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Chwedl Gymaeg a Llenyddiaeth Gyfoesol: (Welsh Myth and Contemporary Literature

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Chwedl Gymaeg a Llenyddiaeth Gyfoesol: (Welsh Myth and Contemporary Literature

Abstract

Contents religious discourse has migrated to the fantasy novel, and fantasy “invades so-called realistic novels”; examines “this theological aspect of writing applied to fantasy”; discusses several contemporary fantasies based on Welsh myth.

Additional Keywords

Fantasy—Criticism and interpretation; Fantasy—Sources; Fantasy—Theological aspects; Welsh myth

Chwedol Gymaeg a Llenyddiaeth Gyfoesol

(WELSH MYTH AND CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE)

KATH FILMER-DAVIES

It does not need a degree in theology nor skill in rhetoric to argue that what the world needs now is not so much love, but hope. Nearly every time any one of us opens a newspaper or tunes into the television or radio news, we are greeted with displays of hopelessness brought about by the actions of our own kind — war, terrorism, injustice, unemployment.

Our various gods have become incarnate and are being crucified. The saviours of a past age, science and technology, have become demons in ours. But this paper is neither about *fin de siècle* angst nor about retrospective breast-beating. What I hope to do is to show what is happening for certain writers of fantasy, who are turning to the mythic past to revitalize their vision for this and for a future age. In doing so, they are in the business of theology, for they offer comfort and hope.

I have argued elsewhere that there has been a decided slippage of theological discourse into fiction, especially fantasy fiction. While churches are emptying, fantasy bookshops are filling. It is to the writers of fantasy that many readers are turning, for such writers temper theology with thrilling stories of quests, adventures and romance. Of course, it might be said that is precisely what readers will find in the Bible, but not everyone is able to view the Bible in quite the same way as they do contemporary literature.

Kurt Vonnegut was well aware of the theological imperative of the writer. In his novel *Cat's Cradle* he writes that "When a man becomes a writer, I think he takes on a sacred obligation to produce beauty and enlightenment and comfort at top speed" (145). But such production is not accomplished *ex nihilo*. Rather, as Coleridge has said and Tolkien has echoed, writers must recreate from elements already available to them. Fortunately for us, there is a wealth of mythic lore awaiting the masterful touch of the storyteller.

Some of the most insightful fantasy has emerged from retellings of Welsh mythic stories, and in this paper I want to look at several books which draw upon Welsh mythic traditions to offer hope of various kinds to children and adults of the late twentieth century. I will concentrate on children's literature a little, since it is through children's eyes that we see, and with their minds that we will be thinking, not merely toward 2000 but beyond it.

This paper, then, is in three parts. First, I want to look at the way in which religious discourse has slipped, into the genre of fantasy, and how fantasy itself invades so-called realistic novels; next I want to look at the import-

ance of this theological aspect of writing applied to fantasy literature, and last, I want to look at several fantasy works using Welsh myth and story to provide the consolation of, if not beauty, enlightenment and comfort, then at least hope. And if not at top speed, then in a slow and steady way which promises that the hope they offer will endure to and beyond the turn of the century.

If the nineteenth century saw a growing tension between faith and doubt, the ebbing sea of faith has all but dried up in Western culture. Christianity seems to make the news mostly by desperately striving to keep up with the times, so that ancient truths are forgotten or so ruthlessly updated that they are unrecognizable. If ever a century witnessed the withdrawing God, it is this one. But the withdrawal of faith and a lack of feeling God's presence and purpose leaves humanity with a need to fill the void, a hunger and thirst which cries out for relief. To some degree, literature, as Matthew Arnold predicted, has provided a quantum of solace for abandoned humankind.

