the Muse. But the Muse must have wings. [Mrs C. rummages frantically in a chest...]

In the corresponding scene of the earlier version, by contrast, Ellen reveals both a sophisticated awareness of the constraints of her position and an irrepressible desire to escape from her claustrophobic surroundings:

**Ellen [looking from one (Tennyson) to the other (Mr. Cameron)]**

O how usual it all is. Nothing ever changes in this house. Somebody's always asleep. Lord Tennyson is always reading Maud. The cook is always being photographed. The Camerons are always starting for India. I'm always sitting to Signor. I'm Modesty today—Modesty crouching at the feet of Mammon. If it weren't for Mammon, I should be there still. But Mammon's big toe is out of drawing. Of course Signor with all his high ideals couldn't pass that. So I slipped down and escaped. If only I could escape. [She wrings her hands in desperation.] For I never thought when I married Mr. Watts that it was going to be like this. I thought artists were such jolly people—always dressing up and hiring coaches and going for picnics and drinking champagne and eating oysters and kissing each other and—well, behaving like the Rossettis. As it is, Signor can't eat anything except the gristle of beef minced very fine and passed through the kitchen chopper twice. He drinks a glass of hot water at nine and goes to bed in woolen [sic] socks at nine thirty sharp. Instead of kissing me he gives me a white rose every morning. Every morning he says the same thing—"The Utmost for the Highest, Ellen! The Utmost for the Highest!" And so of course I have to sit to him all day long. Everybody says how proud I must be to hang for ever and ever in the Tate Gallery as Modesty crouching beneath the feet of Mammon. But I'm an abandoned wretch, I suppose. I have such awful thoughts. Sometimes I actually want to go upon the stage and be an actress. What would Signor say if he knew?

A similarly significant disparity between the two versions of *Freshwater* can be found in the scene in which Ellen's infidelity is discovered and she leaves the island in disgrace. In the earlier version, she

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97 Ibid., 1923 version, pp. 59-60.
enters the stage dressed in trousers and returns her veil to Watts telling him: ‘I intend to wear trousers in future. I never could understand the sense of wearing veils in a climate like this.’98 Nina Auerbach notes that, in the 1935 version, by contrast, Ellen ‘has no checked trousers; she leaves with John Craig dressed not as a boy, but as a fallen woman, “painted, powdered—unveiled—,” Watts cries’.99 It seems that, in revising her play for its performance in 1935, Woolf was aware of the need to make it more dramatic, satirical and farcical for her audience, and in so doing, she jettisoned her usual feminist sympathies in favour of Bloomsbury humour. Her treatment of both Ellen Terry and Julia Cameron certainly seems to be bound up with the requirements of genre, as is demonstrated by the disparities between the earlier, more prosaic and yet more feminist version of 1923 and the later, more dramatic, and yet satirical, version of 1935.

In the essays which Woolf wrote on these women, by contrast, a very different picture of the two artists emerges. While, in her review article of Ellen Terry’s autobiography, Woolf merely touches upon the events dealt with in Freshwater, surmising only that Terry must have been ‘an incongruous element in that quiet studio [...] too young, too vigorous, too vital perhaps’, she seems at pains in this essay to show a very different aspect of the actress.100 She notes, for example, the undeniable force of Terry’s ‘genius; the urgent call of something she could not define, could not suppress, and must obey’,101 and argues that Terry was an intelligent correspondent who could easily hold her own against Bernard Shaw himself:

She is as close and as critical a student of Shakespeare as he is. She has studied every line, weighed the meaning of every word; experimented with every gesture. Each of those golden moments when she becomes bodyless [sic], not herself, is the result of months of minute and careful study. ‘Art’, she quotes, ‘needs that which we can give her, I assure you.’ In fact this mutable woman, all instinct, sympathy, and sensation, is as painstaking a student and as careful of the dignity of her art as Flaubert herself.102

98 Ibid., 1923 version, p. 71.
100 Virginia Woolf, ‘Ellen Terry’, The Moment and other essays, op. cit., p. 167
101 Ibid., p. 168.
102 Ibid., p. 169.
This Ellen Terry certainly seems to be a far cry from her beautiful but dim-witted counterpart in the second version of Freshwater.

Similarly, in her essay ‘Julia Margaret Cameron’ (in which Woolf in fact quotes from Terry’s memoirs), a picture of a true, and much respected, female artist emerges, although Woolf cannot help poking fun at her highly eccentric aunt, even in what is a relatively sober piece of writing, compared with Freshwater:

‘I longed to arrest all the beauty that came before me, and at length the longing was satisfied,’ she wrote. Painters praised her art; writers marvelled at the character her portraits revealed. She herself blazed up at length into satisfaction with her own creations. ‘It is sacred blessing which has attended my photography,’ she wrote. ‘It gives pleasure to millions.’ She lavished her photographs upon her friends and relations, hung them in railway waiting-rooms, and offered them, it is said, to porters in default of small change.

Nevertheless, Woolf records that Cameron was ‘indefatigable’ and ‘magnificently uncompromising’ in the pursuit of her art, quoting contemporaries who remembered how Cameron used to say that ‘in her photography a hundred negatives were destroyed before she achieved one good result; her object being to overcome realism by diminishing just in the least degree the precision of focus.

In fact, Julia Margaret Cameron’s work gave rise during the 1860s to a fierce debate about the aesthetics of this new art, photography; a debate which is certainly comparable to the prolonged debates on ‘modern fiction’ (and modernist attempts to ‘overcome realism’) to which Woolf herself contributed in the form of both her fiction and non-fiction. The famous lack of focus in Julia Margaret Cameron’s photographs, for example, has long

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104 Ellen Terry, The Story of My Life (Hutchinson & Co. 1908).
since been re-assessed by art historians as, while an accidental manoeuvre in
the first instance, a deliberate aesthetic strategy on her part which proffered
a challenge to early realistic ideals in photography during the mid-
nineteenth century. In her own account of the development of her work,
Julia Cameron wrote in 1874 that:

my first successes in my out-of-focus pictures were a fluke. That is to say,
that when focussing and coming to something which to my eye, was very
beautiful, I stopped there instead of screwing on the lens to the more definite
focus which all the photographers insist upon.

In a letter written in 1864, Cameron defended ‘that roundness and fullness
of force and feature, that modelling of flesh and limb which the focus I can
use only can give though called and condemned as ‘out of focus’. What is
focus—and who has a right to say what focus is the legitimate focus?’
In the earlier, less acerbic, version of Freshwater, Woolf’s humour
momentarily makes way for these more serious aspects of her great-aunt’s
work: as the Camerons are finally about to depart for India, Julia Cameron
runs back into the room:

Mrs. C.
Wait, wait. I have left my camera behind. [She takes it and holds it towards
Ellen Terry] It is my wedding gift, Ellen. Take my lens. I bequeath it to my
descendants. See that it is always slightly out of focus. Farewell!
Farewell!

The significance of this gesture reflects not only that Ellen Terry has finally
escaped her role as an artist’s model, but also that she is on the brink of
becoming an artist herself by taking to the stage. It can also be seen as
representing a bonding of female artists across the generations, a bond
which begins with Julia Margaret Cameron and ends with Virginia Woolf.
Nigel Nicholson, while protesting that ‘we should not read into frolic too

106 Ibid., p. 382.
107 See, for example, Amanda Hopkinson, Julia Margaret Cameron (London: Virago
[Virago Pioneers series], 1986).
108 Mike Weaver, Julia Margaret Cameron, 1815-1879, (Southampton: John Hansard
109 Quoted by Mike Weaver, op. cit., p. 138.
110 Virginia Woolf, Freshwater, op. cit., 1923 version, p. 73.
serious an intent', does concede that: 'Julia Cameron and Ellen Terry form a composite portrait of Virginia herself.'

_Freshwater: a failed chronicle play?_

There are, therefore, certain aspects of Woolf's treatment of Ellen Terry and Julia Margaret Cameron which can be compared more generally with the work of other female playwrights of the interwar years. Like Kate Roberts’s protagonist, Gwen, Woolf's Ellen Terry escapes from an oppressive situation and seeks out a rebellious liberty instead. Similarly, like Kate Roberts and her fellow English women playwrights of the period, such as Edith Lyttleton, Woolf stresses the positive aspects of solidarity between older and younger women. The emergence of such similarities prompts further comparisons of Woolf's one play with the dramatic output of her contemporaries. Her focus in _Freshwater_ on the lives of two exceptional women, who became prominent public figures during their own lifetime, for example, intimates a suggestive parallel with what Maggie B. Gale has identified as a subgenre of women's playwriting of early decades of the twentieth century, namely that of the chronicle play.

According to Gale, during the interwar years the chronicle play became for women playwrights a 'strategy for re-placing women into positions of status within the cultural consciousness':

After the First World War Britain was a nation that found itself lacking the strength of a unified identity, which had been so much a part of the propaganda behind its war effort. It was both in this context and in the context of the recent women's suffrage movement that women playwrights of the inter-war years turned to women from history as a means of creating role models in their plays [...] In the context of women's social position after the First World War the re-placing of women within British cultural history and women's history in general could be seen as having a specific function. It is interesting that social pressure to return to the home and hearth—traditionally an 'insignificant' environment as far as history is

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113 Maggie B. Gale, op. cit., p. 141.
concerned—was met by a renewed interest in key exceptional women from history, whose fame had come from their positions and roles in the public sphere.\textsuperscript{14}

Perhaps this is the context in which a more sympathetic version of \textit{Freshwater} might have found a public forum. In her essays on Ellen Terry and Julia Cameron, Woolf betrays her serious interest in these women as ‘exceptional women from history’, indeed, as artists whose work she considered as seriously as the work of any the other almost innumerable women about whom she wrote in her essays and reviews. Maggie B. Gale points to the depiction in chronicle plays of the period of such figures as Florence Nightingale, Elizabeth Barrett-Browning, the Brontë sisters, Queen Elizabeth, Mary Stuart and Elizabeth of Austria,\textsuperscript{115} and cites such important and popular early examples of the genre as Clemence Danes's portrayal of Elizabeth I in \textit{Will Shakespeare} (1916).\textsuperscript{116} The authors of these plays used historically significant women, Gale argues, ‘as a filter through which to examine contemporary women’s present cultural position’.\textsuperscript{117} There are other aspects of the chronicle plays which also ring remarkably true for Woolf’s \textit{Freshwater}, particularly in its early version, such as the importance of creating and representing a specifically female heritage and historical tradition.\textsuperscript{118} Thus the passing of artistic traditions from Julia Cameron to Ellen Terry to Virginia Woolf herself can be seen in the broader context of an awareness on the part of the authors of chronicle plays of the period of the importance of their own specifically female cultural history. In this context it seems especially surprising that Woolf did not make more of the roles in \textit{Freshwater} of two female figures whom she seems genuinely to have admired.

However, as in the previous chapters of this thesis, the faultlines which emerge when the work of the subjects of this study are explored in terms of both their femininity and their cultural positioning require a

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{14} Ibid., p. 139.
\bibitem{115} Ibid., pp. 139-140.
\bibitem{116} Ibid., pp. 142-3.
\bibitem{117} Ibid., p. 153.
\bibitem{118} Ibid., p. 156.
\end{thebibliography}
reassessment of such literary contexts and Woolf’s place in them. For it is crucial to emphasise that the chronicle play developed as it did as a result not only of a growing feminist consciousness of women’s history as an important part of contemporary female identity, but also as a direct consequence of the fact that the First World War, in addition to empowering women by permitting them access to the workplace, also made them acutely aware of their statehood for the first time. Enfranchisement brought the vote to women between the two World Wars; what it also did, in the wake of the First World War, was to impress upon them the significance of their citizenship in terms of their British statehood, and it is this awareness which accounts for the simultaneously radical and conservative impulses of English women’s chronicle plays of the period. While they were radically feminist with regard to their depiction of women, they were culturally conservative in terms of their portrayal of women’s positioning within the British Empire. Drawing attention to Alison Light’s theory of a renewed conservatism in women’s writing between the wars, Gale asserts that for women their newly acquired sense of their British statehood ‘ultimately meant that they were being assimilated into an essentially imperialist national identity, and this is reflected in many of the chronicle plays and “war” plays of the time’.\(^{119}\) To this she adds that: ‘[t]he idea of women “working for the nation” runs through the narratives, often subtextually, of many of the chronicle plays of the inter-war period’.\(^ {120}\)

Despite her profound attachment to the literary heritage of her country, such notions were, of course, anathema to Woolf. As the author of *Three Guineas*, she is renowned for her ‘biting and severe’ deconstruction of a patriarchal British Empire.\(^ {121}\) Woolf’s argument in this essay, writes Glynis Carr, runs essentially as follows:

\[\begin{align*}
\text{T} & \text{hat the cause and root of war is love of possession, which is related to the male possession of women. She argues that the love of possession causes men to demand the forced subservience of others and to create a social system based on socially constructed differences—sex, class, nation, and} \\
\end{align*}\]

\(^{119}\) Quoted by Maggie B. Gale, op. cit., p. 170.

\(^{120}\) Ibid., pp. 146-7.

race. Such a system values some members—the male, the rich, the British, the white—more than others. The result is oppression and deprivation which produce violence and war. 122

Woolf's anti-colonialist sentiments had been fostered from a young age: even as a child, she had been involved, as I have noted, in various anti-imperialist jokes and hoaxes, the most public and notorious of which was the Dreadnought Hoax, in which Woolf impersonated a member of the royal train of the Prince of Abyssinia with her brother Adrian and his friends, in order to bluff their way through Royal Navy security onto the H.M.S. Dreadnought. The Hoax attracted severe disapproval from their elders, who were shocked that they had dared to make a mockery of a British military institution in this way. Hermione Lee comments that 'the hoax combined all possible forms of subversion: ridicule of empire, infiltration of the nation's defences, mockery of bureaucratic procedures, cross-dressing and sexual ambiguity'. Thus Virginia Woolf's 'first contact with the National Press' was heralded not by the publication of her first novel, for example, but by this 'silly and vulgar performance', and yet it was a performance marked by all the characteristics which have since been attributed to her writing.

