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The ‘Welsh’ Pimpernel: Richard Llewellyn and the search for authenticity in Second World War Britain

WENDY UGOLINI

Achieving worldwide success in 1939 with his bestselling novel, *How Green Was My Valley*, Richard Llewellyn became indelibly linked with a particular vision of Wales and Welshness. Yet, when it posthumously emerged that Llewellyn was not Welsh but an Englishman of Welsh parentage he faced accusations of fakery which rested upon contested understandings of diasporic identity claims. Mapping Llewellyn’s military service in the Welsh Guards and wartime work with the BBC for the first time, this article traces the author’s complex negotiation of selfhood during the Second World War. Overall, it highlights how Llewellyn was embraced as a cultural representative of transnational Welshness within a wider British and imperial nation and underlines the potential of dual identifications in underpinning constructions of Britishness during the war.

Keywords: dual identities, Britishness, Welshness, Englishness, Second World War

Richard Llewellyn remains one of the most widely recognised names within twentieth century British literature. He achieved worldwide fame in 1939 with his novel, *How Green Was My Valley*, the story of a Welsh mining community seen through the eyes of a child, Huw Morgan: in Dai Smith’s view, it was ‘the most popular novel ever written by a Welshman about Wales’.¹ The book was an instant bestseller both in Britain and America and in 1941 was made into an Academy award-winning film, linking Llewellyn indelibly in the public mind with a particular vision of Wales and Welshness. Yet, after his death in 1983, it emerged that Llewellyn was not born in Pembrokeshire, as he had claimed, but rather in London to Welsh parents. This revelation attracted accusations of duplicity with newspaper headlines trumpeting ‘How phoney was my valley’.² In many ways, these attacks replicate the response within ‘Anglo-Welsh’ literary circles at the time of publication that *How Green Was My*

Valley was somehow ‘fake’.³ Whilst this article does not address the ‘historical and topographical’ distortions contained within the text itself, it is significant that much of the negativity surrounding Llewellyn revolves around notions of authenticity.⁴ Following the ideas of Marc Scully and using Llewellyn’s complex negotiation of selfhood during the Second World War as a case study, this article highlights the historical tensions between Welshness ‘as the preserve of the nation-state’ – a largely ‘territorialised assumption’ of identity - and Welshness as ‘a pluralist, diasporic identity’.⁵ Martin Johnes notes that the Second World War both reaffirmed the interconnectedness between Welsh and British identities, but also promoted a heightened ‘sense of Welshness’.⁶ Using original and previously unpublished material held in the BBC Written Archives, the Welsh Guards Archives and the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas, this article addresses how the English-born Llewellyn was embraced as a significant figure within wartime expressions of transnational Welshness and underlines the potential of dual identifications in underpinning constructions of Britishness during the Second World War.

Paul Ward acknowledges that the war is commonly viewed as a time of ‘homogeneity, community, pulling together and standing alone against the might of Nazi-dominated Europe’.⁷ Yet, whilst wartime exigencies created ‘a new sense of a socially cohesive British identity’, Sonya O. Rose argues that the drive for unity was also ‘haunted by the spectre of division and difference’, including competing geographic identities.⁸ She notes how, whilst it was necessary to depict Britain ‘as a cultural, if not political “multi-nation” composed of four distinctive “national” cultures: Northern Ireland, Wales, Scotland, and England’, there were inherent tensions within these official constructions.⁹ For example, Rose refers to Welsh ‘sensitivity’ at the prominence given in 1942 to the military successes of the Scottish forces in BBC broadcasts, a phenomenon labelled as ‘Scotsmania’.¹⁰ The fact that conscripted

Welshmen were perceived as being ‘scattered among other national regiments’ also caused resentment, Rose argues, as did the banning of the kilt from Scottish regiments on active service.¹¹ Another source of tension was the use of the term English as a synonym for British during the war which represented what Kenneth Lunn sees as ‘a series of assumptions about the natural right of England to speak for Britain and, by the imposed silence, the inability of Welsh, Irish and Scottish voices to challenge effectively those assumptions’.¹² This tension, argues Rose, ‘overtly complicated the idea that the nation was an organic community’.¹³ However, significant attempts were made within propaganda and cultural representations to refine conceptions of Britishness whilst working to recognise ‘the diversity of the British Isles’.¹⁴ Jeffrey Richards has shown how British wartime cinema was ‘careful to characterize its forces units as embracing all regions, countries and classes of the United Kingdom’ with films such as *Millions Like Us* (1943), *The Way Ahead* (1944) and *The Captive Heart* (1946) including Welsh and Scottish characters alongside English ones.¹⁵ Similarly, in the documentary films *Scotland Speaks* (1941), *Ulster* (1941) and *Wales – Green Mountain, Black Mountain* (1942), Stuart Allan notes how the producers used this space to confidently narrate a sense of cultural distinctiveness within the framework of British unity.¹⁶ For Thomas Hajkowski, the BBC was ‘the most important arena in which regional cultures interacted with and interrogated a normative English culture, buttressing the hybrid “dual identities” of contemporary Britain’.¹⁷ Adopting the contemporary parlance of the BBC, he notes that throughout the war the BBC maintained its production of ‘regionally flavoured’ programmes. Thus, he argues, propaganda during the war emphasized national unity, but ‘did so in a way that necessarily recognized the national diversity of Britain’.¹⁸ He points out that outside broadcasts were dedicated to St Patrick’s, St Andrew’s, and St David’s Day, Welsh region prepared talks in Welsh and Scottish region prepared talks in Gaelic for broadcast in the Home Service and the BBC broadcast its popular programme *Ack-Ack, Beer Beer* from anti-

aircraft installations across all four nations. Above all, the series *In Britain Now* which included contributions from the BBC in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the English regions, ‘admirably represented the multi-national character of Britain’.¹⁹ As part of my wider research project which aims to recover the functioning of English Welsh dual identities, this article will examine Llewellyn’s wartime career and, in particular, his involvement in two key sites of British identity formation: the BBC and the military. This offers a particular vantage point from which to scrutinise notions of English Welsh duality, emerging from the Welsh diasporic population in England, as an important underpinning of pluralistic Britishness in wartime.

Who was Richard Llewellyn?