The American critic, Nathan A Scott, observes that: a radically secular literature may have a profoundly fruitful religious function to perform. For, by the very resoluteness with which it may plunge us into the Dark, it may precipitate us out of our forgetfulness, so that, in a way, our deprivation of the Transcendent may itself bring us to its Mystery. (208)

Even the post-modernist critic, J. Hillis Miller has observed that twentieth-century literature could transcend nihilism, the absence of the withdrawing God, by presenting a divine and immanent presence. He writes:

If any spiritual power can exist for the new poetry it must be an immanent presence. There can be for many writers no return to the traditional conception of God as the highest existence, creator of all other existences, transcending his creation as well as dwelling within it. If there is to be a God in the new world it must be a presence within things and not beyond them. The new poets have at the farthest limit of their experience caught a glimpse of a fugitive presence, something shared by all things in the fact that they are. This presence flows everywhere, like the light which makes things visible, and yet can never be seen as a thing in itself. It is the presence of things present... (186)

If we are looking for "a presence within things" we come close to the belief in an immanent God which informs the fantasies of George MacDonald. In his novel *Lilith*, he has his character Mr. Vane realize, after pursuing redemption and individuation, that

I lived in everything, everything entered and lived in me. To be aware of a thing was to know its life at once and mine, to know whence we came, and where we were at home — was to know that we are all what we are, because Another is what he is! (245).

And now we are walking on firm ground. If God is a transcendent being, we have little to know of him and little to do with him in the business of everyday life. But if, through literature, we become aware that "the kingdom of God is within us," if we become aware of the light which makes all things visible illuminating our lives and those of all about us, if we know where we are at home, then we have inestimable treasure. I think that there is a certain kind of fantasy literature which gives us this experience.

It does so by coming to terms with twentieth-century angst — the results of buffeting by global and local warfare, human injustice and natural disasters. Fantasy does not turn from the skepticism that pervades the external world, the disillusionment with traditional Western religions or the myriad religious sects offering some variation upon the themes of mysticism, New-Age self-actualization, crystal power and the like, all of which offer at first glib answers to human pain, and finally only further disillusionment, disbelief and despair.

In the midst of this, fantasy offers hope, a sense of meaning and purpose, without which the human psyche cannot survive. The Swiss psychiatrist, Victor Frankl, noted that when belief and hope are excised from human experience, the resulting absence is painful. In the concentration camps of Germany, Frankl observed that of those who were not taken to the gas chambers, survival was more probable in those who believed that there was some reason to survive. This "search for meaning" prompted Frankl to develop his logotherapeutic psychology. He writes:

Man's search for meaning is a primary force in his life and not a "secondary rationalization" of instinctive drives. This meaning is unique and specific in that it must and can be fulfilled by him alone; only then does it achieve a significance which will satisfy his own will to meaning....(99)

It is, I suggest, more than likely that we bring to the experience of reading the quest for meaning, and like post-modernist critics, we look to literature for reassurance, for relief of pain, for guidance and for hope. We need to look for that kind of literature which will fill the divine void in our lives and admit us to the realization that George MacDonald allows his character Mr. Vane — that is, to know who we are, from whence we have come, and where we are at home. Of all literatures, that of fantasy and myth comes closest to fulfilling these criteria. And the two are closely related. Let me define for you what I mean by them.

Myths are stories which contain everlasting truths about the human condition and which offer to humans, individually and collectively, some kind of redemptive hope. C.S. Lewis affirms that

Myth is not merely misunderstood history (as Eu-

hemerus thought), nor diabolical illusion (as some of the Fathers thought), nor priestly lying (as the philosophers of the Enlightenment thought), but, at its best, a real though unfocused gleam of divine truth falling on human imagination. (Lewis 188n)

Myth is neither static nor unchanging; it is a creation of individual humans, although it might be adopted by a whole society and culture. It springs, as Tolkien suggests, from the Secondary Imagination, a concept he borrowed from Coleridge. According to Coleridge, the Secondary Imagination is that faculty which recreates perceived elements of the created world; it, like the Primary Imagination, is "a repetition in the finite mind of the infinite I AM" (Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* Ch. XIII). Tolkien goes further. Recreation, or to use his term, Subcreation, is the divine faculty awakened in humans, and in exercising it, we are most like God; in that is our ancient, lost lordship regained. Here is Tolkien's poem, *Mythopoeia*, written for a defiantly unconverted Lewis who was then arguing that "Myth is lies breathed through silver." Not so, said Tolkien:

Dear Sir, I said— Although now long estranged,
Man is not wholly lost nor wholly changed.
Dis-graced he may be, yet is not dethroned,
and keeps the rags of lordship once he owned:
Man, Sub-creator, the refracted Light
through whom is splintered from a single White
to many hues, and endlessly combined
in living shapes that move from mind to mind.
Though all the crannies of the world we filled
with Elves and Goblins, though we dared to build
Gods and their houses out of dark and light,
and sowed the seed of dragons — 'twas our right
(used or misused). That right has not decayed:
we make still by the law in which we're made.

("On Fairy Stories" 49)

Myth, then, is a link in the chain which binds the human imagination, the immanent presence of God, with our notions of selfhood, our sense of belonging and of place, our ideas of good and evil, to the hope we have of union with the eternal. It binds us also to others; it releases us from the prison of self. As C. S. Lewis remarks in his sadly overlooked critical work *An Experiment in Criticism*,

...in reading great literature I become a thousand men and yet remain myself. Like the night sky in the Greek poem, I see with myriad eyes, but it is still I who see. Here, as in worship, in love, in moral action, and in knowing, I transcend myself; and am never more myself than when I do. (141)

But that is not the last word. Ursula Le Guin says almost the same thing in her incisive essay "Why are Americans Afraid of Dragons?" (and I might add that for Americans, one could substitute anyone who shies away from the mystical and the magical.) This is what she says:

Fantasy [as well as myth] is true, of course. It isn't factual, but it is true. Children know that. Adults know it too, and that is precisely why many of them are

afraid of fantasy. They know its truth challenges, even threatens, all that is false, all that is phoney, unnecessary, trivial, in the life they have let themselves be forced into living. They are afraid of dragons, because they are afraid of living. (44)

Wilson Harris, Guyanese writer of mythic fiction, also notes that

...art of a universal genius hidden everywhere in the... mystery of innovative imagination... transforms concepts of mutuality and unity, and... needs to appear in ceaseless dialogue between cultures if it is to turn away from a world habituated to the pre-emptive strike of conquistadorial ego.... The voice of authentic self is the complex muse of otherness. (137)

His idea is, of course, that the reach of the human imagination can breakdown cultural barriers and recreate human relationships. Myth and fantasy fulfils the deepest and most heartfelt of human needs, the hope that the future can and will be better — that, indeed, there will be a future, and places with which we can identify, and which we can love. I hope then that I have established some link between the working of myth upon the human imagination and the function of religion and theology. It is, I know, a quasi-Romantic link but I see no reason to apologize for that.

Welsh myth, and its appropriation by twentieth-century writers, exemplifies my point. It is inextricably bound up with notions of Welsh identity and sense of place. It was nurtured through centuries of oppression and invasion, and, like much of the Christian tradition which has crept into it, centers upon heroic males. However, contemporary uses of Welsh myths and mythic themes redress the gender imbalance to a significant degree. This, too, is a current theological issue.

I would like at this stage to look briefly at some works in which there is some attempt to use Welsh myth to create a sense of place and identity before looking more closely at a couple of lesser-known works which seem to me to have especial significance.