This ridicule of empire is certainly very much in evidence in Freshwater. The Isle of Wight was during the nineteenth century as much an isolated island as Britain itself, whose links with the world—just like those of the mainland—negotiated from the power base of the privileged. The constantly deferred moment in Freshwater of the Camerons' departure for their estates in the colonies reminds the reader that the finances of one household in this romantic, idealistic artistic community were firmly rooted in nineteenth-century colonialism (even the Cameron's Freshwater home, Dimbola Lodge, was named after an estate in Ceylon). 123 Julia Margaret Cameron's photographs, now hailed by the National Portrait Gallery as in themselves a great British institution, were funded largely by her husband's

122 Ibid., 13-14.
123 While in Freshwater the Camerons are about to set sail for India, in reality they travelled
colonial ventures—although she did in later years earn money for her photographs, and evidently regarded herself as a professional artist. Woolf’s description of the two coffins ordered by Julia Cameron to take to ‘India’ mercilessly derides British imperial cultural values:

Mrs. Cameron:
Think, Alfred. When we lie dead under the Southern Cross my head will be pillowed on your immortal poem In Memoriam. Maud will lie upon my heart. Look—Orion glitters in the southern sky. The scent of tulip-trees is wafted through the open window. The silence is only broken by the sobs of my husband and the occasional howl of a solitary tiger. And then what is this—what infamy do I perceive? An ant, Alfred, a white ant. They are advancing in hordes from the jungle, Alfred, they are devouring Maud!  

The good oak coffins become the absurd symbol of traditional British Victorian values, as they alone can protect Maud—arguably a jingoistic poem—from the ravages of the ‘jungle’. Apart from these most obvious references, the passage is in fact composed of a densely clustered set of allusions, all of which are connected with the British Empire, most particularly in its warmongering capacity. The references to the Southern Cross and Orion in the ‘southern sky’ are both taken from A. E. Housman’s poem ‘Astronomy’, published in his Later Poems in 1923, the year in which Woolf wrote her first draft of Freshwater. In this poem, Housman writes of his brother’s death in the Boer War under the southern skies of Africa:

For pay and medals, name and rank,
Things that he has not found,
He hove the cross to heaven and sank
The pole-star underground.  

Similarly, the reference to the ‘white ants’ is arguably drawn from Kipling’s Five Nations (1903), also a collection of poems about the Boer War, the most renowned of which is ‘The White Man’s Burden’, which explores the complexities of colonialism from an essentially imperialist perspective. Finally, and more prosaically, but just as significantly, it is possible that the

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'white ant' is Julia Cameron herself, the 'white aunt' whose colonialist identity resonates with all the cultural complexities inferred in this allusive passage.

In fact, this one brief speech is, in its highly condensed allusiveness, typical of much of both versions of *Freshwater*. Like de Quincey, a writer whom Woolf admired and about whom she wrote several essays, she seems to have developed in this play her own personal code of the 'involute', as de Quincy called it; a process of allusion which results in a surreal, almost nightmarish clustering and compression of several allusions drawn from different sources into one potent symbol; in this case, that of the 'white ant'. The play on ant/aunt can also be seen as typical of Woolf's subversive and psychoanalytical relationship with language and subjectivity, with significant consequences for the consideration of the connections between the playwright and her audience offered in this chapter. In order to extend the image of the 'white ant' to the 'white aunt', Woolf's spectator/reader is obliged silently to insert a 'u' thus initiating an internal dialogue with 'you', although the identity of 'you' remains frustratingly opaque. Is it 'you' the reader/spectator, or 'you' Woolf, or Woolf addressing her aunt Julia Margaret Cameron, 'you'? The subjectivity of the playwright thus merges with both that of her subject and her audience, leaving the reader/spectator with an impression merely of the smallness of humanity underneath an infinite and impersonal, godless sky. Such a complex process of allusion and linguistic subversion demonstrates, therefore, that *Freshwater* is a profoundly anti-imperialist play which in fact deconstructs the notions of Empire which were becoming increasingly popular in female-authored chronicle plays of the interwar years. While the play enacts a tension between Bloomsbury humour and Woolf's own personal feminism, as a result of which Julia Margaret Cameron and Ellen Terry are shown as one-dimensional characters rather than the important female figures that they really were, it reveals a far more sophisticated and troubled attitude towards her own cultural positioning on the part of Woolf than that of the female authors of the chronicle play. Another vital aspect of *Freshwater* which emerges from this discussion of the play's anti-colonial aspects is that, just
like Kate Roberts's early plays, it can be interpreted as an important precursor to some of her later, seminal works. Just as Housman remembers his dead brother in 'Astronomy', Woolf had written her elegy to her brother Thoby Stephen and to the First World War in the form of her novel Jacob's Room just one year before commencing her first draft of Freshwater.¹²⁷ Her preoccupation with war, as well as Empire—in fact with war as the aggressive manifestation of the essence of Empire—was already taking shape in her personal imaginative landscape when she wrote Freshwater, therefore, and it would be developed during the course of the 1920s in her novels Mrs Dalloway and To the Lighthouse. It is in Three Guineas that these concerns re-emerge most clearly: it is arguably in this essay that Woolf presents her reader with an impassioned and vitriolic personal deconstruction of the 'white ant', maintaining that women, due to their social oppression, can never be and should never be 'white ants', and that women should in fact use their 'outsiderness', and their otherness, to point up the weaknesses of the British imperial project, and of English nationhood in particular:

But the outsider will make it her duty not merely to base her indifference upon instinct, but upon reason. When he says, as history proves that he has said, and may say again, 'I am fighting to protect our country' and thus seeks to rouse her patriotic emotion, she will ask herself, 'What does “our country” mean to me as an outsider?' To decide this she will analyse the meaning of patriotism in her own case. She will inform herself of the position of her sex and her class in the past. She will inform herself of the amount of land, wealth and property in the possession of her own sex and class in the present—how much of 'England' in fact belongs to her. [...] And if he adds that he is fighting to protect her body, she will reflect that for her there are no 'foreigners', since by law she becomes a foreigner if she marries a foreigner. [...] All these facts will convince her reason (to put it in a nutshell) that her sex and class has very little to thank England for in the past; not much to thank England for in the present; while the security of her person in the future is highly dubious.¹²⁸

'O to write a play without an audience': Between the Acts

However, unlike Three Guineas, Freshwater remains a nexus, a tangled knot of family history, 'in-jokes' and allusions, so much so that it is

¹²⁷ Virginia Woolf, Jacob's Room, op. cit.
impossible to imagine how it might have had any relevance beyond the makeshift theatre in Fitzroy Street where its one and only performance was held. The result of this true-to-life comic reproduction of a small, isolated artistic community, claims one reviewer of *Freshwater*, is the anecdotal exclusivity typical of ‘that jejune, high camp group known as Bloomsbury’:

The plot, critics will say, is anecdotal, and the details of the action could be known only to those privy to the labyrinthine web that enclosed Bloomsbury. Such criticism is difficult to reply to, because Woolf, of course, wrote the play to be performed in Bloomsbury (at Vanessa Bell’s studio on Fitzroy Street), by Bloomsbury (Vanessa Bell as Julia Cameron, Leonard Woolf as Charles, Angelica Bell as Ellen Terry, Duncan Grant as Watts, and Adrian Stephen as Tennyson) and for Bloomsbury.¹²⁹

Nigel Nicolson, like the handful of other critics who have commented upon *Freshwater*, scrupulously reminds the reader of the context in which the play was performed and for which it was indeed written, the very private clique that was Bloomsbury.

A few scribbled musings on the subject in Woolf’s diaries do nevertheless suggest that she herself did imagine a more public context for her playwriting abilities, even if they can be read as no more than wistful fancy. On the day following the performance of *Freshwater*, she described the evening’s events in her diary:

The play came off last night [...] It was said, inevitably, to be a great success; and I enjoyed—let me see what? Bunny’s praise; Oliver’s; but not much Christabel’s, or the standing about pumping up vivacities with David [Cecil], Cory [Bell], Elizabeth Bowen: [...] That is, I rather dread Bloomsbury [...] And Bobo [Mayor] by the way, grey-haired, silver and rose, very handsome, exacerbated me by saying I was always publishing. Am I? But I carefully extracted that thorn and put it on the mantelpiece. And Morgan said it was lovely, I mean the play [...] And Rosamond’s play is dubious, because Gielgud has made such a success with Hamlet. There is something pleasing in the misfortunes of one’s friends: I wonder [...] I have an idea for a ‘play’[.] Summers night. Someone on a seat. And voices speaking from the flowers.¹³⁰

While Woolf had not been ‘bother[ed] about making an impression as a playwright’, her references here to Rosamond Lehmann’s *No More Music* and Gielgud’s production of *Hamlet* suggest a wishful re-positioning of *Freshwater* as no longer a private performance, but rather a theatre production to rival those of the West End. In particular, the reference to Rosamond Lehmann’s *No More Music*, a play about a young virgin who commits suicide for love (a tragic anti-heroine whose dilemma is comparable with Kate Roberts’s protagonist in ‘Ffarwel i Addysg’), reminds the reader of the whole corpus of contemporary drama which was being played out alongside Shakespeare in the theatres of the West End during the 1930s.13

Interestingly, despite this wishful thinking, Woolf simultaneously accepts the praise of her own intimate audience and shrinks from it: ‘The play […] was said, inevitably, to be a great success; […] That is, I rather dread Bloomsbury’. Also, for all the apparent success of *Freshwater*, Woolf does not seem to conceive of writing another play. She does indeed state that she has ‘an idea for a “play”’, but her use of inverted commas here invokes the uneasy distance between herself and this genre, a distance which she negotiated with difficulty in *Freshwater*. The play she imagines—‘Summer’s night. Someone on a seat. And voices speaking from the flowers’—would become the novel-play/play-novel *Between the Acts*. It is in this work that Woolf examines—far more radically than in any of the novels that preceded it, I would argue—the role of the writer in society, and her relationship with her audience, in this case in the context of the difficult negotiation between dramatic text and performance. For Miss La Trobe, the quirky, lonely dramatist, ‘another play always lay behind the play she had just written’.132 More compelling even than this exploration of the play as always ‘in process’ as it were (part of what has gone before and what will come afterwards), is her sense of disillusionment. Initially Miss La Trobe revels in her glory:

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13 Maggie B. Gale, op. cit., p. 182.
Glory possessed her. Ah, but she was not merely a twitcher of individual strings; she was one who seethes wandering bodies and floating voices in a cauldron, and makes rise up from its amorphous mass in a recreated world. Her moment was on her—her glory.\(^\text{133}\)

And yet before long, she is overwhelmed by an audience which appears uncomprehending and unresponsive, unmoved by her beloved creation: “O to write a play without an audience—the play”.\(^\text{134}\) However, the novel does not end on this note. Instead, a belief in the power of creation and communication remains, but this belief is accompanied by a recognition of the iron grip in which the playwright is held by her audience: ‘She was an outcast. Nature had somehow set her apart from her kind. Yet she had scribbled in the margin of her manuscript: “I am the slave of my audience.”’\(^\text{135}\) echoing the comments of a dissatisfied Woolf after the performance of *Freshwater*: ‘I rather dread Bloomsbury.’

Miss La Trobe and her artistic preoccupations are arguably suggestive not only of the creative dilemmas of Virginia Woolf herself, but also of those of that artistic pioneer portrayed in *Freshwater*, Julia Margaret Cameron. While *Three Guineas* represents a discursive playing out and feminist development of the anti-colonialism explored in *Freshwater*, it could be argued that *Between the Acts* represents a creative exploration of the problematic interrelation of the writer and her audience, of which Woolf seems to have become even more acutely aware following the performance of her play at Fitzroy Street. Thus *Freshwater* can be seen as a germinal precursor of both of the major works produced by Woolf during the 1930s, *Three Guineas* and *Between the Acts*. Significantly, critics have argued that Woolf’s portrayal of Miss La Trobe and her pageant is in fact based upon the career of Edith Craig, writer of numerous chronicle and pageant plays during the interwar years (most famously *A Pageant of Great Women* co-authored with Cicely Hamilton), and a well respected producer and director in this field.\(^\text{136}\) Katharine Cockin, Craig’s biographer, however, suggests

\(^{133}\) Ibid., 92.

\(^{134}\) Ibid., p. 107.

\(^{135}\) Ibid., p. 125.

\(^{136}\) Jane Marcus, ‘Some Sources for Between the Acts’, *Virginia Woolf Miscellany*, 6
that ‘[r]eading La Trobe as Craig instead of Woolf is ultimately unhelpful’.\textsuperscript{137}

It is perhaps more fruitful to suggest that Craig represented the kind of woman, the kind of artist, with whom Woolf had little sympathy but a great deal of curiosity. Fundamental doubts concerning aesthetics, politics and sexuality coalesced for Woolf around Craig/La Trobe, symbolizing a path not taken which could have brought Woolf an understanding of anger and rage as more than bitterness, distilled from melancholy into social action. However prosaic and embedded in the closed rituals of Englishness, La Trobe’s pageant of the history of England appears at first to be, it employs a devastation scene which turns broken mirrors onto an audience transformed by the experience. Afterwards, frustrated by the performance which has been her only social interaction, La Trobe (known locally as ‘Bossy’) goes to the pub alone.\textsuperscript{138}

Such an interpretation of Between the Acts points up the differences between Woolf and her more obviously politicised English feminist playwriting contemporaries. It also serves as a crucial reminder of the faultlines (‘broken mirrors’) in Woolf’s own literary attachment to an English cultural tradition. If anything, when Between the Acts is surveyed from the perspective of Freshwater, the importance of Woolf’s deliberate explosion of the ‘closed rituals of Englishness’ evident in La Trobe’s pageant takes on an even greater anti-imperial significance. Finally, in the shape of Edith Craig, we come full circle; for Edith Craig was none other than the daughter of Ellen Terry. Freshwater is, then, a clear precursor in several senses for Woolf’s last novel: like Between the Acts, it is concerned with the troubled relationship between a female artist and her society, with the constraints of genre in terms of the requirements of one’s intimate audience, and finally, of course, with the onset of a war as terrible as both the Boer War and First World War.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have examined the plays of Kate Roberts and Virginia Woolf in relation to the work of other notably feminist playwrights of the

period, thus highlighting how both Roberts and Woolf were influenced by changes in the British constitution following the First World War. To explore Roberts's dramatic works in such contexts, for example, reminds us that, while she inhabited a culture which was almost completely divorced from the literary life of the London metropolis, her work with the Ystalyfera collective was concerned with the place of women in society in a way which was in some rebellious respects very similar to that of the female authors of the English suffragette and suffrage-influenced plays. Such an interpretation suggests the extent to which her concerns as a woman writer overlapped with those of her English counterparts. However, Roberts's specifically Welsh concerns, for example, with what she saw as the Nonconformist institutionalization and repression of women's identities, set her plays at one remove from those of her metropolitan contemporaries. Similarly, while Virginia Woolf's portrayals of Julia Margaret Cameron and Ellen Terry in *Freshwater* can be compared with the female-authored chronicle plays of the interwar years, it is her refusal of an imperial identity which sets her work apart.