The man with the *non de plume* Richard Llewellyn remains an elusive cultural figure. A tax exile from Britain following the Second World War, Llewellyn did not write an autobiography and no biographies have been published.²⁰ At his request, there is no gravestone to mark his burial place.²¹ From the moment of his literary success, Llewellyn allowed himself to be perceived as Welsh, weaving a story about his cultural hinterland that essentially asserted that he was born in Pembrokeshire, Wales and that his paternal grandfather worked at a colliery in Gilfach Goch, rather than as an ironworks foreman in Middlesbrough.²² Any biographical profile, such as that by Mick Felton, tends to reproduce the same mythic elements:

Richard Llewellyn was born...in the cathedral village of St.David’s, Pembrokeshire, on approximately 10 December 1906. His birth was not registered because his anglophobic maternal grandfather considered birth registration to be an English practice... Until the age of six, when his family moved to London, Llewellyn spoke only Welsh.²³

Commentators such as Sam Adams are puzzled by Llewellyn's lifetime reluctance 'to disclose the circumstances' of his English upbringing.²⁴ However, there is a strong case, put forward by John Harris, that the text of *How Green Was My Valley* was itself an expression of Llewellyn's struggle to construct a composed identity: to deal with 'his own inner conflicts regarding Wales', his warring 'two worlds'.²⁵

Richard Herbert Vivian Lloyd was born in Willesden in 1906 to Welsh parents, restaurant manager, William Llewellyn Lloyd and his wife Sarah Ann, and was the product of a lower middle class English suburban childhood.²⁶ William organised the catering at the 1924-5 British Empire Exhibition at Wembley and later that decade became manager of the Rose and Crown in Watford.²⁷ After attending Bolt Court technical 'art' school in London, Llewellyn worked as a kitchenhand at Claridges. He joined the British Army in 1924, serving for six years, largely in India and Hong Kong.²⁸ Returning to London he worked as a reporter for *Cinema Express* before landing a job as a scriptwriter for Fox-British studios producing quota quickies.²⁹ In 1937, Llewellyn experienced his first taste of critical success when he wrote a play, *Poison Pen*, which transferred to the West End the following year. From this point onwards, Llewellyn appears to have publicly asserted a Welsh identity which was widely accepted. In 1938, he was introduced by the *Daily Mail* as 'a young Welsh author'.³⁰ That same year, another newspaper profile characterised him as:

a grandson, on his father's side, of the late Mr and Mrs Joseph Lloyd, of Gilfach Goch, and on the other, of Mr and Mrs Richard Thomas, of Old Belle Vue House, St David's. Much of his time has been spent at Aberdare and at St David's. He speaks Welsh, and his new novel of industrial Wales, "How Green Was My Valley" is awaited with interest.³¹

Within months of this press item, the publication of this novel was to sweep Llewellyn to a new level of international celebrity and fame, one in which he was firmly anointed as a 'Welsh' author.

The genesis of *How Green Was My Valley*

The process by which Llewellyn produced *How Green Was My Valley* is significant in illuminating his determined self-identification as Welsh, which could also be framed as a search for authenticity. Following Alexis T Franzese, authenticity can be defined as ‘an individual’s subjective sense that their behaviour, appearance, self, reflects their sense of core being’ which, in turn, is composed of their values, identities and self-meanings.³² Whilst authenticity is part of the ‘process of becoming’ it is also ‘socially constructed, evaluative, and mutable’.³³ Rebecca J Erickson writes that since all personal identities develop through ‘an actor’s reflective observations of self-in-interaction with others’, they will be ‘closely related to the content of social identities imputed by these others’.³⁴ At the same time, she points to the fundamentally ‘self-referential’ nature of authenticity and the importance of the ‘meanings’ attached to particular identities within constructions of self.³⁵ In his desire to underline his identification as Welsh, Llewellyn appears to have made the decision that birthplace outweighed parentage in establishing his claim to authenticity. Llewellyn stated later in life that when writing *How Green Was My Valley*, ‘I found I didn’t know enough about my country or its people’ and, adhering to contemporary ‘territorial understandings’ of Welshness, clearly felt the need to situate himself in Wales in order to secure both personal, and literary, authenticity.³⁶ In 1936 he contacted the publishers Michael Joseph with his idea for ‘a novel with a Welsh setting’ and then travelled repeatedly to Wales before settling in Llangollen.³⁷ The Welsh actor Meredith Edwards testifies to his presence at Plas Newydd in 1938 as part of a venture by arts patron Howard de Walden to form a Welsh National Theatre.³⁸ Harris suggests that Plas Newydd acted as ‘an important cultural contact’ for Llewellyn, providing a meeting point with Welsh scholar, T Gwynn Jones and the one of the founders of Plaid Cymru, Saunders Lewis.³⁹ In 1938, Llewellyn also pursued the Welsh dramatist and broadcaster Jack Jones, a ‘self-educated working-class writer of high talent’.⁴⁰

Significantly, Jones laces his recollection of their meeting with an implicit hint at Llewellyn's inauthenticity alongside an assertion of his own territorial and generational authority:

He told me he was writing a book, a novel about mining life, so he wanted to have a talk with me. He stayed to lunch and we talked and after lunch I went down to Cardiff on the bus with him. *Cymru am byth*, which means Wales for ever, he cried as he left me. He did not know much about the life and work of the mining community of South Wales, but he was very much in sympathy with them and had made up his mind to try and do them justice in the novel he was writing. Good luck to you, son, was what I said.⁴¹