There is a definite sense of spirituality behind Susan Cooper's *The Dark is Rising* series. Cooper sees the rise of evil — the dark — as a kind of power-lust, since those who challenge the Old Ones, the descendants of what appear to be a druidic race, are set upon taking and establishing power. The kind of power to which they aspire is economic and political as well as spiritual, and embodies all those aspects of enslavement and control that typify villains in adult dystopian literature such as that of Huxley, Orwell and the like. In one of the five books which make up the series, *The Grey King*, the setting is Wales, and in it there is a merging of past and present realities, united by the strong sense of place. The brooding landscape of North Wales, the towering mountains and the misty valleys, contributes to the magical, highly-charged atmosphere as the Dark and the Light engage in their timeless struggle. The sense of place which Cooper develops in this book contributes to the mythic power of the conflict, since both

the dark and the light are manifested in extraordinary strength in the Welsh countryside. There is no doubt that Cooper's spiritual vision in this book owes much to an appreciation of place, and even the notion of individual identity is controlled by it.

Cooper's mythology is based upon the Arthuriad; she has Merlin appearing as the wise man Merimian Lyons. As well, she follows the gender-exclusive tradition of having boys as her magical protagonists.

The traditions of Arthur, especially their Celtic origins, is the occupation of Nikolai Tolstoy's novel *The Coming of the King* and his scholarly work, *The Quest for Merlin*. Tolstoy is fascinated by things Celtic and especially Welsh, and he uses Welsh sources to trace the adventures of Merlin or Merddyn. As with Cooper, Tolstoy uses the sense of place and the use of myth contributes to the conflict between good and evil, while providing at the same time a romanticized picture of Wales which appeals to a great many readers of fantasy. Tolstoy is in the process of completing a trilogy, so I am eagerly awaiting the second and third volumes.

Lloyd Alexander's "Prydain" series is also popular with young readers, and it draws loosely from the four branches of the *Mabinogion* for both plotline and characters. But as Alexander himself admits, the books are not set in a "real" Wales; he constructs a mythical country based upon Welsh folklore he has read and his own distant memories of childhood visits.

There are two recent books by the author Barbara Erskine which take a different approach to mythical and historical Wales by retelling events in the light of a woman's experiences. While Erskine writes in the pot-boiler/historical romantic tradition, there is much more to her books than merely stoking the stove. The first book *Lady of Hay* takes a twentieth-century journalist back to a former incarnation as Matilda of Hay, and it depicts through the eyes of both female incarnations the subjection and subjugation women were forced to endure (and sometimes still are) as mere chattels.

Nevertheless, thanks to the druidic gifts of sight magic and intuition, women are able to gain a measure of power through their love relationships with men. Matilda's nickname was Moll Wallbee, and she was historically reputed to be a wild witch and worker of magic; that was probably the only conclusion which could be drawn from the woman's tall build and physical wellbeing, her charisma and great intelligence.

Both in this book and the next, titled *Child of the Phoenix*, Erskine slants the polemic to favour the women, to show how they strove for what power they could achieve, given the social and cultural constraints of the time. In the second novel, the Princess Eleyne, sister of Llewelyn, the last true Prince of Wales, is a woman gifted with the ability to see the future. Born in a burning castle hall, Eleyne, like Matilda, rises above the mistreatment handed out to her by

her husbands — treatment which includes rape, beatings and infederence — and makes her way through her own wit and skill, and where necessary, by cleverly manipulating her lovers.

Erskine does not hesitate to show Wales as a fierce and bloody battleground, with brother fighting brother, a cauldron of seething tensions and disputes, and always a deep hatred of the English overlords. Nor does Erskine neglect to show the powerlessness of women, save through their wit and their wiles, and their inherited property. But even then the English King could select a second or third husband for the hapless widow and take of her property what he saw fit.

In Erskine's books, druidic magic empowers women, and gifts of foretelling and healing are also the province of women. In them, the myths are given voice, and in her novels the women are given personalities which they lack in either the mythic or the historical telling of the same story. Indeed, Erskine is doing for Welsh stories what Marion Bradley has done for the Arthuriad in *The Mists of Avalon*.

But now I want to turn to the real focus of this paper, to Welsh myth in stories for children. Here, the theological emphasis varies, but it is always present, through the notions of belonging, of having a true place, and of offering hope.