Despite the very obvious differences between the plays of Roberts and Woolf in terms of language, class and frame of reference, one unavoidable similarity emerges: namely that in the case of both writers, their plays have been seen as tangential to their other canonised works. They can be read as playful performances which provided an outlet for subversive discourse rendered innocuous by its supposedly comic context, and that it is indeed how they have been read by critics. Both Roberts and Woolf have thus been dispossessed of their dramatic work, and a restitution of these works to their respective canons renders possible a reading of the social force of the plays, albeit within the boundaries of locality and community which their authors were bound to negotiate. When Woolf wrote *Freshwater* she was probably aware that this was the only play that she would ever produce (her idea for another 'play' is qualified from the outset). However, for Roberts, the composition of plays provided her with a stage on which to experiment with her literary talents for the first time. Had she not begun by writing plays she might not have developed into a
published writer at all, and a reading of her dramatic work shows how, under the mask of comedy, she developed her interest in the very serious issue of womanhood in early twentieth-century Wales which would inform her later novels and short stories.

This chapter has shown the significance of literary beginnings and the abiding importance of chronology to a fuller understanding of a writer's *oeuvre*. In addition to working in more literary genres, Kate Roberts and Virginia Woolf were both prolific journalists throughout their lives. In the chapter which follows I intend once more to return to beginnings, this time to trace their steps back to the starting-point in the career of each writer in the field of journalism, in order to examine what can be termed the 'dynamics of democracy' in their output in this genre.
CHAPTER 5
Writing democracy: the journalism

Previous chapters have demonstrated the extent to which, while Virginia Woolf and Kate Roberts were born into extremely distinct cultures and communities, there are significant points of contact between their work. This is especially the case with regard to their feminist sympathies and situations as women writers whose lives were defined, and, indeed, circumscribed by British law. Turning to their journalistic output we find once more a significant point of contact, and yet that output again serves as an indicator of the very different cultures in which they lived, and to which they were both profoundly and emotionally attached. Despite their lifelong commitment to more literary genres, both writers were hugely prolific as journalists, producing hundreds upon hundreds of articles in the course of their careers. Critical interest in this aspect of their work is growing, especially in the case of Woolf. Several collections and anthologies of Woolf's reviews and essays have been published since her death, attesting to the widespread recognition of their interest and value. These range from The Death of the Moth and Other Essays, edited and published by Leonard Woolf in 1942, to Michèle Barrett’s Virginia Woolf: Women and Writing (1979) and Rachel Bowlby’s A Woman’s Essays (1992) and The Crowded Dance of Modern Life (1993).1 In the early 1980s Andrew McNeillie began the arduous task of producing a comprehensive edition of Woolf’s essays and articles: four volumes, all extensively edited, have appeared so far.2 In 1978, David Jenkins produced a themed selection of Kate Roberts’s more literary articles; hundreds of others still remain uncollected, and Jenkins’s selection, although it certainly presents some of Roberts’s key pieces—on the novel and short story, for example—gives little indication of the length and breadth of Roberts’s journalistic career.3

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1 Each of these volumes has been cited several times in preceding chapters; for full bibliographical details, see bibliography, p. 248.
3 Erthyglau ac Ysgrifau Llenyddol Kate Roberts [Literary Articles and Essays by Kate Roberts], ed. David Jenkins, op. cit.
The scope for research into the journalism of both writers is immense—from an exploration into the influence of the great essayists Hazlitt, Lamb and de Quincey on Woolf, to a consideration of Kate Roberts’s career as a printer-journalist in the context of a Welsh newspaper industry which in the nineteenth century had been dominated by men, by political parties, and by religious denominations of all kinds. However, as far as the parameters of this thesis are concerned, critical consideration of Roberts’s and Woolf’s journalism in general presents several difficulties in comparison with the treatments of genre offered in previous chapters. Firstly, the genre itself is formally rather diffuse and unwieldy, bridging as it does both literary and political registers, for example, and also many different kinds of outlets (newspapers, magazines, journals, pamphlets). Also, the range of each writer’s output in the genre is so extensive and wide-ranging that it is impossible to offer a cohesive and penetrating analysis of that output in a way which is comparable to the detailed cultural and historical contexts offered as a basis for the comparative exploration of a few significant and relevant works in previous chapters of this thesis. Finally, and most importantly, I would suggest, the one main area of comparison between the journalism of Roberts and Woolf which deserves close attention itself presents further difficulties in terms of critical work already published in the field. For while Kate Roberts’s political journalism on women is a much neglected and in fact extremely important aspect of her output in this genre, Virginia Woolf’s writing on women in her non-fiction, in both her polemical essays and in her reviews and literary essays, has been almost exhaustively documented by feminist critics. In this chapter, therefore—and with this imbalance in mind—I offer a few small ‘snapshots’ of Woolf’s and Roberts’s work in the genre, with the aim of highlighting not only significant areas of comparison and contrast, but also of asking fundamental questions about their relationship as writers with the profession of journalism itself, the answers to

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4 See, for example, Aled Gruffydd Jones, Press, Politics and Society: A History of Journalism in Wales (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1993).
which, as I shall show, throw their work in more literary genres into an ever sharper cultural relief.

Firstly, then, and bearing in mind the importance of literary beginnings emphasised in the previous chapter, I explore in both material and textual contexts the very early years of Woolf's and Roberts's careers as journalists. This involves a consideration of what exactly impelled them to write in this genre in the first place, how and by whom they were encouraged to undertake a career in this field (and whether, indeed, they themselves viewed their journalism as a career in itself), and, finally, the subjects they chose to treat in their articles of the early period. Secondly, I explore briefly the evolution of and shifts in their journalistic 'voices' during the course of their careers. Comparing a selection of earlier and later articles and essays by each writer, I consider what such shifts might indicate about their changing relationships not only with their subjects, but also with their audiences. By way of a conclusion, I draw these contrasts and comparisons into a material context, considering how each journalist's perception of herself in terms of the profession itself, combined with her own material circumstances as a printer-publisher (which in Kate Roberts's case involved the ownership of her own newspaper) can be seen as having contributed in quite complex and unexpected ways to a journalistic 'aesthetics of democracy'.

Kate Roberts and *Y Ddraig Goch* [The Red Dragon]

Most of the articles collected in David Jenkins's selection of Kate Roberts's articles and essays are literary in their emphasis, and yet they represent a minority of the journalistic pieces written by Kate Roberts during her career: most of her newspaper articles were in fact either political in nature, or apparently mundane domestic articles for women's columns. Referring to Derec Llwyd Morgan's famous pronouncement that 'they do not breed de
Beauvoirs here' (that is, in the villages of north Wales), Katie Gramich comments:

Somehow, I can’t imagine [...] Simone de Beauvoir [...] writing articles for the women’s column in a magazine on the best way to make butter, as Kate Roberts did several times for the Y Faner and Y Ddraig Goch.⁵

Gramich quite rightly emphasizes the complexity and ambivalence of Roberts’s position as a woman at the heart of a traditionally patriarchal and increasingly embattled culture and, more particularly, at the very centre of Plaid Cymru as a newly-established nationalist party. However, the thinly-veiled amusement with which she refers to her journalism echoes the patronizing benevolence with which Roberts’s ‘cookery column’ is remembered in Welsh academic circles. Derec Llwyd Morgan, while offering a serious consideration of Roberts’s journalism and its place in her work, curiously fixes upon 1945 as the time at which she began her career as a journalist:

The ‘Fire in Llŷn’, the war, her own maturity, her position in Welsh literary circles, and her honest resolution, contributed to make her from about 1945 onwards a profound critic of life and literature in Europe. She desisted from introducing propaganda into her fiction—she would not make literature subordinate to something else—and became a newspaper columnist, made journalism literature, commenting in Baner ac Amserau Cymru and Y Ddraig Goch on subjects that reflected the state of our civilization.⁶

It is of course correct that ‘from about 1945 onwards’ a new stage in Roberts’s journalistic career began to develop. Following the death of her husband, Morris T. Williams, in 1946, she became the sole proprietor of the publishing house and printers Gwasg Gee, and more directly involved in the production of its weekly newspaper, Y Faner (Baner ac Amserau Cymru) [The Banner (The Banner and Times of Wales)]. At this time, she would regularly contribute at

⁶ Derec Llwyd Morgan, Kate Roberts, op. cit., p. 44.
least two articles a week to the paper on a variety of subjects.\(^7\) As Llwyd Morgan records, topics to which she returned again and again in articles written during this period were: ‘the decline of spoken Welsh and the subsequent loss of the key to a great part of our cultural heritage; the state of contemporary prose [...] and] the morality that once framed the fabric of Welsh life’.\(^8\) However, Kate Roberts also wrote many pieces at this time on issues affecting women, from discussions of their changing role in the context of a developing nationalist politics, to more domestic matters, such as the successful running of a household. Even more notably, it was a regular contributor to the women’s column in Plaid Cymru’s newspaper, \textit{Y Ddraig Goch}, that Roberts had embarked upon her career as a journalist some twenty years previously.

When the first issue of \textit{Y Ddraig Goch} appeared in June 1926, Roberts’s response was less than enthusiastic:

\begin{quote}
I really cannot see myself any nearer to joining the Blaid after reading it. I can see Mr Saunders Lewis’s point of view as I love literature, but as I am a socialist I really cannot reconcile myself with his ideas. Personally, I see no difference between doffing one’s cap to an old English merchant and doffing one’s cap to our old Welsh princes.\(^9\)
\end{quote}

During the summer of that year, however, she began to re-assess her political position—not only did she join the party, but was almost immediately elected Chairman of the Women’s Section which H. R. Jones, Plaid Cymru’s party secretary, was keen to establish.\(^10\) It was in this capacity that she was invited to contribute to the paper’s monthly newspaper, for the simple reason that ‘she

\(^7\) Nia Williams, op. cit., p. 66. Williams notes that Roberts used her articles to organise direct political action, for example, it was through a series of articles written at this time that she successfully established a fund to help alleviate post-war poverty across Europe.

\(^8\) Derec Llwyd Morgan, \textit{Kate Roberts}, op. cit., p. 44.

\(^9\) Kate Roberts in a letter to H. R. Jones (Plaid Cymru party secretary, who had sent her a copy of the first issue of \textit{Y Ddraig Goch}), undated, quoted and translated by D. Hywel Davies, \textit{The Welsh Nationalist Party 1925-1945: A Call to Nationhood}, op. cit., p. 124, footnote.

\(^10\) D. Hywel Davies, op. cit., p. 70, footnote. See also Nia Williams, op. cit., p. 55: ‘During the Machynlleth Summer School in 1926, the Women’s Working Committee was set up. Six women collaborated in its establishment, namely—Tegwen Clee, Llanelli; Cassie Davies, Barry; Nansi Davies, Rhymney; Phoebe Jones, Bridgend; Kate Roberts, Aberdare, and Mai Roberts, Caernarfon. Kate Roberts was elected chairman, and Mai Roberts secretary.’
was one of the few members of the party during the early period who could write political literature'.

Roberts’s first article, which appeared in September of the same year, shows that, despite the rapidity of her conversion to Plaid Cymru, the enthusiasm which accompanied it was profound. The zeal with which she reports on the first meeting of the Women’s Section sets the tone for the many articles which she would write for the paper during the late 1920s. Urging female members of the Blaid to persuade other women to join the party, she reminded them that:

It is by law that we attend school from the age of five, it is by law that we pay Income Tax, and I am completely convinced that it will be by law that Wales will be made Welsh again [...] Once we achieve a Welsh Wales, the state of society will be such that it will be necessary to appoint Welsh speakers to jobs in Wales or for people of other nationalities to learn our language. It is important that we also remember that this is not a movement for the promotion of the Welsh language. It is the Party’s aim to ensure that every aspect of life in Wales is Welsh in character.

According to Roberts’s report, Plaid Cymru women appeared set for an active role in the Party; one of the resolutions of the Women’s Section established at Machynlleth was that they should not only encourage other women to join Plaid Cymru, but also to establish sub-groups of the Women’s Section in their own locality. These groups, suggested Roberts, would be catered for by specially invited speakers ‘who will be well versed in different aspects of the life of the Welsh nation, in order to enlighten women on social questions which are specifically Welsh and differ from those of England’.