Llewellyn did have an ancestral connection to Gilfach Goch which was less immediate than the one he claimed: his father's maternal grandfather, David Thomas Jones, was a cashier at one of the collieries in the 1880s.⁴² Thus, Llewellyn undertook fieldwork in the South Wales coalfield in order to learn more about his 'home' of origin. Adams insists that Llewellyn primarily found out about the area of Gilfach Goch through a local miner, Joseph Griffiths, who had worked underground for over fifty years.⁴³ More significant, however, is that Llewellyn initially made the Gilfach Goch contact via the Welsh Department of Foyles bookshop on Charing Cross Road, London which was managed by Joseph's son, Will Griffiths.⁴⁴ This bookshop, described by the poet Keidrych Rhys as a 'London-Welsh cultural centre', was a significant meeting place for the diasporic Welsh in London.⁴⁵ It regularly hosted 'All-Welsh Luncheons' and produced its own publications under the imprint 'Gwasg Foyle'.⁴⁶ During the war, Llewellyn's friend, the bookseller Bertram Rota, reminded him of 'the old days of the Welsh Circle at Foyle's' signifying Llewellyn's participation in this diasporic cultural grouping.⁴⁷ There is also fresh evidence that Will Griffiths himself had a closer editorial role in Llewellyn's novel than has previously been acknowledged. A letter written by Llewellyn in July 1939 shows that the author sent Griffiths the draft manuscript of *How Green Was My Valley*, requesting, 'Please read it and correct where you find it wrong, and I shall be in your debt. But quickly, Willie, for it is near to publication'.⁴⁸ Llewellyn also

contacted T Gwynn Jones at this time, inviting ‘any criticism you may have to offer in the matter of proper names’, particularly the correct rendition of Welsh spellings.⁴⁹ This demonstrates both the importance of London Welsh diasporic networks in Llewellyn’s evolution as a writer as well as his painstaking attempts to achieve authenticity through his dependency on Welsh contacts. Adams notes how, in the finished product, Llewellyn’s dialogue ‘imitates Welsh idiom and word order’.⁵⁰ Even more significantly, the book ‘is predicated on the notion that the characters are speaking in Welsh and that what is on the page is an English translation’⁵¹, thus indicating an insider’s knowledge. The inclusion of a ‘Guide to the Pronunciation of Welsh Names’ at the close of the book is also significant, with Llewellyn consciously positioning himself as an expert interlocutor between Wales and England.

A Welsh star is launched

Set during the late nineteenth century in a South Wales mining village, *How Green Was My Valley* is concerned with the story of the Morgan family narrated through the memories of the youngest child, Huw. As well as promoting a powerful vision of family, the novel addresses ‘manual colliery work, English ownership of the coal mines, strikes, lockouts, industrialization, emigration, hostility toward the Welsh language, and the political and social power of Nonconformist religion’.⁵² In his classic 1968 text, *The Dragon Has Two Tongues*, Glyn Jones defines Anglo Welsh writers of the twentieth century as ‘Welshmen [sic] who write in English about Wales’; most commonly, individuals who were cultural products of the South Wales coalfield.⁵³ Jones sees the interwar Anglo-Welsh novel as having ‘arisen very largely in an industrial area which knew widespread, perhaps unparalleled, unemployment, and during a period of violent unrest and bitter suffering’ and identifies Richard Llewellyn as one of its key practitioners alongside Jack Jones, Rhys Davies, Gwyn Jones and Lewis Jones.⁵⁴ In addition, Chris Hopkins notes how, in the 1930s, ‘Wales became a subject for

writing and viewing *from England* in a way which it had never been before'. The reasons for this, he suggests, lay not in a particular recognition of Wales as a nation in its own right but rather, an association of Wales with 'a particular political response' and a 'literary aesthetic'. Smith identifies how the trend for government-commissioned industrial and sociological surveys investigating the 'plummeting decline' of the South Wales coalfield in the 1930s was matched by literary endeavors to 'enlighten' sympathetic readers.⁵⁵ In this period, some London publishers actively sought to publish work by writers about working-class subjects, particularly in 'Distressed Areas' such as South Wales, to such an extent that Wales came to 'represent a kind of domestic otherness'.⁵⁶ Llewellyn clearly benefited from this trend; indeed, Mick Elton detects one major source of contemporary criticism for his novel being the sense that it was 'profiting from the Welsh vogue in England'.⁵⁷

How Green Was My Valley was published a month after the outbreak of the Second World War on 2 October 1939, becoming an instant best-seller. Making an unprecedented investment in a first time novelist, Michael Joseph set a run of 25,000.⁵⁸ In the UK, it sold a thousand copies a week over the next two years and 60,000 in 1942 after the release of the film; this success was duplicated in America and with colonial sales.⁵⁹ Hajkowski argues that the enduring cultural image of the Welsh mining village carried special significance during the war with coal being vital to the war effort and the dangers faced by miners symbolising the wider dangers faced by the British people. Most importantly, 'the values of the miners and the mining villages interlocked effectively with the ideals of a nation fighting a total war for its survival: community, camaraderie, resilience, and cheerfulness in the face of great tribulation'.⁶⁰ Overall, the book received effusive reviews. *The New York Times* viewed it as 'The most magnificent novel ever produced about Wales' whilst the editor of *The Bookseller* proclaimed, 'Llewellyn has done for Wales what Synge did for Ireland'.⁶¹ The poet David Jones reviewed the novel for the *TLS* in October 1939, enthusing about 'the breath of Welsh

incantation in Mr Llewellyn's flow of language' whilst Edwin Muir praised Llewellyn's skill in 'writing English as a Welshman'.⁶² Some, however, sensed falsity. From Wales, in particular, there were accusations that the novel was a 'misrepresentation of Welsh life' and a typical product of those who 'wrote about Wales for a market'.⁶³ For Keidrych Rhys, the editor of the arts journal *Wales*, which promoted Welsh writing in English, 'Llewellyn was another "merchant-hack", trimming his material for London publishers'. Glyn Jones's verdict in 1942 was that it was 'a fake, but a charming fake', believing that the novel 'ignored the grimness of the Valleys'.⁶⁴ Overall, Harris surmises, the leading figures within Welsh writing in English were irritated by 'Llewellyn's presumption of speaking for Wales' conjoined with a sense of unease at Llewellyn's 'professional Welshman' persona.⁶⁵ To adopt Scully's argument, this suggests that Llewellyn's personal construction of Welsh identity was not 'felt' as authentic within wider collective understandings of Welshness.⁶⁶ Ironically, the book, which sold well in both Wales and England, was successful because it was experienced as emotionally authentic by its readership even though it was often framed as inauthentic by contemporary Welsh reviewers.⁶⁷