Madeleine L'Engle's time-and-space-travelling book, *A Swiftly Tilting Planet* deals in part with Welsh Americans, including the South American Welsh settlers of Patagonia and a legendary settlement in North America by the sons of Prince Llewelyn, who produced a race of blue-eyed American Indians. As well, subsequent migrations of Welsh people have produced a settlement in the United States, in which the houses are called Merioneth and Madrun, and goodness is associated with Welshness and evil with the corruption of Welshness. The villain, a power-crazed South American dictator called Mad Dog Branzillo, is the offspring of a line of Welsh men called Gwydir, a name which has been corrupted into Gedder as evil permeates the line and corrupts it, so that even its intrinsic Welshness is corrupted as the name symbolizes.

Thanks to the services of a unicorn called "Gaudiur," a "might have been" is averted and the world is saved from the corrupted Welsh South Americans. This salvation is wrought through the good offices of a woman born of the line of Bran and his Indian wife, Zillah, and the powerful prayer-rune which she and her descendants recite to protect the time-and-space travelling Charles Wallace Murry.

Two other books in which the past is recreated in the present are the Australian writer Brian Caswell's *Merryl and the Stones* and American writer Nancy Bond's *A String in the Harp*. Interestingly, both stories are set in North Wales, the first near Caernarfon and the other on the island of Anglesey, and in each case the past is brought to life so that it is entwined with present reality. The children are destined in each case to put right wrongs perpetrated in the past, to

redeem the time, as it were, by taking part in the recreation of history. In the case of Merryl, she returns to a past life (a theme common even in adult novels) to carry out certain tasks set for her, although the deity in control of such things remains unknown and un-named. As Merryl puts right the ancient wrong, the history books of the twentieth century are supernaturally emended, and the might-have-been as written history has recorded it at the beginning of the novel is erased in favour of a more acceptable resolution to an ancient mythological tale.

Similarly, in *A String in the Harp*, a young American boy living in Wales with his father, resenting the new experience and grieving still over his mother's death, finds a harp key which once belonged to the legendary poet-warrior Taliesin. The boy sees sixth-century adventures taking place before his eyes, and his role is to return the key to Taliesin so that the poet's spirit can rest in peace. The story is essentially about a moral dilemma, and the evil in the plot comes from a too-eager desire on the part of some officials to consign Welsh myth to museums, to a fate of death by exhibition.

In resolving to return the harp key, the boy learns where the poet is buried — a secret which has escaped Welsh historians for centuries — and the grave is well and truly out of reach for potential young explorers among Bond's readers: it is at the bottom of a huge hydro-electricity dam.

It is interesting to note that contemporary Welsh writers are willing to look into the not-so-distant past for hauntings of Welsh life by ancient stories which give a supernatural dimension to childhood activities. I am thinking in particular of J. Norman Davies, whose short story "Pools" appeared in the latest issue of *The Journal of Myth, Fantasy and Romanticism*. Here, Davies recollects an incident from his own childhood in which he and his companions witness a near-fatality in a popular bathing spot near their home at Trawsfynydd, in North Wales. Davies asks whether their innocent childish games have disturbed some ancient, brooding spirit hidden in the depths of the pool, and adds a note that a resident has been researching the magical ley lines, or lines of great mystical power, which reportedly run through the region. In any case, what we have in Davies' case is a powerful childhood memory enhanced and made magical by the hint of hidden supernaturalism behind it. It reminds me of nothing so much as the mysticism of Wordsworth's *The Prelude*, especially the incident when the young Wordsworth steals the boat, and suddenly finds

...a huge peak, black and huge,
As if with voluntary power instinct
Upreared its head. I struck and struck again,
And growing still in stature the grim shape
Towered up between me and the stars, and still,
For so it seemed, with purpose of its own
And measured motion like a living thing,
Strode after me. With trembling oars I turned,
And through the silent water stole my way

Back to the cover of the willow tree...

But later, Wordsworth says,

o'er my thoughts there hung a darkness...