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12 Kate Roberts, ‘Cylch y Merched’ [The Women’s Circle], Y Ddraig Goch, September 1926, 6.
13 Ibid., 6.
It seems that, from a very early stage, Roberts was well aware of the subtle connections between the personal and the political, even if it was a nationalist rather than an overtly feminist politics that caused her to pursue this way of thinking. The contradictions of a political agenda which was simultaneously nationalist and yet gender-specific can nevertheless be seen in her report on the meeting at which Plaid Cymru's Women's Section was initially established: 'The feeling among the women who attended was that there was a great deal that could be done by women independently, without encroaching upon the territory of the Party itself'. However, Roberts evidently intended her contributions to the 'Women's Column' to be far more than mere lists of recipes and household tips. Each of the domestic pieces which she wrote for the column during this earliest period opens with a general disquisition on the issue in question, before proceeding to specific examples and anecdotes, apart from 'Traditional Welsh Food', which provides a list of long-forgotten Welsh terms for food which eisteddfod organizers were keen for Roberts to reconstitute and publicise through her column.14 The most interesting pieces are 'Women's Handicrafts' and 'The Virtues of Butter Making', which clearly demonstrate the political and cultural impetus of Roberts's writing for the column, whether she was writing about butter making, votes for women or embroidery. 'Women's Handicrafts' also reveals a more radical aspect of Roberts's project, which was the deliberate recording of old Welsh domestic traditions and customs, normally passed on from mother to daughter, for posterity. As such, this article is a valuable transcript of orally-communicated customs which were rapidly passing out of everyday use. Such transcription has been and is, of course, an invaluable element in social anthropology: that Roberts was aware of this is evident from her reference to T. Gwynn Jones's pioneering work in this field: 'As I was re-reading Professor Gwynn Jones's excellent essay [...] on “Handicrafts”, I recalled many things which I heard from time to time about our grandmothers’ customs'.15 The article concentrates mainly on knitting and sewing skills which were slowly being forgotten in a

14 *Y Ddraig Goch*, December 1926, 6.
modern age when clothes could easily be bought. In each case, Roberts is at pains to use the correct Welsh term, for ‘embroidery’, for example—‘In my locality, “needle and thread work” [“gwaith edau a nodwydd”] is the Welsh expression for embroidery’—and describes in painstaking detail, to the best of her knowledge and according to memory, how women of her grandmother’s generation would ‘cwicio’ and prepare the lace which they wore underneath their traditional Welsh hats.16 The article closes in a vein similar to many of the pieces which Roberts wrote for the Women’s Column at this time, whatever her subject—bemoaning the passing of a time when Welsh culture had not yet been deeply influenced by English customs and habits:

Wel, mae'r hen bethau yna wedi mynd. Pa un ai da ai drwg oeddnt, ein pethau ni a'n dulliau ni o fyw oeddnt. Yn lle gwneud pethau yn ôl yr hen ddiwylliant Cymreig gwnân hwynt fel y Saeson heddyw ac nid ydyw hynny ond enghraifft arall o ryweth arall a gollwn o’n hen ddiwylliant beunydd.17

*Well, those old ways have gone. Good or bad, they were our customs and our ways of living. Today, instead of doing things according to the old Welsh ways we follow English habits, and this is just another example of another aspect of our culture that is lost every day.*

Similarly, in ‘Traditional Cookery’, in which she discusses the health problems experienced in the relatively new quarrying villages across North Wales, she argues that communities will always adopt poor eating habits where they lack any tradition to follow, before concluding glumly:

Ond efallai mai’r drwg mawr gyda choginio pob rhan o Gymru ydyw ein bod yn dilyn y Saeson ydyw ein bod wedi cadw at yr hen fwydydd Cymreig. Yr oedd y bwydydd hynny yn symll bid siŵr, ac yn rhad, ond yr oeddnt gryn dipyn iachach na’r bwydydd sydd yn awr.18

*But perhaps the greatest problem with cooking in every region of Wales is that we follow the English instead of adhering to traditional Welsh foods. Those foods were simple and cheap, of course, but a great deal healthier than the food we eat now.*

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15 Kate Roberts, ‘Ysbytyd Creffty Ymhliith Merched’ [Women’s Handicrafts], *Y Ddraig Goch*, October 1926, 6.
16 Ibid., 6.
17 Ibid., 6.
18 Kate Roberts, ‘Traddodiad Mewn Coginio’ [Traditional Cookery], *Y Ddraig Goch*, September 1927, 6.
Frequently, the titles of Roberts’s articles are more than a little misleading, which may well have been the responsibility of the paper’s editor at the time, Saunders Lewis. ‘Striking Inconsistencies: The Virtues of Butter Making’ is far less homely than its title suggests. It opens with a thought-provoking discussion of butter mountains and the like across Europe, before addressing similar disparities in Wales between production, demand and shop prices. ‘The Virtues of Butter Making’ is in fact strictly relevant only to the final paragraphs of the article, in which Roberts praises a recently-established butter factory in Aberdare.

Roberts also produced many articles on women’s education for the column at this time. While she frequently complained that too many teachers were produced by the education system, and even then the best-qualified Welsh women teachers were tempted by better salaries to places in schools in England, it was this very disillusionment, combined with her desire to see Wales as a self-sustaining nation, which led her to make some more radical suggestions with regard to careers for women. In ‘Architecture as a Vocation for Women’, for example, she draws the attention of her readers to The Journal of Careers. Commenting approvingly that careers such as architecture are opening up to women because ‘women are insisting on going in for all kinds of jobs now, as men always have’, she recognises that to choose such a newly-available career is far from an easy option: 19

Rhaid i ferch pan fo’n cynnig am swydd sydd newydd ei hagor [...] i ferched ddangos gallu neulltuol yn y gwaith, oblegid hawdd yw credu y delir i apwyntio dynion i’r swyddi a fu’n eiddo iddynt cyd, er i’w cymwysterau fod yn ddim ond gweddol. 20

When a woman is applying for a job which has newly been made available to women [...] she has to demonstrate outstanding ability in her work, since it is easy to believe that men will continue to be appointed to the jobs that have for so long been their preserve, even if their qualifications are only so-so.

19 Y Ddraig Goch, June 1927, 6.
Another characteristic aspect of Roberts's writing on careers for women is that it is motivated by her socialist leanings. In 'More on Women's Education', she suggests that shop girls should be made shareholders in their business, and in 'Vocations for Women', she argues for the establishment of small industries around Wales, which would encourage the preservation of indigenous crafts while providing business opportunities for independently-minded women.\(^{21}\)

Think of a woman learning how to bind books and finding employment with a bookbinder, or setting up her own business after leaving college. Or learning to spin and finding work in a woollen mill. Or learning how to work with leather, and opening a shop to sell her own products.

From the outset, therefore, Kate Roberts clearly approached her work as a journalist very seriously, although that work was produced within the confines, admittedly, of a column devoted to women. Such separatism unwittingly implied, I would suggest, that women would not interested in the main body of the newspaper; that the Party women themselves subconsciously contributed to such negative separatism is evident from Roberts's own early report that it was felt that Party women could achieve much separately without 'encroaching' upon the work of the Party itself. Not only that, but when the only article in each issue to be written by a woman was Kate Roberts's women's column (as was the case at this time), then women, and their particular connection with Plaid Cymru, were evidently marginalised even further. Just as she was surrounded by men in her role as a prominent member of Plaid Cymru, Roberts was also surrounded by men on the pages of *Y Ddraig Goch* during these early years. However, one thing which she did have in common with her fellow male contributors to the paper was that none of them, male or female, received any

\(^{20}\) Ibid., 6.

\(^{21}\) *Y Ddraig Goch*, May 1927, 6; and *Y Ddraig Goch*, May 1928, 6.
financial reward for their efforts; it was expected, and understood, that such work was undertaken for the good of the party. While Roberts's correspondence with Saunders Lewis shows that she clearly had no qualms about this aspect of her journalism, it also reveals the extent to which, despite her political zeal, she felt that the time-consuming nature of the work was an unbearable burden at times. Saunders Lewis warned her from the very beginning that she needed to take care to avoid the suffocation of her literary talents in her political activism. Complimenting her in October 1926 on a recent article, for example, he warns her: 'don't let the Blaid take up all your spare time. (A very odd thing for the leader of the Blaid to say, I know, but the writer in me has not died in the politician yet)'.\textsuperscript{23} In 1928, less than two years after she had taken on the responsibility for the Women's Column, Roberts was beginning to tire of what was rapidly becoming a thankless task. She admitted to Saunders Lewis in June of that year that 'I find it very hard to write something month after month, and I would like in one way or another to give it up'.\textsuperscript{24} One of the most depressing aspects of her authorship of the column, she tells him on another occasion, is that the very women for whom it was written showed very little if any interest:

Fel y gwyddoch, ychydig iawn o help a gaf fi gyda Cholofn y Merched. Apeliais dro ar ôl tro am ysgrifau. Apeliais am help tuag ay arwerthiant gwaith er mwyn cael arian i'r Blaid ond ni wnaed dim sylw o'r apêl. Morus a finnau sydd wedi ysgrifennu i'r golofn ers misoedd lawer. Pan gaf lythyrâu oddiwrth ferched y Blaid, fel rheol lythyrâu yn gofyn cwestiynau dwl ydynt, megis y ferch o Abergwaun a anfonodd ataf i ofyn a allai hi fotio yn y lecsiwn ddiwethaf i gadw'r Tori allan (a hithau yn aelod o'r Blaid a D J Williams yn byw yn Abergwaun).\textsuperscript{25}

\textit{As you know, I get very little help with the Women's Column. I appealed time after time for articles. I appealed for help with the sale of work in order to raise money for the Party but no one took any notice of the appeal. It is Morris and I who have been writing for the column for many months now. When I do receive letters from Party women, they are usually letters asking dull questions,}

\textsuperscript{22} Kate Roberts, 'Galwedigaethau i Ferched: Eisiu Cymraesau i Dorri Gwallt' [Vocations for Women; Welshwomen needed to cut hair], \textit{Y Ddraig Goch}, May 1927, 6.
\textsuperscript{23} Saunders Lewis in a letter to Kate Roberts dated 10 October 1926, \textit{Annwyl Kate Annwyl Saunders: Gohebiaeth 1923-1983}, op. cit., p. 13.
\textsuperscript{24} Kate Roberts in a letter to Saunders Lewis dated 15 June 1928, \textit{Annwyl Kate Annwyl Saunders: Gohebiaeth 1923-1983}, op. cit., p. 39.
\textsuperscript{25} Kate Roberts in a letter to Saunders Lewis dated 15 July 1929, \textit{Annwyl Kate, Annwyl Saunders: Gohebiaeth 1923-1983}, op. cit., p. 57.
such as the woman from Fishguard who wrote to ask if she could vote in the last election to keep the Tory out (and this from a member of the Party who lives in the same town as D. J. Williams).

During the course of the 1930s Roberts would write progressively fewer articles for the column. Nevertheless, this was neither the end of her career as a journalist, or the last of of her journalism for women specifically; it was merely a lull, and the amount of political journalism which she subsequently produced in the course of her long career as a writer testifies to her commitment to the cause of Welsh nationalism.

What the expression of her early disillusionment with the writing of the column does signal, however, is Roberts’s ambivalent attitude towards political journalism itself, both as a profession and as a form of writing. She clearly did not connect it with her work as a literary writer, in fact, she saw it as something which took her away from her own creative work. Nor did she seem to hold comparable views on authorship in non-literary as opposed to literary genres. While her sense of herself as a literary author was, as has been seen in previous chapters of this thesis cautious, sensitive, self-deprecating, but always passionate, her notions regarding the textual authority and identity of the ‘author’ of political journalism, at least in the area in which she was active, seem to have constituted a refusal of the writing self. Just as she refused to give the best of herself to her political journalism, she similarly refused to invest her whole writing self into the text which she was creating. Thus she was keen for the authorship of the Column to become a shared task, and, frustrated with the lack of response from her female readers, she turned to her husband Morris Williams for help, which he readily supplied in the form of provocative anonymous letters and challenges to ‘lazy’ female Nationalists.26 However, it is also important to note that, even by 1928, Roberts was beginning to turn her hand to more literary forms of journalism—it was during this year that she

26 E.g. ‘Barn Llanc am ein Merched Ifainc’ [A Bachelor’s Opinion of Our Young Women], *Y Ddraig Goch*, December 1928, 6.
produced an essay on 'The Welsh Novel' for Y Llenor, for example. Even at this early stage, therefore, she was beginning to spread her wings beyond the limiting confines of a political journalism for women who did not seem to want it.

'Our passbooks [...] are greatly overdrawn': Virginia Woolf's pursuit of a profession

While Kate Roberts neither expected nor received payment for her early articles, for Virginia Woolf it was as much her desire to make money from her writing which fuelled her initial attempts to have her articles published, as her ambition simply to be a writer. She wrote to her friend Violet Dickinson in 1904, for example, that she was keen to contribute to the family coffers, being only too aware that her recent nervous breakdown had been a financial drain on the Stephens:

[O]ur passbooks came last night, and they are greatly overdrawn. It is all the result of this idiotic illness, and I should be glad to write something which would pay for small extras.  

Critic Jeanne Dubino draws upon Woolf's letters and diaries in order to demonstrate the extent to which Woolf herself appears to have been utterly proactive in her pursuit of publication. 'The first five years of Woolf's career as a journalist, 1904 to 1909', Dubino comments, 'show how diligently she pursued her family's social connections in order to realize her dream as a writer'. Interestingly, in view of Kate Roberts's journalistic beginnings as a columnist on women's matters, Woolf's first literary connection to bear fruit was the female editor of the women's section of the Guardian, Margaret Lyttelton. It was Violet Dickinson, former friend of the late Stella Duckworth, and now a close personal friend of the young Virginia Stephen, who set up the

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28 Quoted by Andrew McNeillie in his introduction to The Essays of Virginia Woolf: Volume 1, 1904-1912, op. cit., p. xi.
initial contact between her young protégée and Mrs Lyttelton, in her post at what was then a weekly newspaper for the clergy. Margaret Lyttelton did not publish the first article sent to her by Woolf, causing the aspiring journalist to acknowledge with some humility to Violet that 'there is a knack of writing for newspapers which has to be learnt, and is quite independent of literary merits'.\(^{30}\) However, Woolf must have made some kind of impression on Lyttelton as, in spite of this rejection, the *Guardian* editor began to commission and accept reviews and articles from her on a regular basis. The first of these, 'The Son of Royal Langbrith'—a review of a novel of the same title by W. D. Howells—was published on 14 December 1904, and the second, 'Haworth, November 1904', on 21 December, before she began, finally, to have her work accepted by other papers and journals.