The dandy outsider

A key point of dissonance within Welsh contemporary observations of Llewellyn appears to have been the way in which he ostentatiously embraced his commercial success. This perhaps sat uneasily after years of economic depression which had seen the decimation of coalfield communities, particularly in South Wales, and when Welsh visibility in interwar London was often embodied by hunger marchers calling attention to their plight.⁶⁸ Meredith Edwards recalls how Llewellyn's ownership of dozens of suits and shoes at Plas Newydd was 'very impressive to a Welsh boy with one suit and one pair of shoes'.⁶⁹ Lusty also recalls how Llewellyn 'moved into a lavish Mayfair flat which he crammed with pictures and many treasures', including forty-eight toothbrushes in the bathroom.⁷⁰ Yet, this extravagance also

worked to set Llewellyn apart from Welsh writers such as Jack Jones whose play *Land of My Fathers* – which highlighted the plight of ‘idle and good men rotting for want of something to do’ - was performed in London in 1938.⁷¹ In his memoir, Jones describes being buttonholed by Llewellyn in a Strand restaurant, and being smothered by the latter’s excessive display of hospitality. Jones’s narrative subtly constructs Llewellyn as misguidedly attempting to assert authority over a more legitimate representative of Wales:

As I entered the room where Richard Llewellyn [sic], looking ever so vivid and vital, was entertaining the producer and cast, he greeted me with ‘*Cymru am byth*’, Wales for ever, and escorted me to the place of honour which he said was reserved for me. I thought him most kind though a little too attentive and solicitous. Three of the young men of the cast had already noted and resented this and had gone to sit apart at a small table, and when I went across to them one of them said: It’s no before you ask, Jack. We’re on our own and we’re paying for our own. No ill-feeling, said the other. It’s just that our host is a shade too flamboyant for us chaps. The third said something rather offensive and I went back to where our host was doing all in his power to honour and entertain the people up from Wales.⁷²

Implicit here is the suggestion that Llewellyn does not fully comprehend the current plight of the people of Wales; he is constructed oppositionally to the people ‘up’ from Wales.

Significantly, whilst English contemporaries of Llewellyn also picked up on dandified elements of Llewellyn’s appearance, they still firmly construct him as a ‘Celt’, often employing stereotypical motifs of Welshness. Theatre producer Basil Dean, who employed Llewellyn at Entertainments National Service Association (ENSA) from October 1939, described his ‘quick intelligence and Celtic gift of fantasy where the facts of a situation required embellishment’.⁷³ At the Ministry of Economic Warfare, where Llewellyn was seconded between 1941-42, the author Peter Quennell encountered him as ‘a small neat dark Celt’ looking ‘enviably smart and rich’.⁷⁴ It is also worth noting that in these accounts Llewellyn often appears as a liminal figure, positioned on the boundaries of belonging. ENSA

employee, Stephen Williams, recalls the presence of Llewellyn at a meeting in 1940 between ENSA grandees and senior BBC staff, including the producer, Grotto Newman. On this occasion Llewellyn arrived in attire consisting of ‘a startling shade of green, with shirt and collar of paler hue, suede shoes and a violet tie’.⁷⁵ Williams recalls the arrival of his ‘flamboyant’ colleague:

It really was something quite extraordinary. So much so that Rex Newman turned round to us in a quiet voice and said, “He’s just written that book *How Green Was My Valley*, hasn’t he? Well, how green was *his* valley, to let him go out like that?”

Basil Dean, also present, relates Newman’s comment as follows: ‘he leaned across the table to me and whispered, “How keen was my valet!”’⁷⁶ Using a slightly different iteration of Newman’s pun, Dean’s account underlines the same point: that Llewellyn was perceived as an outsider. Arguably, Llewellyn was still struggling to find a place where he fully ‘belonged’ despite the fact that his asserted claim to Welshness had been culturally endorsed. It is worth noting that, in this period, Llewellyn also ventured into representations of contemporary England. Before the war, Llewellyn was drafting a new play about Italian ‘gangster-life’ in Soho which he intended to call ‘Lid Off London’.⁷⁷ Llewellyn’s second novel, *None But the Lonely Heart* (1943) which he worked on ‘between drill parades and picquets’ whilst serving in the Welsh Guards, also focused on the theme of metropolitan criminality, charting the life of delinquent Ernie Mott. This was an aspect of English society which Llewellyn said he had witnessed in the 1930s, as an observer in juvenile courts.⁷⁸ However, Llewellyn’s decision to write ‘in Cockney English – written to be read aloud’⁷⁹ was again critiqued on the grounds of perceived *inauthenticity*. Quennell was unimpressed by the ‘rambling cockney jargon’ and whilst collating the reviews for Llewellyn, Rota noted their generic complaint ‘that this is not the real East End and the real cockney’.⁸⁰ Whilst Llewellyn subsequently rejected the novel as ‘unfinished’, his experimentation with Welsh and English idioms in both his wartime novels

suggests someone who was able to shift between two potential identities but remained an outsider in both.⁸¹ Indeed, Quennell's review of *None But the Lonely Heart* perceived the 'Welshman' Llewellyn as 'approaching his subject from the point of view of the romantic outsider'.⁸²

The Welsh Pimpernel

The success of *How Green Was My Valley*, however, conferred a level of legitimacy upon Llewellyn in the sense that it positioned him as an authority on all matters Welsh. Yet, what is also clear from the archival records is that Llewellyn responded somewhat ambivalently to the demands placed upon him in this role. Hajkowski notes that once BBC Wales became fully integrated into the BBC's unified Home Service in September 1939, Welsh broadcasters focused on their nation's contribution to the war effort and 'produced programs that connected the Welsh experience, or Welshness, to larger propaganda themes'.⁸³ In autumn 1940 a flurry of internal memos circulated within the BBC attempting to locate Llewellyn as a potential 'speaker'. When BBC Overseas in London assumed that 'Welsh Region' would know his whereabouts, the latter responded, 'as far as we know Mr Llewellyn is still working for ENSA at Drury Lane' confirming his address as the St. Regis Hotel, London.⁸⁴ In January 1941, Nan Davies of the Features and Drama Section in Wales, attempted to contact Llewellyn asking him to participate in the programme, 'Welsh Chords', one of a series of monthly broadcasts to the Empire with 'a Welsh bias'.⁸⁵ When Llewellyn proved hard to track down, Davies contacted the BBC in London stating:

I have been trying to get hold of Mr Richard Llewellyn's address but he appears to be rather an elusive gentleman. I noticed an article by him in a recent issue of 'London Calling' so it occurred to me that you might have his address in your files.⁸⁶

The reply came the following day, revealing that Llewellyn's 'real name is Lloyd' and providing a Welsh Guards contact address, an allusion to his military enlistment.⁸⁷ Davies

made contact with the author at the Guards Training Battalion, and tried to encourage his participation by stating that his speech would appear alongside ‘Welsh News-Letter’ (Gossips from Wales) by A G Prys Jones and ‘The Welsh corner of the British empire’ by a French commentator. The broadcast would also include a Welsh Folk Song performed by a group of evacuated London schoolchildren. In a subsequent communication, Davis elaborates on the intention behind the programme:

- a) To let Welshmen abroad have some news of what is happening in ‘yr hen wlad.’
- b) To show listeners in the Empire generally how a small nation living in close proximity with England is able to preserve its own way of life and foster its native language and culture.

Specifically, the programme makers wanted Llewellyn to aim for a ‘lighter and more chatty’ talk, that ‘throws light on the Welsh temperament, or a description of some old Welsh character that may have impressed you at some time’.⁸⁸ Llewellyn eventually recorded a four and a half minute talk in London entitled ‘A Welsh Cameo’ but his evasiveness hints at his metaphorical and literal distance from Welsh cultural life at this time.⁸⁹ However, Llewellyn continued to be pursued by cultural agencies that identified him as a leading representative of the Welsh nation. In October 1941, the publishers William Collins asked Llewellyn to contribute a volume to the series *Britain in Pictures* on the subject of Wales and provide ‘some description of the character of the country and its people’, concluding, ‘the Committee and the Publishers are most anxious that the volume on Wales should be as good as possible and feel that no author could write this book so well as yourself’.⁹⁰ Llewellyn turned this opportunity down. Arguably, his equivocal responses to these requests taps into a level of discomfiture. With his phenomenal literary success, Llewellyn became publicly confined within a Welsh identity which overlaid his diasporic roots. In response he appears to have behaved during the war as a ‘Welsh Pimpernel’: sought here and there to present a vision of

Wales but often proving elusive. This suggests that Llewellyn was uneasily aware that he could never fully match the expectations of others in terms of his own constructed Welsh identity. It also suggests that he lacked faith in the authority of his diasporic claim to Welshness: that acknowledgement of his English birthplace and upbringing would somehow dilute the sincerity of his personal commitment to Wales.

The Welsh Guards

One way in which Llewellyn attempted to resolve these contradictions was to join the Welsh Guards. Raised in February 1915 in order to complete the national complement of the Brigade of Guards identified with the countries of the United Kingdom, the Welsh Guards functioned as a site of pluralistic Britishness in wartime. Based in London, the regiment recruited heavily from Gloucestershire, Lancashire and Somerset as well as Glamorgan and Monmouthshire.⁹¹ Llewellyn was commissioned in September 1940, at the age of thirty four, with the uniform of the Welsh Guards enabling him to access a recognisably Welsh martial identity.⁹² When he was commissioned, Llewellyn recorded his birthplace as St David's on his army forms and recorded his own nationality as 'Welsh' alongside that of his parents. On this documentation, he also inserted 'Dafydd' and 'Llewellyn' into his name to become Richard Dafydd Vivian Llewellyn Lloyd.⁹³ Although he was living at Claridges, Llewellyn borrowed the address of his family's temporary residence in Merionethshire, North Wales where he had arranged for them to be evacuated from London in September 1940: "Cynlas" near Bala, itself highly symbolic as the birthplace of influential Welsh Liberal politician, and founder of Cymru Fydd, T E Ellis.⁹⁴ In this newly patriotic context, Llewellyn's claim to Welshness was reciprocated by his regiment. In a *Daily Sketch* article of March 1941 the Regimental Lieutenant-Colonel, 'Chicot' Leatham, boasted that the regiment's distinguished recruits included 'a brilliant Welsh author'.⁹⁵ Furthermore, a journalist's report of a private film

viewing of *How Green Was My Valley* shows how Llewellyn's military persona served to consolidate his Welshness:

Richard Llewellyn, now a lieutenant in the Welsh Guards and wearing the uniform, sat with me through the film which he, too, was seeing for the first time...Mr Llewellyn's Welsh associations are with St David's, where he was born, and Gilfach Goch, where his family lived for many years.⁹⁶

As Lieutenant Lloyd, Llewellyn served in the UK for two years until overseas service in North Africa and Italy from 1943 onwards.⁹⁷ A young subaltern who served alongside Llewellyn, Philip Brutton, wrote of their time stationed in Lake Trasimeno living in the property of the Marchesa Bourbon del Monte Ranieri di Sorbello but, interestingly, constructs Llewellyn as sitting outside of conventional norms:

The Marchesa, like most Italian women, is rather beautiful but also very selective... one of our officers [Richard Llewellyn Lloyd – Richard Llewellyn who wrote *How Green Was My Valley*] remarked that the house was under military control and that she must consider herself very lucky not to have had it demolished like most others. Later Richard Lloyd had the Marchesa's cook put in prison in Passignano for a month. The circumstances were as suspicious as Richard Lloyd was capricious. He was in the charge of the mess. He also supplied the cook with Army rations. She taught him kitchen Italian wherever was most comfortable. They fell out. She called him names. He called in the police. The 'evidence' was there. The house, as he had inelegantly expressed it, was under military occupation. The cook returned to the Marchesa who has never forgotten the talented but complexed little man.⁹⁸

Here, the implication is that Llewellyn's display of poor manners towards the Marchesa was linked to his failure to adhere to the correct form of a Guards officer; a factor underlined by his liaison with the Italian cook. With his lower middle class suburban upbringing, Llewellyn it appears that struggled to fit in with the other, often privately educated, upper class Welsh Guards officers. Interestingly, an *Observer* profile from 1975 picks up on this distance between Llewellyn and his fellow officers, stating that following the publication of *How*

Green Was My Valley, Llewellyn was ‘accused in the officers’ mess of being a “bloody Red”’ due to the fact that many of his fellow officers were ‘the sons of coal barons’.⁹⁹ Ultimately, these articulated class frictions suggest that, for Llewellyn, the wartime identity of the Welsh Guardsman also proved to be ill-fitting.