... No familiar shapes

Remained, no pleasant images of trees,

Of sea or sky, no colours of green fields;

But huge and mighty forms, that do not live

Like living men, moved slowly through the mind

By day, and were a trouble to my dreams.

Wordsworth attributes his moral lesson directly to the "Wisdom and Spirit of the universe" who uses Nature to instruct the potential prophet/priest of poetry in moral issues. Davies makes a similar link, but obfuscatively, by suggestion, and then only in his final paragraph.

Other aspects of Welsh myth, tradition and legend are found in the collections of short stories, gathered and edited by Welsh literary scholars over the years for the international market and published by Faber, Penguin and Oxford University Press. In every instance, the stories insist upon Welshness, upon a peculiar sense of place and purpose which is, in my outsider's experience at least, totally unlike any other nationalism. There are references to myth and legend, together with references to the Welsh chapel tradition, and this latter, whether applauded or despised, nevertheless adds a theological dimension to Welsh writing.

But Welshness is not a quality to be appreciated or enjoyed only by the Welsh. Let me quote from Dylan Thomas:

It is curious that the wonders of Celtic mythology, and the inexplicable fascination that Welsh legends are bound to exercise upon whoever takes enough trouble to become acquainted with them, have not influenced the Anglo-Welsh poets more considerably. W H Davies, the most gifted Welsh poet writing in English today, could, if he had chosen, have made something very great out of the legends of his own country. He could have recreated the fantastic world of *The Mabinogion*, surrounded the folk lore with his own fancies, and made his poetry a stepping-place for the poor children of darkness to reach a saner world where the cancer of our warped generation is no more than a pleasant itch.

Thomas's biographer and critic, John Aclerman, responds to this "caustic criticism" of W. H. Davies by commenting that

...Thomas was giving thought to the relationship between the Anglo-Welsh writer (that is, the Welsh writer in English) and his inherited Welsh literary tradition, and also, of course, to the problems that confronted the writer in the present in Wales — for Thomas powerfully concludes:

Only a great writer can give this absurd country, full of green fields, and chimney stacks, beauty and disease, the loveliness of the villages and the smokeridden horror of the towns, its full value and recognition (Aclerman 14,14).

But the use of Welsh myth in contemporary literature is not confined to the notion of achieving recognition for

things Welsh. Its purpose is much wider and much more important, than that. After all, in today's world there are a lot of causes and a lot of countries with a desire to be recognized and a fair case for demanding it. In Britain alone, by very virtue of their high political profile, the issues involving Northern Ireland receive a fair bit of attention. Scottish nationalism, too, gets a fair press. But of the Welsh we hear little, unless it is about the football at Cardiff Arms Park.

I conclude from this that the stage for the myths and the legends of Wales is much more important than the merely political. I believe it has the kind of mythic power, an inherent theological value, that will inspire writers and give the world a vision for 2000 and beyond.

For a start, the works I have touched upon here operate on two levels. The first is what we might term the romantic, in that it exploits to the fullest the mythic potency of Wales, its remoteness in terms of mainland Britain (especially by train), its uniqueness, thanks to its language and its customs, its distinctive history and its living culture. Welsh mountains and mist, dark Welsh valleys and strange incantations, the presence of druids and old Celtic magic, and the Celtic influences even on contemporary Christianity, give the country a surreality in the eyes of outsiders rarely equalled by other cultures, except perhaps for those of indigenous Americans and Australian aborigines.

The second level at work in the use of Welsh myth in contemporary literature is that of universal human qualities and values. That is why the tales of Matilda, Eileyn, Merryl and Blodeuwedd are important; they illustrate the strength and the weakness of women, the way they have faced and fought oppression, led their people, exercised compassion and responded to overtures of love.