Although Woolf would publish only infrequently in this paper after 1907, she would continue her association with Lyttelton until as late as 1909, by which time she was a well established reviewer. However, even in the very early days of her reviewing career Woolf was soon to chafe under the somewhat restrictive harness of this Anglo-Catholic paper, and more, particularly, under that of her editor. In February 1905, for example, she wrote to Violet:

> I spend 5 days of precious time toiling through Henry James' subtleties for Mrs Lyttelton, and write a very hardworking review for her; then come orders to cut out half of it—*at once*, as it has to go into next weeks [sic] Guardian, and the Parsonesses, I suppose, prefer midwifery, to literature. So I gave up 10 minutes, all I had, to laying about me with a pair of scissors: literally I cut two sheets to pieces, wrote a scrawl to mend them together, and so sent the maimed thing off—with a curse. I never hope to see it again. It was quite good before the official eye fell upon it; now it is worthless, and doesn't in the least represent all the toil I put into it—and the book deserved a good, and careful review.\(^{31}\)

Nevertheless, in 1904, when she had no other publishing outlet, the *Guardian* was an extremely important source of self-esteem to Woolf, and one which

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played a crucial role in her developing awareness of herself as a professional writer. Her letters of the period show that as she began to receive books on a regular basis, she was as keen to emphasise the pecuniary benefits of her reviews as she was suddenly aware of her new role as a published writer with an audience for which to write. To her cousin, Emma Vaughan, for example, she wrote: ‘By the way, I am reviewing novels and writing articles for the Guardian, and so hope to make a little money—which was our old ambition’.32

Regular commissions for periodicals and newspapers as prestigious as the *Times Literary Supplement* and *The Cornhill Magazine* quickly followed, a fact which has since encouraged feminist critics to argue that Woolf’s career as a journalist was both nurtured within and contained by a benevolent upper-class patriarchal circle (the author of *The Cornhill Magazine*, for example, was Reginald Smith, a close friend of the late Leslie Stephen). In their reassessment of Woolf’s journalistic output in the context of women’s engagements with Modernism more generally, for example, Bridget Elliott and Jo-Ann Wallace note the significance of the kinds of publications in which Woolf’s journalism first appeared, and argue that the relative conservatism of Woolf’s criticism in comparison with her fiction can be traced to these contexts:

The fact that much of Woolf’s literary journalism was ‘traditional’ in nature, albeit brilliant, may be ascribed to the demands and conventions of the magazines and newspapers where she placed her work [...] Even a cursory glance at B. J. Kirkpatrick’s invaluable *Bibliography of Virginia Woolf* indicates that over a period of almost forty years—a period representing literally hundreds of reviews and essays—Woolf published perhaps fewer than a dozen pieces in what we would today call ‘alternative’ journals. Her primary outlets were such mainstream liberal and left-of-centre publications as the *Times Literary Supplement*, the *Nation and Athenaeum*, the *New Republic*, the *Criterion*, and the *New Statesman* and *Nation*.33

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The ‘demands and conventions’ of these publications were, they suggest, dictated by the men who ran them, and therefore the potential for Woolf’s critical writing to aspire to either the same avant-garde experimentalism as that found in her novels, or the forthright feminism of *A Room of One’s Own* and *Three Guineas*, was circumscribed by the conditions within which it was produced. However, as is shown by Woolf’s gradual access to the world of publishing via the women’s pages of the *Guardian*, and as Leila Brosnan has argued more fully, while Woolf’s social position certainly did help her to fulfill her aspirations to be a published journalist, in most cases she was brought into contact with an editor through the generosity and connections of one of her female friends:

The circumstances of Virginia Stephen’s introduction to Mrs Lyttelton were a blueprint for the many subsequent associations with journals. She gained access to Leo Maxse, editor of the *National Review*, through the intervention of his wife Kitty, an established friend of the Stephen family, and her association with the *Times Literary Supplement* began after an ‘invitation to dine with the Crums [neighbours of Violet Dickinson] to meet B. Richmond at the Times’.

Compared with other journalists of the period such as Frank Swinnerton and Robert Lynd, Winifred Holtby and Vera Brittain, says Brosnan, the ‘ease’ with which Woolf obtained access to the ‘professional scene’ demonstrates the extent to which she has ‘more in common with her male Oxbridge contemporaries, the “sons of educated men” than with the “Outsiders” [...] with whom she liked to claim allegiance’.

Despite her emphasis on the role played by Woolf’s female connections in her pursuit of publication, Brosnan nevertheless concurs with Elliott and Wallace that Woolf’s early reviews ring with echoes of editorial requirements rather than Woolf’s own individual critical voice:

> [The] positioning of Woolf as a journalist, and some of the resultant tones of her ‘professional’ voice, should be reminders to her later twentieth-century readers

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35 Ibid., pp. 45 and 46.
that the articles we read as ‘by VW’ are as much an indication of Edwardian and Georgian editorial conceptions of literary propriety or expediency and traditional gender roles, as they are of a modernist or feminist sensibility. On many occasions, and especially in the early writings, Woolf speaks in the voice required and often demanded by the editorial policy of the relevant journal.  

Woolf’s voice is certainly more guarded, and even a little bland, perhaps, in her early reviews, and as such seems to contrast starkly with her later self-appointed role as feminist revisionist literary historian. While her early pieces are thorough and faithful representations and criticisms of the books under review, they are relatively tentative and unadventurous. A representative example of her early approach can be found in ‘The Sister of Frederic the Great’, a review of Wilhelmina Margravine of Baireuth by Edith E. Cuthell, published in *Academy and Literature* on 13th January 1906. This review follows Woolf’s early technique of taking the reader carefully through the book step by step: she aims above all at clarity. At the very outset, for example, she explains not only that the sister of Frederic the Great left behind her a memoir, but also that ‘[a]fter her death the manuscripts fell into the hands of publishers, and various editions with different claims to authenticity excited for the time considerable interest and controversy’. Before proceeding to a further exploration of Edith Cuthell’s account of the life of Wilhelmina, Woolf refers to Carlyle’s estimation of the memoir as ‘a human book ... a veracious book, done with heart, and from eyesight and insight’, and also to Sainte-Beuve’s opinion that it ‘revealed talents no less remarkable than those of her famous brother’. She then concludes her opening paragraph with a comment on this, the latest work on Wilhelmina to be published:

Miss Cuthell, although her method is at times too crude and colloquial to be altogether pleasing, has given us a picturesque and readable account of a woman who is invariably interesting.

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36 Ibid., p. 61.
38 Ibid., p. 87.
39 Ibid., p. 87.
40 Ibid., p. 87.
In just one paragraph she has introduced us to the genesis of the text under discussion, placed it in some kind of critical context by referring to Carlyle and Sainte-Beuve, and succinctly summed up the strengths and weaknesses of the book before proceeding to more detailed description and discussion. While Woolf's reading notes show that she has taken these references to Carlyle and Sainte-Beuve from Cuthell's own introduction, they also reveal that she read or at least referred to and made notes on extensive portions of Thomas Carlyle's *History of Friedrich II of Prussia, called Frederick the Great*, and also to Richard Lodge's *A History of Modern Europe, 1453 - 1878*, in preparation for writing this review.\(^41\) In this respect also, this early review can be regarded as a blueprint, as Woolf's reading notebooks show that she would invariably prepare herself for all her reviews at least as thoroughly as this.

Despite, or perhaps because of, the thoroughness with which Woolf trained herself in the craft of journalism, her critical register is undeniably a little clichéd in many of the early pieces. Examples of the voice 'required and often demanded' by Woolf's editors abound in pieces such as 'Wordsworth Letters', written in 1908:

> Metaphors rise constantly to the lips in thinking of him which shall express his majesty, his serenity, in the form of some enduring natural object, a mountain or a river. But it is the merit of the letters that they forbid impersonal abstractions. Noble as his life was, they show it to be made of common stuff, 'transmuted', as he would have said, into a permanent shape by the perfect sincerity of his ambition. His daily life, exposed to us here so largely, and with such indifference to effect, has thus the same quality that moves us in the deepest of his poems; it points unswervingly, through trials and obscurities, to the most exalted end.\(^42\)

The same is true of the numerous 'notices' (very short reviews) written by Woolf at this time, usually of run-of-the-mill modern fiction. Since they were so short, leaving her even less room for manoeuvre than usual, they generally


make for dull reading. However, the most surprising aspect of Woolf’s early reviews in this respect lies for the present-day reader in her apparent timorousness on the subject of women’s fiction and the necessarily gendered aspects of women’s writing. She cautiously suggests in ‘Nancy Stair’, for example: ‘The prosaic mind may be tempted to suggest that the world might, perhaps, be considerably poorer if the great writers had exchanged their books for children of flesh and blood’. In ‘The Feminine Note in Fiction’, she is a little braver: ‘Is it not too soon after all to criticise the ‘feminine note’ in anything? And will not the adequate critic of women be a woman?’. However, even in her sensitive review of Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s letters, she does little to challenge received wisdom about the literary value of Browning’s poems: ‘there seems to be no reason to agree with Mrs Browning in her tacit assertion that the cause of truth would be demeaned by a more scrupulous regard for literary form’. Nevertheless, she does at least begin in such articles as these to consider the historical circumstances which made it so difficult for a woman to be a good writer prior to the advent of access to education, enfranchisement, and independence: ‘But it is not possible to consider what she might have done had her life been propitious—had not one half of it dwindled in a London sick-room—had not the other been exposed suddenly to the fierce Italian sun and Robert Browning’.

Exploring the apparent conventionality of Virginia Woolf’s early journalism, Leila Brosnan suggests that Woolf ‘of necessity taught herself a language of duplicity, a double-voiced ability’ to ‘slip’ her ‘complex and often condemnatory meanings [...] under the cover of a superficial respectability’, citing as the most obvious example of this technique Woolf’s review of The Life and Letters of John Thadeus Delane, written for the Cornhill Magazine in 1908. In this review Woolf refers continually and ironically to Delane’s lack

44 Ibid., p. 15.
45 Ibid., p. 103.
46 Ibid., p. 103.
of personality, and yet the irony was lost upon her respectable editor Reginald Smith, who was apparently much pleased with the review. Similarly, Brosnan argues, Woolf's years of literary apprenticeship as a reviewer for the staid and formal TLS taught her to 'structure her writing so that there were two levels of meaning and commentary operating simultaneously'. This critical duality can be seen in Woolf's review of Cuthell's biography of Wilhelmina. Woolf manages with some skill to combine a compelling narrative of Wilhelmina's life and times—the story of an individual who obviously fascinated her—with an evident lack of enthusiasm for Cuthell's biography. The main body of the review provides a directly narrated and lively account of the contents of Cuthell's biography of Wilhelmina Margravine; while relatively tame compared with later potted biographies such as the colourful account of her Aunt Julia Cameron (discussed in the previous chapter of this thesis), it reveals some of the stylistic traits which would later be recognized as trademarks of Woolf's prose. Even when reviewing, the narrative impulse of her prose is directed by the desire to tell a story:

Wilhelmina was a precocious child but, save for one circumstance, an unhappy one. The happiness of her childhood, as to a great extent of her whole life, depended upon her brother Frederic, who was born three years after her: they had two bodies and one soul, he wrote in later years. They were 'inseparable in the nursery': at six years old Wilhelmina had impressed the eye of a painter with one attitude that was to be characteristic of her future life; she lays her hand on Frederic's arm to restrain him from some infantine campaign on which he is bent with his big drum.

Such passages demonstrate that Woolf's talent for fleshing out history, for bringing it alive for her reader—which I will examine further in my consideration of Woolf's Common Readers—to have been highly developed at an extremely early stage in her career. Nevertheless, in spite of the strong narrative impulse of Woolf's reviews at this stage, and her careful and faithful representation of the book in question, the young reviewer did not refrain from criticizing as well as describing the book. Referring to Wilhelmina's intellectual

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48 Ibid., p. 64.
reform of Baireuth in later years, she documents the constraints placed upon such activity by her poor health:

But all this activity was carried on in defiance of the failing health which obliged her to winter in the South. To Wilhelmina the journey was an intellectual pilgrimage to be performed in a spirit of due reverence, but the account so faithfully recorded by Miss Cuthell is not more interesting than such itineraries generally are.\(^{50}\)

Woolf concludes that 'Miss Cuthell’s book is full of interesting materials for any one who cares to preach it'.\(^{51}\) The dangerously close proximity of praise, irony and laconic comment in the final sentence suggests Cuthell’s account to be itself a ‘funeral sermon’, the antithesis of Woolf’s own lively reportage, without condemning the author outright. The real criticism is implied—Cuthell’s book is about as interesting as a funeral sermon—while the public criticism is guarded and polite praise.

One of the most outstanding aspects of Woolf’s output during her earliest years as a journalist—both in view of her later political polemicism in *Three Guineas* and also in contrast with Kate Roberts’s early development as a primarily political journalist—is that it is deliberately and unquestioningly literary in nature. While Woolf quite happily used the women’s pages of the *Guardian* as a means of accessing a male-dominated literary world, she still wrote sneeringly in private of ‘the Parsonesses [who,] I suppose, prefer midwifery, to literature’.\(^{52}\) Nevertheless, although Woolf at this early stage seems to have thought only of a career as a literary journalist rather than as a feminist political polemicist, she was well aware of the precariousness of her position as an aspiring female literary journalist, and early rejections from both the *TLS* and the *Cornhill Magazine*—which her own father had once edited himself, after all—encouraged her to pursue ever more readily the benevolent

\(^{50}\) Ibid., p. 90.
\(^{51}\) Ibid., p. 91.
female patronage of the upper-class circles in which she moved. In addition to this, it is clear that, even in the very early stages of her career, Woolf viewed her journalism as a form of literary apprenticeship. While she appreciated that there was a particular ‘knack’ of writing for newspapers, she recognised also that there was a subtle connection between her newspaper articles and her own development as an aspiring writer of short stories and novels. Finally, she wrote for money from the outset, not only because she needed it, but because she wanted to become and, just as importantly, to be regarded by the public as a professional writer.

The politics of the housewife: Kate Roberts’s development of a democratic voice
From 1929 onwards, as I have noted, Roberts contributed less frequently to Y Ddraig Goch, although she would in the late 1950s return as a regular columnist. In the meantime, she began to contribute to a much greater range of publications, from Y Llenor to Llafar, and her journalism became far broader in focus than it had been when she had first taken on the mantle of women’s columnist for Y Ddraig Goch. David Jenkins’s selection, while it concentrates on the literary journalism, points to the variety of different topics addressed by Roberts, and even to the different registers employed. Her chosen subjects range from commentary on the Eisteddfod to the use of dialect in literature, while the form of the articles themselves are just as varied; most notable in this instance is the publication of fragments of her diaries and autobiographical pieces, as well as what could be called articles written in the form of ‘literary polemic’. Derec Llwyd Morgan’s discussion of these latter articles examines the intersection of art and politics to be found in much of her writing on literature, and he sees articles such as ‘Problemau Llenorion Cymraeg’ (‘The Problems of Welsh writers’) as constituting some kind of personal literary manifesto. After her husband’s death in 1946, Roberts threw herself into her work, and devoted her energies to running and contributing to the newspaper
which they had owned together, *Baner ac Amserau Cymru*. At this time she
would write at least two columns each week; following the Second World War,
she would become increasingly concerned with European affairs.