The Masking of Englishness

Llewellyn’s particular form of shape shifting, apparent in his adoption and shedding of different forenames and surnames, was, arguably, a reflection of his own conflicted sense of duality. Although Llewellyn dedicated *How Green Was My Valley* ‘To my father and the land of my fathers’ he also associated his Welsh-born father, William Lloyd, primarily with Englishness. In 1968 he reminisced about being raised within a dual and competing heritage:

With my grandfather during school holidays we were all Cambrians. We fought again with Caradoc and Llewelyn, recited the poetry, sang the songs. At home, with my father, we charged at Waterloo and stormed the Great Redan. We were English of the English.¹⁰⁰

Here Llewellyn acknowledges his English heritage but does not categorically state that he grew up in England. It could be argued that, in his public pronouncements, Llewellyn was engaged upon the act of masquerade, electing to emphasise his Welsh identity and mask his English upbringing.¹⁰¹ Efrat Tseëlon points out that whilst the mask has come ‘to connote disingenuity, artifice and pretence’, it is perhaps more accurate to see it as providing ‘partial covering’.¹⁰² Christie Davies agrees that those who opt to wear ‘masks’ are often attempting ‘to resolve an uncertain identity’.¹⁰³ Homi K Bhabha signals the importance of the space ‘in-between the designations of identity’, writing that, ‘this interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy’.¹⁰⁴ In their study of the second generation Irish population in England, Bronwen Walter and her colleagues characterise hybridity as the site ‘in which both placed and displaced identities are held in tension, their expression varying

contextually in time and space'. The notion of hybridity thus allows for 'conceptualisation of new forms of identities which arise out of experiences of "dwelling-in-displacement"'.¹⁰⁵ M. Wynn Thomas suggests that the notion of hybridity can usefully be applied to 'the meeting, mingling and cross-fertilization' of English Welsh identities in early twentieth century Britain.¹⁰⁶ In terms of Llewellyn's personal identity construction, therefore, it is crucial to acknowledge the significance of his diasporic links with Wales. Llewellyn and his family, including three siblings, were part of the Welsh diaspora in London. By 1931, there were over 50, 000 Welsh-born men and women living in the city, a diasporic presence which also had comfortably reached its third generation of settlement.¹⁰⁷ Kevin Kenny notes how the concept of diaspora 'opens up new cultural spaces beyond the boundaries of homeland and hostland', enabling an emphasis on identity as historically constructed rather than fixed.¹⁰⁸ As a product of the diasporic population, Llewellyn would have been able to plug into what Tomos Owen terms 'the performative character' of Welshness in London.¹⁰⁹ In his analysis of the late nineteenth century newspaper, the *London Kelt*, Owen writes that the Welsh community in the metropolis came 'to position itself in relation to its current London location and real-and-imagined Wales left behind' which, he argues, testifies to 'the bifurcated nature of the London-Welsh condition'.¹¹⁰ Merfyn Jones points out that for the descendants of Welsh immigrants growing up in English cities in the early twentieth century, being Welsh 'offered few problems' compared to the settler generation: 'with the English language, but without their Welsh accents, they only needed to choose'. For the second generation, being Welsh was, therefore, very often a matter of personal choice or identification.¹¹¹

For Llewellyn, his Welsh parentage and heritage clearly mattered. He spent childhood holidays in Wales, particularly with his maternal grandparents in St. David's.¹¹² In a 1992 TV documentary, his sister Lorna Llewellyn Lloyd was filmed in St David's where she recalled:

This was the Wales he knew. This is why he was able to reproduce, years later, the language because St David's was the centre point of his life at that time and he absorbed it all because of the large family, you see? My mother had many sisters as well as this one brother and they all spoke Welsh. Nobody spoke English. You wouldn't dare. So, this was the part of the world that inspired him.¹¹³

Llewellyn also pointed to the influence of his Welsh mother whose relatively early death in 1928 is of potential significance in nurturing his identification with Wales. In a private letter to his cousin in 1975 Llewellyn mentions 'my beautiful Mama'.¹¹⁴ He also reminisced in his *Western Mail* column, 'A man thinking back across his life can be gentle with himself in boyhood. Because of his Mama. The most important influence in any man's life'.¹¹⁵ Writing in 1986, Deirdre Beddoe notes how patriarchal constructions of Wales tend to revolve around the idea of 'coalminers, rugby players and male voice choirs'. She discusses how, in *How Green Was My Valley*, Llewellyn deploys the gendered nineteenth century trope of the 'Welsh Mam', the one female character allowed to intrude into this national construction: 'clean as she is pious: she scrubs her floors and her husband's coal-black back. She is, of course, a mother, mainly the mother of sons who like her husband are also coalminers'.¹¹⁶ Whilst not reflecting Llewellyn's own lived experience, Osmond acknowledges that the emotional power of the novel is rooted in the iteration of 'Huw's love for his "Mam"'.¹¹⁷ Another matrilineal factor which bolstered Llewellyn's attachment to Wales was his relationship with his grandmother, Elizabeth Thomas, who lived in St David's until her death in 1915. In wartime correspondence with an American girlfriend, Sarah R Steinman, whom he met whilst serving in Italy, Llewellyn reminisced about 'My Grannie' who used to spend time in bed 'in red flannel with a fichu of beerstains & biled ham'. During his 1942 affair with the double agent Mathilde Carré, the latter confided to her MI5 minder that there were 'only two women' in Llewellyn's life, 'one his grandmother and the other she'.¹¹⁸

In addition, wartime correspondence between Llewellyn and his father, held at the Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin, testifies to a closeness between the author and his father as well as illuminating a wider familial connection with Wales. Whilst evacuated in Bala, Llewellyn's father, William Lloyd wrote a series of letters to his son, 'Darling Vivian'. Although he was raised in Middlesbrough, it is interesting to note how in their correspondence William signals his own sense of Welshness and connection to the Welsh landscape. Writing from his rented farm house, he muses:

the wild life and open spaces might sound good in books but in reality it does not appeal to me on the side of a mountain with wind, rain and the water rushing down from the hills or I ought to say mountains, yet, there is something in my old blood when I realise it is Wales.