In *The Mabinogion*, the men are violent, ruthless and often rather nasty. They take women and use them as chattels, and yet, pace the feminists, they too represent universal human qualities. In a society where women are not valued, male qualities are unrestrained, and even men are made to suffer for want of compassion, commitment and caring. Myth shows that men and women are complementary beings, and for the want of the feminine in a society there is a loss of balance, of harmony and peace, not merely on the social level but also in the realm of our deepest metaphysical and ontological beliefs. There is very truly for men in such societies a loss of identity or sense of self.

I have long been pondering the notion that the choices we make about our lives can either hurt or heal the human spirit. And we can respond to a wounded spirit in one of two ways: we can take refuge in anger, hatred or bitterness, or we can look for ways to restore it through love, forgiveness and compassion. Oddly enough, the most damaging course — for ourselves as well as for others — the ways of bitterness and rage, come more easily to us than the healing ways. But perhaps the value of each choice is reflected in its cost.

In this literature, the emphasis is upon healing, espe-

cially in those cases where the issue of reincarnation is raised. I cannot say I am a believer in reincarnation, but I find myself very much in sympathy with the idea that the spirit of place can draw people to it from across the aeons, and that uncompleted business from centuries past can be completed and people healed from hurts left festering from a past lifetime. As one of the characters in Barbara Erskine's *Lady of Hay* points out, it is the act of a good and compassionate God that souls should have the chance to heal the hurts of former lives.

So it is very much on these two levels that I see the myth and history of Wales being used in today's fantasy fiction, itself gaining in sophistication and meaning as it moves away from the quests of hobbits into the experiences, psychic and spiritual, of human beings. The timeless questions are addressed, and the human universals mean that their appeal is very wide. Anyone who has known oppression — minorities, women, those who care more for a life of the spirit than that of the material world — will identify with the stories of Wales. Let me conclude with a quotation from Jay Ashton's new children's novel, *The Door from Nowhere*. The English engineers are excavating the Welsh countryside near Swansea, or Abertawe, and the grandmother of the little girl, Cerian, observes:

"Open-cast. They don't dig pits any more, they dig out the whole mountain." She shook her head. They always say they'll put things back again afterwards, but you can't, not to make them the same as they used to be. Still, they say the nation needs the coal. We don't get much chance to argue. The local councils were all against allowing open-cast mining, but the government overruled them. It's just the way it's always been, Wales gives and England takes."

"Are you a Welsh Nationalist?" [asks Dylan, the half-Welsh boy].

"Don't sound so shocked. You're Welsh too, aren't you?"

"I dunno. I mean, yes, I suppose I'm Welsh, but I don't know what it means. Like Welsh people don't seem to talk Welsh much or — or be any different really."

"You're right, of course. There's not many speak Welsh round Swansea now, not like when I was a girl. I grew up speaking Welsh but Tom never learned it, or only a few words. My fault. No, you can buy the same clothes and eat the same food from the same cafes and watch the same television programs in Swansea or Birmingham or London or Glasgow. But there is still something different about being Welsh. I think it's something to do with a sense of place, of feeling you belong to a place..."

"I don't," said Dylan. "I don't belong anywhere."

"Oh, but you do. Though maybe you've still got to find out where." (54)

And that, I think, is the problem that confronts twentieth-century humanity as we think and move towards 2000. We need so much to find our own place. In Australia, we think that declaring ourselves a republic and changing the flag will do it, but I am afraid it will not. And for those of us

who live in the material world, or as academics, in a world of politicized fictions, the struggle is not easy. We continue to search, however, because we are being urged through the myths and legends of an older time to sustain our quest for meaning and to hold on to hope. That is the value of the world of the human imagination, and in the realm of Welsh myth, revived and thrice-blessed by writers Welsh and non-Welsh, we can at least leave the maelstrom of mundanity for a time, and imagine our own place, and create for ourselves a sense of belonging.



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EDITORS' NOTE

In the world of electronics, technology and progress never sleep. This issue is produced on a new 600 dpi (dots per inch) laser. This supercedes the previous 300 dpi laser printer, and gives 4 times greater resolution. You can see this in the increased crispness in both the graphics and text.