However, despite the expansion of Roberts’s journalism across a variety
of publications, and its evolution into the exploration of a range of different
topics, she maintained her interest in journalism for women specifically.
Between 1946 and 1957, for example, she contributed on a regular basis to the
women’s columns of both *Y Faner* and *Y Ddraig Goch*. Although *Y Ddraig
Goch* was still Plaid Cymru’s official newspaper, *Y Faner* was in many senses
the Party’s *unofficial* paper, especially since Morris Williams and Kate Roberts
had bought Gwasg Gee in 1935 and subsequently *Y Faner* itself. As a result,
the articles written by Roberts for the women’s columns of both papers between
1946 and 1970 demonstrate a significant overlap in terms of theme and interest.
As Nia Williams has noted, Roberts’s attitude towards women and their place
in society seems to have become increasingly conservative with age. Many
articles of this later period consist of lists of recipes, fashion and health tips, and
were evidently aimed at the ‘average’ Welsh woman whose prime concerns lay
in housekeeping and running a family, in stark contrast with the young,
educated, politicized reader that Roberts seems to have imagined for herself in
the early articles that she had written for *Y Ddraig Goch*. In *Y Faner* between
1950 and 1955, for example, her column seems primarily to follow the
preoccupations of the housewife’s calendar—the reader will find numerous
articles on topics such as ‘Preparing for the spring’, ‘Neverending housework’,
‘Directions for the Season’, ‘Food for the Spring’, ‘Drying Clothes in the
Winter’, for example.54 These later columns are far more fragmented in nature
than they had been in the 1920s, when Roberts had attempted to write what was

53 Derec Llwyd Morgan, *Kate Roberts*, op. cit., pp. 44-47. ‘Problemau Llenorion Cymraeg’ is
reprinted in *Erthyglau ac Ysgrijau Llenyddol Kate Roberts*, op. cit.
54 Kate Roberts, ‘Paratoi ar gyfer y gwanwyn’ [Preparing for the spring], 18 January, 1950, 7;
‘Gwaith Diddiwed y tŷ’ [Neverending Housework], 1 March 1950, 7; ‘Cyfarwyddiau at y
Tymor’ [Directions for the Season], 12 April 1950, 7; ‘Bwyd ar gyfer y gwanwyn’ [Food for the
spring], 2 March 1955, 7; ‘Sychu Dillad yn y Gaeaf’ [Drying Clothes in Winter], 30 November,
1955, 7.
in effect a small essay on her chosen topic. On 16 February, 1955, for example, her article was split into five ‘mini-columns’, as it were, ranging from comments on food mountains in Europe, to instructions on housekeeping and health (‘Ffeithiau at y cartref’ and ‘Ffeithiau at yr Iechyd’). In keeping with this new, fragmented, apparently more superficial approach, are the illustrations which frequently accompanied her articles, usually depicting the latest fashions. It is the photographs, in fact, those unmistakably 1950s fashions and pictures of impossibly perfect and beautifully turned out housewives, which remind the reader that Roberts’s increasing conservatism may not have been so much a reflection of her late middle age—she was by this time well over sixty—as of the ideological constraints of the post-war era in which she lived. It is now recognized, of course, that in the 1950s women in Britain generally experienced a post-war backlash: advertisements and photographs found on the pages of Y Faner are themselves unwitting testimony to the extent to which such anti-feminist propaganda penetrated the media in Wales as well as in England.55 By the 1950s, Roberts no longer railed against ‘dull’ apolitical women; if she wrote about politics, it was usually about the politics of the housewife. On 15 February 1950, for example, she simply urged women to protest against the sharp rise in the cost of living:

A syndod i mi ydyw gweled nad yw merchyn codi cynnwrf o gwbl yn yr etholiad hwn, yr hyn sy’n dangos mae arnaf ofn nad ymannodd yr un argyfwng a gawsom rhwng 1945 a 1950 arnom. Pysleisias yn y golofn hon lawer gwaith mai gwraig y tŷ sy’n dodi def ywafr y pen draw oddi wrth yr argyfyngau hyn, ac eto, yr ydm yn berffaith dawel, ac yn cymryd ein twyllo gan ymresymu cam.56

And I’m surprised to see that women are not making a fuss at all in this election, which shows, I’m afraid, that none of the crises that we had between 1945 and 1950 have impinged on us. I have emphasized many times in this column that it is the housewife who suffers most in the long term from these crises, and yet, we are perfectly quiet, and allow ourselves to be deceived by false reasoning.

55 See, for example, Betty Friedan, The Feminine Mystique (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965 [1963]).
The most striking change of all between these articles and the early pieces written for *Y Ddraig Goch* in the 1920s lies in Roberts’s use of the first person plural—from talking about women as ‘they’, she has come to interpret the word ‘women’ as ‘we’. More than that, the group denoted by her use of the inclusive first person plural is used with reference to ‘the housewife’. In contrast with her early articles, Kate Roberts is here considering herself as belonging to this group. Looking back on Kate Roberts’s career, it is tempting to pigeonhole her as ‘the queen of our literature’ and as an exceptional woman, especially with regard to her middle years which she spent as an independent printer-publisher and journalist, as well as a writer. But throughout her life Kate Roberts was deeply concerned with housework, both its necessities and hardships, and the small luxuries it afforded. Her self-identification as a ‘housewife’ is no self-deprecating masquerade adopted in order to endear her to her readers. She saw herself as very much a woman who ran a household, as well as a woman who worked, wrote, and was politically active, and in these later articles we see her writing from a domestic perspective which was clearly an important aspect of her personal identity.57

Despite the apparent conservatism of the later articles, Roberts nonetheless still retained her interest in women’s issues as distinctly different from those of men, and there are several articles dotted around in both *Y Ddraig Goch* and *Y Faner* during the 1950s and 1960s which attest to the fact that, despite everything, she maintained a belief in the value of the contribution of Plaid Cymru women to the party, and also the value of female collaboration. She frequently wrote about women’s groups and institutions, for example. One of the most significant characteristics of such pieces is that, while she was frequently reporting approvingly on the activities of what were essentially English women’s movements, she never lost an opportunity to provide a Welsh perspective on these goings-on, and to argue for the establishment of

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57 Katie Gramich offers a reading of the domestic aspects of Kate Roberts’s fiction in her interpretation of Roberts’s short story ‘Chwiorydd’ [Sisters], in her essay ‘Gorchfygwyr a Chwiorydd: storfau byrion Dorothy Edwards a Kate Roberts yn y dauddegau’ [Conquerors and Sisters: the short stories of Dorothy Edwards and Kate Roberts in the twenties], *Diffinio Dwy Lenyddiaeth Cymru*, op. cit. pp. 80-95.
specifically Welsh women’s groups of a similar nature. On June 28, 1950, for example, she wrote:

You have read accounts in various newspapers of the above conference, which was held in the Albert Hall, London, and the decisions that were discussed there, so I am not going to say much today about the decisions as they were reported in London, but I would like to talk about some of them from the perspective of Welsh women. Some of the decisions have to do with women of many countries, but if Wales had her own union of women’s organisations, I am certain that some of the decisions would be different, and that there would be different aspects to some of them. I have always admired the zeal and enthusiasm of women’s organisations, the assistance they give to rural women, and the renewed interest they show in their lives. But it grieves me greatly to see how anglicized these organisations are in places like Dyffryn Clwyd and Hiraethog.

Roberts also commented favourably on projects such as Welsh magazines and journalism specifically for women. In September 1963, for example, she wrote a very positive review of a new Welsh magazine for women, Hon. Acknowledging the important work done by other women in the field, she praises Llythyr Ceridwen [Ceridwen’s Letter], and ‘Ty Ni’ [Our House] (the women’s pages of Y Cymro), although she qualifies her praise with a comment which is relevant to her own journalism for women:

Fe gydnebydd pawb nad yw'r dull presennol o gyhoeddi erthyglau, etc., ar bethau sydd o ddiddordeb i ferched yng nghanol papur newydd yn foddhaol. Fe hoffwn weld rhywbeth y gallwn droi ato yn hwylus, a chael pob dim gyda’i gilydd. 59

58 Kate Roberts, ‘Cynhadledd Flynnyddol Sefydliadau’r Merched’ [Women’s Institutes’ Annual Conference], Y Faner, 28 June, 1950, 7.
59 Kate Roberts, ‘Cyhoeddiadau solet o ferched solet—a choreso i Hon’ [Solid publications from solid women—and welcome to Hon], Y Ddraig Goch, October 1963, 6. See also ‘Papurau a Chylchgronau Merched’ [Newspapers and magazines for women], Y Faner, 3 October 1951, 7 (quoted by Nia Williams, op. cit., p. 64).
Everyone will acknowledge that the present system of publishing articles, etc., on subjects of interest to women in the body of a newspaper is not satisfactory. I would like something I could turn to conveniently, and have everything together.

Between the 1920s and the 1950s, therefore, a significant shift occurred in Kate Roberts's journalism for women. This shift can be traced both to changes in Roberts's personal circumstances, such as the onset of old age, and to broader ideological pressures which came to bear upon Welsh women during the twentieth century. In 1926, when Kate Roberts sat down to pen her first article for the Women's Column of Y Ddraig Goch, she was thirty-four, a young, educated, financially independent woman, living in rented accommodation and moving around the south Wales valleys from school to school, with a glittering literary career ahead of her. Her work as a schoolteacher brought her into contact with many other single and like-minded young women. The literary fruits of this environment can be seen especially in the proto-feminist plays which she co-wrote with friends and colleagues, and in the stories written during this period which appeared in her second collection, Rhigolau Bywyd (discussed in Chapters 4 and 2 of this thesis respectively). Her early articles for Y Ddraig Goch appear to have been directed at young women like the educated single colleagues with whom she spent so much of her time, and her evident frustration at the lack of response they attracted from her readers suggests that she had very little idea of what domestic life was like for most women. She seemed to associate the harsh realities of domestic poverty with women of her mother's generation and background, rather than with women of her own age. However, later articles written for Y Faner in the 1950s demonstrate a gentler, more sympathetic attitude towards her own sex, and a heightened awareness of the domestic parameters within which many Welsh women lived their lives. The number of letters and responses which she received from her readers during this later period suggests that the column did indeed strike a chord with Welshwomen. She was by this time a widow in her sixties, living in the home which she had bought with her husband in 1935.
However, although her later journalism for women displays a continued interest in women's issues and interests as distinct from those of men, at no time did Kate Roberts attempt to create any kind of potentially radical gendered discourse as she had in the late 1920s. I have suggested that, in addition to changes in her personal circumstances, this may be due to the pervasive anti-feminist propaganda which pervaded British culture generally during the 1950s, in reaction to the increased freedom experienced by women as a result of two World Wars. In Wales, I would add, and in Kate Roberts's case in particular, this increasing conservatism was also due, surely, to her fervent commitment to the social and cultural ideals of a nationalist party committed to the survival of the Welsh language and culture, and to its future as an independent state. The sexually conservative aspects of this radical movement served only to confirm the nurturing and caring roles thrust upon women by a deeply patriarchal society, and to delay the onset and lessen the impact of Second Wave feminism in Wales.

An aesthetics of democracy: The Common Readers

In the essays and articles for which Woolf is best remembered, the majority of which were written at least ten years after the period of her solitary apprenticeship (1904-1909), she seems remarkably free from the constraints of implication, guarded criticism and academic correctness of the early years. Both volumes in Woolf's Common Reader series consist of a mixture of previously published essays, and pieces written specifically with these volumes in mind. They represent what has been seen by critics as the apotheosis of her idiosyncratic critical style, and they demonstrate how, in the decade or so which had elapsed since her period of apprenticeship, Woolf had indeed succeeding in developing her own critical voice.60 This was at least in part due to greater

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freedom from editorial constraints: while Woolf had continued to write for the *Times Literary Supplement*, in fact writing almost exclusively for this publication until 1919, between 1920 and 1925 she began to publish reviews and essays in publications such as the *Athenaeum* and the *New Statesman*. When Leonard Woolf became the literary editor of the relaunched *Nation and Athenaeum* in 1923, Woolf became a regular and frequent contributor. She began to write more full-length articles and essays—such as the famous and much debated 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown'—as opposed to reviews, with the result that when she came to plan each volume of *The Common Reader*—the first was published in 1925 and the second in 1932—she was able to use revised versions of several pieces which she had written for publication already.61 One of the outstanding features of both volumes, according to critics, is the inherently democratic impulse of Woolf's by now highly individual critical style. It has been described as democratic both in terms of the material that it treated and also in terms of its inclusive nature, which, it has been argued, sought to draw in as many readers as possible, to democratize the reading process, as it were, and to extend the boundaries of the literary audience beyond the refined parameters of either genteel publications such as the *Times Literary Supplement* or exclusively avant-garde periodicals such as T. S Eliot's *Criterion.*62

In terms of material, the *Common Readers* certainly share a decided eclecticism. They include essays on once peripheral female literary figures, from Maria Edgeworth to Mary Wollstonecraft, which have since been anthologized several times over by feminist literary critics, with the result that such 'obscure' women writers have now been allotted their place in the literary

61 Virginia Woolf, 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown', op. cit. For further discussion of this essay, see Chapter 2 of this thesis.

In each case, Woolf's narrative impulse is in evidence, only in this case its effectiveness is increased by her confident and deliberately careless disregard for academic facts and dates. Gone is the young reviewer keen to point to her sources and thus establish academic authority. In her place we find a proudly self-taught mature critic who shapes her material as she pleases, and whose main aim is to restore the power of the imagination to criticism. Her essay on 'Dr Burney's Evening Party' for example, opens as follows:

The party was given either in 1777 or in 1778; on which day or month of the year is not known, but the night was cold. Fanny Burney, from whom we get much of our information, was accordingly either twenty-five or twenty-six, as we choose. But in order to enjoy the party to the full it is necessary to go back some years and to scrape acquaintance with the guests.