Lloyd also expresses pride in his English granddaughters who are attending a local school: 'I am pleased to let you know that Ann & Sally speak & sing Welsh, it is the funniest thing to hear them and it is not parrotwise, it's real'.¹¹⁹ The letters also provide an insight into how the success of *How Green Was My Valley* propels the author's family into a closer identification with Wales. For example, Llewellyn's father became involved in dealings with the producers of the film version of *How Green Was My Valley*, including the arrangements for Welsh auditions for cast members. In November 1940, he writes to Llewellyn:

I enclose a letter from Mr Baker of the 20th Century Fox for your perusal...I feel sure he will like my reply in which I conveyed to him the extraordinary interest the North Walians are taking and looking forward to the film. My taking the two boys and the schoolmaster to Cardiff created quite a sensation and it is in all the North Wales papers (in Welsh).¹²⁰

Llewellyn's literary reputation is certainly a key factor in explaining his foregrounding of his Welsh sense of self, suggesting a complex reciprocity with the overwhelming popular success of *How Green Was My Valley*. There is evidence that, during the war, he purchased a cottage

in Wales as a 'mountain retreat'.¹²¹ Llewellyn also collected antiquarian items relating to Wales, Rota reassuring him whilst he was on military service: 'We snap up odd trifles like old Welsh maps from time to time, to show you when you return'.¹²² Thus, through a network of familial ties, beginning in childhood and reinforced during the war, it is clear that being Welsh held *meaning* for Llewellyn.

Papers held at the BBC Written Archives provide further evidence of Llewellyn's distinctive brand of self-fashioning as well as the often precarious nature of his wartime performance of Welsh identity. As discussed above, the promotion of images of Wales and Welshness were central to the BBC's imperial and global projection of the British nation. The BBC Overseas Service was particularly interested in Llewellyn's appeal to US audiences and was keen for him to broadcast to North America where his novel had been 'well received'.¹²³ In a letter, Llewellyn's father describes one such broadcast as 'the feature of the evening at gatherings in many places in America of Welsh speaking people'.¹²⁴ In January 1941, Llewellyn provided four talks for the BBC's Overseas North American Transmission under the series title *Democracy Marches*. He also provided an earlier talk in December 1940 entitled 'Britain Speaks'. In this script, the key theme is the composure of women in the face of war. It focuses primarily on London and suggests an intimate, insider knowledge of the capital city.¹²⁵ Overall, Llewellyn ruminates on the British character at war plugging into the popular discourse of British fearlessness and stoicism simultaneously being promoted by US commentators Ed Murrow and Quentin Reynolds, the former an acquaintance of Llewellyn's.¹²⁶ In a talk transmitted on 18 January 1941, Llewellyn waxes lyrical about St David's, his supposed birthplace in Wales and artfully manages to convey the impression that this is where he was raised and, indeed, still lives. Lynn Abrams notes how narrative self-fashioning is 'a project which requires much sifting and selection, omission as well as

inclusion' in order to achieve a coherent or composed self.¹²⁷ Llewellyn's talk begins by highlighting his ancestral link to the city and a recollection of his maternal grandmother, 'a Welsh woman whose eyes, as I remember them, held the grey brave fire of one who has experienced all that can decently happen to any good woman in a space of sixty years'.¹²⁸ In his script, Llewellyn notes how his grandmother lived in a house 'overlooking a chapel, whose front is my earliest memory' – stating 'where every Sunday we went, all of us' – and then elaborates on his 'childhood' memories:

Then came the Great War, which I remember very well, for I was then a very small boy. In that day my grandmother was alive. I remember her, in grey silk, among the sweet-peas in her garden.¹²⁹

With a clever verbal dexterity Llewellyn presents his childhood self within a Welsh context whilst the monologue also makes sense if viewed from the perspective of an English schoolboy on his holidays. In a closing statement, Llewellyn signals his own historic rootedness and connection to the area:

Up on a shoulder of the valley that overlooks the Cathedral you will find two headstones: one in the memory of Richard Darrog Thomas, and the other to Elizabeth Walters Thomas. They rest in the soil that bore them, tranquil in the knowledge that their sons and grandsons will comport themselves no less faithfully than they and their fathers.¹³⁰

At the same time, Llewellyn places himself firmly within present-day Wales:

In this war I have found no difference among the people. If you walk down the valley road, you will still hear, from up on the right hand side, the voices of the children reciting their twice times table. You will still see a small boy chasing geese out of the clover and down to the pond at the fork of the road, as I once did. And you will still see the choirboys, in their mortarboards, with the tassels shadowing their faces, with their clean white collars, their short jackets and long trousers, with jewels flashing in their boots, running in the sunshine of a Sunday morning down to the Cathedral vestry.¹³¹

He ends the talk triumphantly, with a proprietorial assertion of Welshness:

If Mr Hitler prosecutes his threat of invasion, he may be quite certain that he shall have his fill of it; for if it is merely a question of invasion, the people of my country have served their time to it, and we still can say, in our own language, “Cymru am byth”.¹³²

Essentially, however, Llewellyn’s experience of Wales was largely gained during childhood holidays and visits, as was the case with many second generation Welsh children growing up in English cities.

Conclusion

At the outset of his writing career, in the late 1930s, Richard Llewellyn demonstrated an apparent keenness to align himself with the Welsh aspect of his identity and to mask his Englishness. It is likely that in his determination to succeed as a ‘Welsh author’, Llewellyn felt unable to counter prevailing fixed and ‘essentialist discourses’ of national identity as dependent on birthplace.¹³³ Rather than assert his own hybridised identity, Llewellyn felt the need to deny his diasporic roots in order to situate himself within ‘collective’ constructions of authentic Welshness.¹³⁴ With the publication of *How Green Was My Valley*, Llewellyn appears to have set out with a dual objective: to pay homage to Wales, ‘the land of my fathers’, and to assert his own claim to Welshness. Ian Bell suggests that, motivated by his status as an ‘outsider’, Llewellyn constructed his identity as Welsh in order ‘to gain a kind of authenticity’.¹³⁵ The largely positive reception of *How Green Was My Valley* provided Llewellyn with validation of his imagining of Wales. Through his literary success and interaction with cultural agencies he was increasingly positioned as a representative of Welshness in wartime society. Yet in the afterglow of his success, he remained in a liminal position, viewed as both authentically and ‘inauthentically’ Welsh.¹³⁶ With his dandified appearance, commercial success and ostentatious behaviour, Llewellyn arguably failed to correspond to ‘socially shared constructions’ of what an authentic Welsh identity

constituted.¹³⁷ His reluctance to engage with Welsh cultural agencies also suggests an uneasy self-awareness that his own personal construction of Welshness was open to contestation.¹³⁸ Yet, Llewellyn's assertion of Welsh identity is ultimately an example of what Scully terms 'authenticity through diasporic claim'.¹³⁹ Llewellyn accessed and performed an imagined Welshness through his diasporic Welsh contacts in London, cultural networks in Wales and sojourns in Wales, as well as memories of his childhood visits and familial links to Wales which continued into the Second World War. The war afforded another opportunity for Llewellyn to attain Welsh legitimacy through military service in the Welsh Guards. In his wartime broadcasts to Welsh diasporic and imperial audiences, Llewellyn's construction of Welshness also held a clear transnational appeal. Moreover, *How Green Was My Valley* was accepted for many decades as a 'Welsh' novel because it was felt to be 'authentic' by its readership. Overall, this case study of Llewellyn's wartime career supports Scully's contention that 'Looking through the prism of diaspora allows hybrid, multi-ethnic, provisional and contingent identities and multiple belongings to be articulated in a way that is not possible through more conventional reading of the national'.¹⁴⁰ The complexities which lay behind Llewellyn's wartime construction as a leading representative of Wales points to the multi-layered and fluid nature of British identity formation during the Second World War and the need to examine in more depth the significant cultural interactions between Welsh and English identities in the first half of the twentieth century.

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- ⁴ Sam Adams, ‘Letter from Wales’ *PN Review* 35, 6 (2009), p. 7; Aidan Byrne, “‘The Male Shoutings of Men’: Masculinity and Fascist Epistemology in How Green Was My Valley’, *International Journal of Welsh Writing in English* (2013), p. 169.
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- ⁶ Martin Johnes, *Wales Since 1939* (Manchester, 2012) p. 3; 29.
- ⁷ Paul Ward *Britishness Since 1870*, (Abingdon, 2004), p.123.
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- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.231-8.
- ¹² Kenneth Lunn, ‘Reconsidering “Britishness”: The Construction and Significance of National Identity in Twentieth Century Britain,’ in Brian Jenkins & Spyros Sofos (eds) *Nation and Identity in Contemporary Europe*, (London, 1996), p.81.
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- ²³ Mick Felton, ‘Richard Llewellyn’, in Bernard Oldsey (ed.), *Dictionary of Literary Biography, Vol. 15*. (Detroit, 1983), p. 324.
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- ³⁸ Alyce von Rothkirch, *J.O. Francis, Realist Drama and Ethics: Culture, Place and Nation* (Cardiff, 2014), p. 85.
- ³⁹ Harris, “‘Hallelujah’”, p. 44.
- ⁴⁰ Glyn Jones, *The Dragon Has Two Tongues* (London, 1968), p. 58.
- ⁴¹ Jack Jones, *Me and Mine. Further Chapters in the Autobiography of Jack Jones* (London, 1946), p.62.
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- ⁴⁷ NLW, MS 21752E, Bodley House Literary Agency Papers 1937-1948, Draft letter from Bertram Rota, 19 January 1944.
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- ⁵⁷ Felton, 'Richard Llewellyn', p. 325.
- ⁵⁸ Lusty, *Bound*, p. 96.
- ⁵⁹ John Harris, 'Not Only A Place in Wales', *Planet: the Welsh Internationalist*, 73 (1989), p. 11.
- ⁶⁰ Hajkowski, 187. These ideas were reinforced by the 1941 film which Richards describes as a 'potent mixture of myth, romance, idyll, dream, memory, melody and emotion' Richards, *Films*, p. 220.
- ⁶¹ *Daily Express*, 13 March 1940; Harris, 'Not Only', p. 12.
- ⁶² Cited in Thomas Dilworth, 'From the Archive' *The New Welsh Review* 75, 1 (2007), p. 43; Edwin Muir, 'New Novels' *Listener*, 12 October 1939, 561, p. 735.
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- ⁷³ Basil Dean, *The Theatre at War* (London, 1956), p. 98.
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Literary Agency; Letter to RLL from BR 1 March 1945.
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- ⁸⁸ WAC, WA8/370/1, RP/9/ND, 10 February 1941.
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¹¹⁹ HRC, Letter from William Lloyd, 4 December 1940.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 20 November 1940.

¹²¹ NLW, MS 21752E, Draft letter from Bertram Rota, 4 November 1943.

¹²² *Ibid.*, letter from Bertram Rota, 6 March 1944.

¹²³ WAC, WA8/370/1, Internal Memo – Welsh Region, 30 August 1940.

¹²⁴ HRC, letter from William Lloyd, 20 November 1940.

¹²⁵ WAC, Talks Llewellyn, Richard, 'Britain Speaks' B/C 21/22.12.40.

¹²⁶ Ed Murrow, *This is London* (New York, 1989), p. 176.

¹²⁷ Lynn Abrams, 'Liberating the female self: epiphanies, conflict and coherence in the life stories of post-war British women' *Social History* 39:1 (2014), 19. See also Matt Houlbrook, "'A Pin to See the Peepshow": Culture, Fiction and Selfhood in Edith Thompson's Letters, 1921–1922', *Past & Present*, 207, 1 (2010), pp. 215-49.

¹²⁸ WAC, Talks Llewellyn, Richard, 'Democracy Marches' script, B/C 18/19.1.41, p.1.

¹²⁹ *Ibid*, p.1, 4.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.5-6.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p.5.

¹³² *Ibid.*, p. 6.

¹³³ Scully, 'Discourses', p. 12.

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 19.

¹³⁵ NLW, 'Richard Llewellyn'; Scully, 'Discourses', p. 103.

¹³⁶ Scully, 'Discourses', p. 105, 316.

¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 10.

¹³⁸ Ibid., p. 105.

¹³⁹ Ibid., p. 12.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 26.