It does not matter exactly when the party took place; lack of accuracy in this respect should not hinder our imaginative reconstruction of the occasion. Fanny Burney, as the mediator of 'information' about the party is evidently going to play a central role in this essay, as, by relaying her account Woolf ensures that it is through the young writer's consciousness that her own readers will imagine the party. Notably, it is 'as we choose' that Fanny Burney is 'either twenty-five or twenty-six': Woolf both aligns herself with her readers at the outset of this journey into the past, and stresses both the imaginative and immediate aspects of this journey—certain choices are ours, and one of the aims of this journey is to re-live and to enjoy the party as if we had been there. Commenting on Woolf's urge to 'put "flesh and blood" into the shadows of English literary history' in this way, Beth Rigel Daugherty suggests that it was her early experiences of teaching the underprivileged working classes at Morley College which informed her critical urge to communicate as broadly directly and humanly as possible in her criticism.

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Note Woolf's own use of 'Lives of the Obscure' as the heading to one of her sections in the first volume of the Common Reader series (London: The Hogarth Press, 1925).


Confronted with class difference at Morley, Virginia Stephen identifies with her students and gives them a presence in her classroom, uses conversation rather than lectures, communicates with vivid details, and provides context. Learned at Morley, these teaching strategies inform her essays, becoming especially evident whenever Woolf widens her audience and confronts difference again. When she leaves the relative anonymity and small readership of the TLS to reach more readers in bookstores and libraries with the Common Reader for example, she calls on what she learned at Morley. 66

Woolf repeatedly uses anecdotal detail and imaginative reconstruction in order to bring her subjects to life for her reader, and over and over again she draws her reader's attention to figures usually considered of minor historical interest. While she focuses frequently on women, and it is essays such as "Dorothy Osborne’s "Letters"" which have been anthologized by feminist editors, it is also important to note her interest in male writers and figures, both major and minor, from John Donne to Jack Mytton, from Daniel Defoe to Beau Brummell. In fact, one of the most important aspects of both volumes, I would argue, and one which is obscured in feminist anthologies which select only the essays on women, is the interaction between men and women as the subjects of Woolf's literary historical explorations, and also the very subtle but significant connections drawn between the essays, making of each volume an organic whole. In 'The Strange Elizabethans', for example, she traces the events of the life of a young milkmaid, Mercy Harvey through that of her brother, Gabriel Harvey (friend of Spenser and Sidney); in her essay on Dorothy Osborne, she shows how Osborne's letters to her suitor reveal as much of his character as they do of her own, arguing that this is 'a proof of Dorothy's gift as a correspondent'; in 'Swift's "Journal to Stella"', she similarly points to what the Journal tells us about Stella rather than its famous author. In her essay on the 'obscure' Laetitia Pilkington she makes her subject at once extraordinary and representative, placing her in certain historical and literary contexts with the deliberate intention of drawing connections between her and other, better-known women writers:

Can you imagine a very extraordinary cross between Moll Flanders and Lady Ritchie; between a rolling and rollicking woman of the town and a lady of

66 Ibid., p. 65.
breeding and refinement? Laetitia Pilkington (1712-1750) was something of the sort—shady, shifty, adventurous, and yet, unlike Thackeray’s daughter, like Miss Mitford, like Madame de Sévigné and Jane Austen and Maria Edgeworth, so imbued with the old traditions of her sex that she wrote, as ladies talk, to give pleasure.  

Woolf makes no grand claims for this evidently minor writer: what she does do by placing Pilkington in such a context is to convince her reader and strengthen her own conclusion that ‘thus Laetitia is in the great tradition of Englishwomen of letters. It is her duty to entertain; it is her instinct to conceal [...]’, ending with a playful gambit: ‘But who taught her English? The great Doctor Swift.’  

Nor is the reference to ‘Dr Swift’ the throwaway remark that it appears to be here: such apparently careless comments are in fact the thread used by Woolf to create an elaborate interweaving of reference and connection between the essays. For example, several of the women cited by Woolf in the passage above are the individual subjects of other essays in the Common Reader volumes. Similarly, Woolf ends her essay on Dorothy Osborne in the second volume with an observation made by Swift: ‘Mild Dorothea, peaceful, wise, and great’, and then places her essay on ‘Swift’s “Journal to Stella”’ immediately following the piece on Osborne. In so doing she no doubt remembered the connection made between Pilkington and Swift in the first volume. Such an interweaving of reference between essays and across volumes gives us a radical, feminist revisionist view of literary history, particularly of women’s writing. While it makes neither extremist nor anachronistic claims as to its literary merit—her essay on ‘Aurora Leigh’, for example, shows her to have maintained the opinion of Elizabeth Barrett Browning which she had formed by the time she wrote her review of the Brownings’ letters in 1906—it allows women’s voices to be heard, encourages us to revisit the classics of English literature through the refracted view provided by female figures, and places the work produced by women, good and bad, major and minor, from Jane Austen to Laetitia Pilkington, in the context of the English literary canon.

68 Ibid., p. 118.
Woolf critics have paid much attention to the theme of ‘not knowing’ which informs the writing of all of the essays and enables her to take her flights of fancy. Beth Rigel Daugherty is representative of this attitude in her emphasis on the radically defamiliarizing effect of what she sees as a profoundly democratic approach:

Because Woolf often chooses works that even the ‘educated’ might not know about, she achieves throughout the two volumes what she does in ‘On Not Knowing Greek’: she transforms learned scholars into novices and puts all readers in the place of ‘not knowing’.

Such readings are, of course, based on the quotation from Johnson which provides the intellectual raison d’être of both volumes—‘for by the common sense of readers, uncorrupted by literary prejudices … must be generally decided all claim to poetic honours’—as well as on Woolf’s own essay in the first volume, ‘On Not Knowing Greek’. In this essay Woolf uses the first person plural to much the same effect as did Roberts in her essay on the politics of the housewife:

For it is vain and foolish to talk of knowing Greek, since in our ignorance we should be at the bottom of any class of schoolboys, since we do not know how the words sounded, or where precisely we ought to laugh, or how the actors acted, and between this foreign people and ourselves there is not only difference of race and thought but a tremendous breach of tradition. All the more strange, then, is it that we should wish to know Greek, feel for ever drawn back to Greek, and be for ever making up some notion of the meaning of Greek, though from what incongruous odds and ends, with what slight resemblance to the real meaning of Greek, who shall say?

Such readings of the politics of the Common Readers evidently draw upon Woolf’s much documented sense of loss at her lack of a formal classical education, and the years of private lessons which she took with Janet Case in order to make up for that sorely missed opportunity. They also point to the most politically democratic aspect of the Common Readers, in that it is this

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theme of ‘not knowing’, this deliberate locating of herself on the side of the ‘common reader’ which enables Woolf to wipe clean the slate of a literary history dominated by classically educated men and to start afresh, allowing the imagination free rein along the way. In ‘The Strange Elizabethans’ it is precisely this strategy which is so inviting: she beckons to her reader to join her in the venture of rummaging among the detritus of literary history, with the exciting prospect of rediscovering history in the making, rather than revisiting history already made:

If we rummage among the fragments we shall, at any rate, leave the highroad and perhaps hear some roar of laughter from a tavern door, where poets are drinking; or meet humble people going about their milking and their love-making without a thought that this is the great Elizabethan age, or that Shakespeare is at this moment strolling down the Strand and might tell one, if one plucked him by the sleeve, to whom he wrote the sonnets, and what he meant by Hamlet.72

‘A language of duplicity’: Woolf as the uncommon reader

And yet, if the democratic approach of both volumes, in which Woolf situates herself as a ‘common reader’ like any other, is comparable to Roberts’s capitulation to ‘we’ in her discussions of domesticity and politics, there are significant differences between their deployments of that all-inclusive pronoun. Woolf was at heart an individualist, and, by 1925, a practised reviewer and essayist who was well versed in the strategies which must necessarily be deployed by any writer seeking an audience. I would suggest that, as she evolved into a more confident and respected literary journalist, she carried with her that personal ‘language of duplicity’ which she had forged as a young reviewer in order to overcome editorial constraints. It is vital, I would suggest, that both the powerful and duplicitous aspects of Woolf’s position as the author of the Common Reader essays are fully acknowledged. She is the author who, as we have seen, refuses authority, who invokes herself in her own text as a reader as common as any other. Nevertheless, as Brenda Silver’s meticulous edition of Woolf’s reading notebooks demonstrates, Woolf is herself playing

72 Ibid., pp. 10-11.
the role of the common reader here in order to capture her audience's attention.

In the first place, as Silver notes, Woolf may have had an unusual education and, like so many other women of her time, was certainly denied a formal classical education, but she was nevertheless a highly uncommon reader:

By her own account and by the testimony of her writing, Virginia Woolf was from her childhood far more than the 'common reader' she later named herself. Born into a long line of professionals and writers, she expressed early in life a passion for reading and ideas that stimulated in turn her own creative energy. She read for pleasure and she read for work. She read to ease her mind, and to fertilise it.73

Woolf was a reader who began to read, voraciously and precociously, from an uncommonly young age, and whose most personal writings, her letters and diaries, point to the close relationship between her reading and writing, particularly the way in which, as Silver notes, her reading fertilized the creative process of writing. She was also in her adulthood a most uncommon reader, an individual whose days were filled with literally hours of reading, writing and intellectual conversation. Her relationships with reading and writing can at best be seen as intense and, indeed, privileged, and at worst, in light of the pattern of connection between her several mental breakdowns during her life and the imminent publication of her next novel, as pathological.

Woolf undeniably addresses her essays to one common reader from another, but this must be seen, therefore, as a powerful rhetorical strategy as much as a straightforward material position vis-à-vis her audience. As with the work of any critic keen to convince his/her reader of the validity of his/her opinion, her criticism deploys the necessary deceit, role-play and attitudinizing intended to provoke the same result: agreement, and even admiration. In her essay on Montaigne, for example, she has evidently perfected the art of her own peculiarly Woolfian rhetoric:

73 Brenda Silver, Virginia Woolf's Reading Notebooks, ed. Brenda R. Silver, op. cit., introduction, p. 3.
But, as we watch with absorbed interest the enthralling spectacle of a soul living openly beneath our eyes, the question frames itself, Is pleasure the end of all? Whence this overwhelming interest in the nature of the soul? Why this overmastering desire to communicate with others? Is the beauty of this world enough, or is there, elsewhere, some exploration of the mystery? To this what answer can there be? There is none. There is only one more question: ‘Que scais-je?’

As in so many other instances, Woolf here invokes herself as one of her audience, watching with them ‘the enthralling spectacle of a soul living openly beneath our eyes’. But then, building up to her conclusion, she goes even further. Before she leaves her reader with a list of pertinent questions intended to resonate in the mind long after the act of reading the essay has come to an end, she attempts to make it seem as if the questions have come out of nowhere, surprising her as much as her reader. The question, it will be noted, ‘frames itself’, although of course it is Woolf herself who frames it, just as it is she who frames the several questions which follow. And then she builds up to her ambitiously rhetorical conclusion with a flourish, flexing the muscles of an experienced essayist with another seemingly impersonal interjection: ‘To this what answer can there be?’ And then, in the style almost of a philosophical dialogue, she answers herself: ‘There is none,’ before ending with Montaigne’s own words which, due to her own persistent rhetoric in the lines that came before, ring with inevitability: ‘There is only one more question: “Que scais-je?”’ While the subject of this essay is one of the most revered essayists in the European tradition, Woolf nevertheless cannot resist the temptation to pit her ability against his, and to dazzle as he shines.

Ownership and democracy: the Hogarth Press and Gwasg Gee

In more practical terms, too, Woolf was able progressively to liberate herself from editorial constraints in her career as a literary journalist and essayist. Although she would continue to write reviews and essays for various publications until the end of her life, the Common Readers were published by

her own press, which was run by Leonard Woolf with her assistance. From 1917 onwards the Hogarth Press was responsible for the publication not only of the work of Bloomsbury friends and satellites (from T. S Eliot and Katherine Mansfield to Hope Mirrlees), but also for the publication of all of Woolf's own work, not only the novels, but also short stories, individual essays, and both Common Readers. Hogarth Press historian John H. Willis notes that '[t]o escape from the unpleasant pressures of publishers and to write and print for one's friends were [...] two of the powerful justifications for beginning and continuing the Hogarth Press'.

He also offers the persuasive argument that: 'Woolf's genius would surely have survived in some form under any publisher, but it developed as it did in the novels and essays because she was free from editorial pressures, real or imagined, and needed to please only herself, an editor severe enough for all seasons.' The publication of the Common Readers under the auspices of the Hogarth Press evidently arrogated a singular control of Woolf's critical voice to her, after years of writing according to editorial strictures. Not only was Woolf more an uncommon reader than the common reader she pronounced herself to be, therefore, she was also an uncommon writer in that she was her own editor and could, ultimately, write exactly as she pleased. The personal liberation achieved through the autonomy of the Press did indeed have far-reaching consequences for her. It was after the publication of Mrs Dalloway and the first Common Reader that Woolf really made a name for herself as a writer, with critics meting out plaudits for both. As a result of this, and of the publication of her novels in America, Woolf began to receive requests to publish essays and articles in American magazines and newspapers. The recognition of Woolf's role as a critic during the last fifteen or so years of her life was, it seems, due more to the publication of a volume of her criticism under her own Hogarth Press, rather than to the twenty years she had spent working as a reviewer for other editors. Just as Leila Brosnan points to Woolf's privileged position at the beginning of her career as a literary journalist, and

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76 Ibid., p. 44.
attempts to qualify Woolf's position as a self-professed 'outsider', the
privileges afforded Woolf as a critic later in life similarly need to be recognised.

Despite the vast differences between Woolf and Roberts, the trajectories
taken by their careers as writers reveal a startling symmetry at times: just as
Woolf became a printer, and her own publisher, with liberating consequences,
so too did Roberts, although the liberation that she had in mind was more
political and communitarian than literary and individual in nature. And just as
the Hogarth Press at first played a cathartic role in Woolf's life, keeping her
mind occupied after one of her worst breakdowns, so too did Roberts's Gwasg
Gee assist her, as the responsibilities of running the press and contributing to its
paper helped her to 'forget a little' her husband's tragic death after an
irreversible descent into alcoholism following the death of his lover Prosser
Rhys (another prominent and respected figure in the Welsh literary community,
who was himself until his death editor of *Y Faner*). When Roberts first came
to Gwasg Gee in 1935, however, her husband was still very much alive and
well, and they had grand plans for the role the press would play in contributing
to the political life and literary culture of Wales. Although, in the event, the
press did publish all of Roberts's work from this point onwards, Roberts herself
clearly saw this more broadly in terms of the political struggle to keep the
Welsh-language culture alive. The world of publishing had a particular role to
play in this struggle, she later claimed:

> Morris was a master printer. I was a writer. With our small savings we then
bought Gwasg Gee in Denbigh. This was a decisive move for us; back to the
north in order to use journalism to reach those who still lived inside the
shrinking confines of our national language, those who could still respond to a
call to action. [...] We were natives, not exiles, born to be bound to our own soil. Whatever value
resided in our writing was related directly to that servitude. Even more
restricting, what we had to say in any form had to be addressed to the remnant
still capable of responding to much more than reading a book. We were obliged

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77 Kate Roberts in a letter to Lewis Valentine, September 1946, quoted by Nia Williams, op.
cit., p. 30.
to make one call to action after another. Appeal after appeal. Buying a book was casting a vote, joining in civil disobedience. 78

Once they had bought Gwasg Gee, Kate Roberts and Morris Williams set about buying a Welsh newspaper. Although their original plans to buy Y Ddraig Goch were disappointed, shortly afterwards they managed to purchase Y Faner from 'its ageing English Liberal proprietors and gave Prosser a free hand as editor to bring it up to date and into the front line of our struggle'. 79 Even after Prosser Rhys's death, Roberts ensured that Y Faner remained at the 'front line' under the editorship of Gwilym R. Jones until, in dire financial straits in 1956, she was forced to sell the paper 'back into the hands of the Liberals'. 80 It is in the light of such material circumstances that the journalism of Kate Roberts needs to be considered, I would suggest, especially her journalism for and about women which has been discussed in this chapter. She was first and foremost a nationalist, and it was her love of her country and Party which influenced many of her personal and professional decisions. Her interest in women's issues, although its expression in her journalism is just as pronounced as it is in her plays, novels and short stories, is more evidently confined within the patriarchal framework of the culture which she fought so hard to protect from erosion by outside influences. As I have shown in this chapter, her later journalism for women in Y Faner shows a greater acceptance of the realities of women's lives, and the evolution of a more embracing attitude of women as they were, rather than as she would have liked them to be. This evolution was accompanied by the development of a textual aesthetics of democracy, in which she considers herself as a speaker to be part of the group about which and for which she is writing.

Conclusion

Just as Virginia Woolf positions herself alongside her common reader in her later articles, therefore, Kate Roberts finally places herself among the women

78 Quoted by Emyr Humphreys, The Triple Net, op. cit., pp. 33 and 34.
79 Ibid., p. 34.
for whom she was writing: both Woolf and Roberts deliberately and consistently deploy the first person plural: 'we'. And yet in Woolf's case, despite the genuinely democratic impulse of her literary criticism, her use of the inclusive 'we' was very much a literary strategy, whereas in Kate Roberts's case it was a far more naive expression of herself and of her relationship with her readers. Not that Kate Roberts was in any way more intellectually naive than Woolf: however, journalism was not her profession as such, it was something that she did primarily to help the cause of Plaid Cymru and of the Welsh-language community more generally. She had to scribble her articles when she could find the time, and in that sense, they necessarily come a poor second to her short stories and novels. Also, the Welsh-language community was so small that certain metropolitan luxuries, such as a vibrant highbrow broadsheet medium simply could not exist here. Then, as now, it is virtually impossible for a freelance writer to make a living in Wales—and in any case, that was not Roberts's intention. Nevertheless, the issue of journalism as a profession ultimately lies at the heart of the major differences between the journalistic output of Kate Roberts and Virginia Woolf, and helps to explain why their writing in this field evolved in the way that it did. For Woolf, it was an essential part of her literary career; for Roberts, it was by and large extraneous to it.

Throughout this thesis I have pointed to the differences between these writers' specific relationships with their communities, and have considered how these relationships can be perceived in their output in various genres. With their journalism, we are confronted ever more strongly by these core issues of community and audience. In this context Virginia Woolf emerges as the sophisticated individualist who nonetheless succeeds in conveying her passion for literature in a radically democratic form; Kate Roberts, on the other hand, can be seen as a committed communitarian who accepted aesthetic and domestic constraints, but who all the same proved politically resourceful in her

80 Nia Williams, op. cit., p. 30. See also Gwilym R. Jones, 'Kate Roberts a’r “Faner”' [Kate Roberts and the “Faner”], in Kate Roberts: Cyfrol Deyrnged, ed. Bobi Jones, op. cit., pp. 192-194.
uneven development towards a more democratic voice on issues of relevance to Welsh women.
Art is the first luxury to be discarded in times of stress; the artist is the first of the workers to suffer. But intellectually also he depends upon society. [...] the artist is affected as powerfully as other citizens when society is in chaos, although the disturbance affects him in different ways. His studio now is far from being a cloistered spot where he can contemplate his model or his apple in peace. [...] With all these voices crying and conflicting in his ears, how can the artist still remain at peace in his studio contemplating his model or his apple in the cold light that comes through the studio window? [...] Two causes of supreme importance to him are in peril. The first is his own survival: the other is the survival of his art.


I began this thesis with a parallel quotation: situated at the extremes of the cultural and geographical peripheries occupied by Kate Roberts and Virginia Woolf, as it were, those fragments from 'Caeau' [Fields] and 'Street Haunting' articulated some of the most obvious contrasts between them as writers.1 As such it was a provocative strategy, intended to initiate

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1 The quotations at the head of this chapter are taken from much later essays:
Kate Roberts 'Llenyddiaeth a Gwleidyddiaeth [Literature and Politics], Erthyglau ac Ysgrifau Llenyddol Kate Roberts, op. cit., p. 266; translation as follows: 'In large countries like France and England writers become involved in politics if they possess deep political convictions. So it has always been in every country, large and small. If a writer possesses
a dialogue between their respective oeuvres, a dialogue which has been heard from various vantage points in the course of this thesis—from different points in time, as well as from different places. The conversation thus provoked has been sometimes strident, sometimes faint, a conversation which has, however, been intimately and consistently concerned with two voices, two languages, and two cultures.

The primary aim of bringing together two such different writers in this way was a political one, namely to give a voice, and a place, to Kate Roberts in the English-speaking literary world. The fact that, of two writers of comparable iconic status within their own cultures, only one has become internationally renowned, while the other has remained more or less invisible, is an indication that post-colonial approaches to literature are perhaps only effective in English, and remain incapable of interpreting minority cultures with entire literary traditions of their own, literary traditions which remain only partly accessible due to the limits of translation, both literal and cultural. In this thesis, as a project undertaken in the medium of English, I have attempted to engage with the slippery notion of the translatability of the work of a writer such as Kate Roberts, both in terms of linguistic transposition, and also in terms of the broader cultural transposition of her work from a purely Welsh context into the context of the English-medium literary criticism. However, in doing so, I have been acutely aware that cultural translation is an ongoing, partial and, most importantly, a two-way process, which reveals the faultlines of writing identities rather than any terra firma on which purist notions of either the English or Welsh writers under discussion in this thesis can be based.

With these faultlines in mind, I have been concerned not only to correct what is clearly an imbalance with regard to the critical attention paid
to Roberts in the English-speaking world in comparison with Woolf, but also deliberately to fracture the restrictive pedestal on which Roberts has been perched in Welsh-language culture. For, while that culture has been extremely sensitive to its own threatened nationhood throughout the twentieth century, it has been seemingly impervious to the deep-rooted patriarchalism on which the future of what is essentially a sexually conservative culture depends. For the Welsh feminist critic, this paradox presents many problems, and the paucity of feminist critics working in the field of Welsh studies in itself remains an obstacle. In this sense, the presence of Virginia Woolf in this thesis, along with the extensive amount of feminist criticism clustered around her work, has been an enabling one, which has contributed directly to the new readings of Roberts's works which I have offered in this study, from a discussion of her neglected proto-feminist plays to an interpretation of her underestimated second war novel, *Tegwch y Bore*.

Nevertheless, the sexual conservatism of Kate Roberts's environment can be seen as hinging upon her cultural conservatism, and that cultural conservatism can in turn be seen as an individual and political necessity in the face of what was becoming during the early twentieth century the frighteningly rapid erosion of one of Europe's oldest cultures and languages. Interestingly, when Roberts's work, with its constant engagement with that threat of extinction, is placed side by side with that of Woolf, then the faultlines in Woolf's own cultural identity emerge, most notably those between her deep-rooted and widely documented anti-imperialism, and her 'consistently recognisable Neo Romantic sensibility', a sensibility which grew out of what was a profound and lifelong attachment to her England, 'my England', as she called it. ² In this thesis I have been concerned to explore this attachment in terms of Woolf's relationship with

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² Clare Morgan, 'Vanishing Horizons: Virginia Woolf and the Neo-Romantic Landscape in *Between the Acts* and "Anon"', *Worldviews: Literature, Culture, Environment*, 5, 2 (2001, forthcoming). I am grateful to Clare Morgan, who kindly gave me permission to quote from a version of this article prior to publication. 'My England' quoted by Karen Schneider, 'Of Two Minds: Woolf, the War and *Between the Acts*', 99 (see also p. 146 of this thesis).
English literary tradition, in terms of how that relationship and its evolution over a writing career spanning several decades represents a constant engagement and negotiation with, but never a breaking away from, the much loved literary traditions and generic forms of her own culture.

I began this thesis with a parallel quotation intended to articulate the cultural differences between Kate Roberts and Virginia Woolf as two contemporary British women writers. I end it with another parallel quotation, but this time with the intention of reminding the reader of the subtle correspondences between them which have emerged in this critical study. Woolf wrote her article ‘The Artist and Politics’ for the Artists’ International Association in 1936 (just seven months before her own nephew, Julian Bell, was killed in the Spanish Civil War to which Kate Roberts refers in her article, ‘Llenyddiaeth a Gwleidydiaeth’ [Literature and Politics]). Like Three Guineas, published just two years later, ‘The Artist and Politics’ was written at a time when war—as a threat, as a reality, as the breakdown of civilisation—was clearly occupying Woolf’s mind. Unlike Three Guineas, however, in which she rhetorically inhabits the place of the outsider, the pacifist, the woman dispossessed of her nationhood, ‘The Artist and Politics’ brings Woolf face to face with her personal instinct to survive at a ‘time of stress’ when ‘society is in chaos’. This essay is just as revealing of Woolf’s cultural affiliations as is Three Guineas, albeit to very different effect. Whereas her ‘outsiderness’ as a woman permits her a scathing and uncompromising polemic in Three Guineas, in ‘The Artist and Politics’, by contrast, in which she necessarily aligns herself with other artists in a ‘society [...] in chaos’, a culture under threat, her language is far more emotive, and her pacifist rhetoric far more muted. For while Woolf renounces her citizenship in Three Guineas, she recognises in ‘The Artist and Politics’ that the artist has much in common with ‘other citizens’. She admits that the artist depends upon society and is powerfully affected when society is in chaos. In this article, the artist-citizen is at the mercy of the forces of society: ‘Two causes of supreme importance to him are in peril. The first is his own survival: the other is the survival of his art’.
For Kate Roberts, writing her article ‘Literature and Politics’ almost a decade after the Second World War (ensconced in a north Wales town far from the small English village near the south coast where Woolf lived in fear of a German invasion during the last months of her life), her instinct to survive, and her concern with the perils of extinction, are no less urgent, but very different in their political emphasis. Welsh writers, she says, are at risk of being obliterated because they ‘write in a language which is in danger of losing its life. [...]’ The ‘principle’ of political involvement is very different for the Welsh writer, she says, simply because, without his language, he has no weapon even with which to fight (compared with Woolf herself, for example, who writes elsewhere at this time that: ‘my natural reaction is to fight intellectually: if I were any use, I should write against [war]’, which she went on to do in *Three Guineas*). Not only is Welsh the language of a culture steeped in a literary tradition stretching back to the sixth century, says Roberts, it is the Welsh writer’s only medium of expression. Take that away and the Welsh writer is nothing: like Virginia Woolf’s artist, ‘his own survival’ and the ‘survival of his art’ are both in ‘peril’. Thus the use of the Welsh language in itself, the very act of writing, is an undeniably and unavoidably politicised act, according to Roberts.

It is clear then, that the writer becomes necessarily more patriotic, willingly or unwillingly, and with all the attendant contradictions that that involves for a woman writer, when her culture and country are under direct threat of extinction. For Kate Roberts this was a permanent state of affairs throughout her writing career; for Virginia Woolf it became an increasing possibility during the last years of her life. However, before I draw a line under the subjects of my study, far from coming full circle and emphasizing the points of contact as opposed to the prominent contrasts between them, I should like to remind my reader of the extent to which this thesis has been concerned with the faultlines between Britishness, Englishness and Welshness, especially during the period between the two world wars. In this study I have been concerned to explore the way in which such faultlines

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4 Quoted by Hermione Lee, *Virginia Woolf*, op. cit., p. 697.
can be detected in different literary forms, drawn from different, culturally specific literary traditions, and also the ways in which engagements with such literary traditions are necessarily complicated for the woman writer by her gender. Since I embarked on this project in 1995, Wales has campaigned for and established its own National Assembly, and notions of Welsh citizenship in a devolved Britain have attracted much attention from political commentators. Similarly, notions of Englishness have become increasingly contested and insecure in recent years, a phenomenon borne out by publications such as Andrew Marr's *The Day Britain Died* and Tom Nairn's *After Britain*. In this devolved context it seems especially appropriate to revisit key periods in British literary history, to re-read significant literary figures such as Virginia Woolf with these cultural faultlines in mind, and to find a place for forgotten, ignored, or lesser known, supposedly 'provincial' writers on an increasingly fragmented British literary landscape.

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