The Short Knife, a novel for young people

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Contextualising Commentary

Liminal Language: The Poetics and Power Dynamics of Welsh-English Transnational Creativity in *The Short Knife*.

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Contents:

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Abstract

This critical commentary makes explicit some of the implicit ideas of the accompanying novel for young people, *The Short Knife.* The two parts should be read together, as a piece of Arts Praxis research.

There are four sections to the commentary, mirroring the narrative journey of the novel's main character. Each section develops in a dialogue between critical reflection, creative writing, and the conceptual framework of both transnational creativity and writing for young adults, including reference to other texts, notably *Sweet Pizza* by G.R.Gemin and *The Curious Tale of the Lady Caraboo* by Catherine Johnson.

The section entitled 'Protected' sets out the poetics of the novel; the moments of position enunciation that led to the creation - by the use of transnational creativity - of a unique voice. I sought to find a liminal space between Welsh and English that would seem simultaneously familiar and alien to both English-only and bilingual readers. The resultant voice is a new contribution to knowledge in the field of creative writing.

The sections 'Disrupted' and 'Confined' deal with the discovery and emergent implications of my poetics. Significant insights were gleaned by applying techniques inspired by transnational creativity explicitly to writing for young people. Themes developed demonstrating the commonalities of the two writing forms, which can be harnessed by creative writers wishing to enrich their writing for young adults. These themes include: determining in-group or out-group status; personal identity; balance of power, and, most significantly for me while writing *The Short Knife,* betrayal.

'Fledged' explores the synthesis of these themes, both within the novel and within myself, in my role as writer and guardian.

The scope of this work is limited by the methodology which requires that the experience of the author remains central to the process. I have focused on betrayal because this was the most creatively useful emergent theme for me. However, I can see that there is potential for other effects to be dominant, if the

approach were used by another author. I have also limited the discussion of power to the relationship between community and individual. I recognise that there are other power dynamics at play, especially that of gendered power. While this was considered during the writing process, it is not included here because of pressures of word count.

The conclusion sets out the significance of these findings for other creative writers. Beyond the academic and artistic audience, however, I also hope that the creative work will have an impact on young readers in the process of negotiating their own coming of age.

Introduction

The novel, *The Short Knife*, and the contextualising commentary are a unified piece of research, and it is assumed that the reader is familiar with the novel before moving on to the commentary. The two parts deal with the same subject - a person negotiating membership of a cultural or linguistic group, and the concomitant difficulties and betrayals therein. The novel explores this subject from a creative angle; whereas the commentary explores the subject from an auto-critical perspective, placing the subject in conceptual and commercial frameworks. However, the two have never been separate processes - any understanding I have gained as a researcher has fed directly into the novel through plot, characterisation, setting, symbolism etc. And the devices within the novel have served as a thought experiment in order to deepen my understanding of my own position - I have researched through my writing.

- Methodology

The methodology for this work has blended Robin Nelson's (2013) model for practice-as-research termed Arts Praxis, and Haseman & Mafe's (2009, p.219) concept of 'position enunciation'. To unpick this a little, in Arts Praxis the researcher imbricates the making with reflection and conceptual thinking, in order to generate new knowledge. It is anticipated that there will be a continuous cycle of creative work, followed by consideration of the wider landscape for the piece, followed by reflective thinking, before returning to the creative work, which should be stronger as a result of each step in the cycle.

Haseman & Mafe suggest that the artist should begin with a 'field of inquiry', rather than a specific research question, paying close attention to the significant moments of decision making, which they call 'position enunciation'.

My initial 'field of inquiry' was to wonder what would emerge if I applied a transnational approach to writing for young adults. Specifically, I set out to write in the liminal space between Welsh and English for the benefit of young adult

readers, who are in their own 'liminal space' between childhood and adulthood. I spent my own childhood and teenage years as a confident speaker of both languages, which undoubtedly piqued my curiosity. This curiosity was further fuelled by a throwaway comment by a copyeditor which made me really consider how I might represent different languages on the page.[1] While writing the novel, I was attuned to spot any position enunciation, and used those to direct my wider reading, conceptual framework and reflective thinking.

By doing this I was able to place the novel in its creative context, in relation to other writers for young people, and in its theoretical context, by researching areas such as Welsh studies, and creative translation. The novel, and commentary, went through multiple drafts, each time getting closer to substantiating significant insights. The novel and commentary are thus a synthesis of cycles of Arts Praxis. To evidence my insights, I draw on the range of materials anticipated by Nelson's model - the novel itself; my own writings during the process, such as writing journals; other published novels for young adults; writing by theorists, and interviews with authors.

- Definitions and form

A definition of what I mean by writing for young people and transnational creative writing, is apposite.

Young Adult Fiction

Young Adult fiction is writing intended for readers in their teens. It isn't a genre, but a marketing term, used to identify books which share a certain attitude. Julia Green (2011) says, “[YA fiction] might address issues which are of key importance to readers at that age, such as working out who you are as an individual, or falling in love, or being part of a group: 'coming of age' stories.” We

[1] The copyeditor commented on the excellent English of one of the Polish characters in my novel *Diamonds and Daggers* (Caldecott, 2015). The character was speaking Polish, a fact I had mentioned in the accompanying description. The English was excellent as the character’s Polish was excellent, but the copyeditor remained dissatisfied by my representation.

might expect to see these topics presented in a voice or style which is accessible to readers in their teens.

As Green's quote suggests, 'coming-of-age' is a genre. Screenwriting has had a significant impact on the pedagogy of creative writing[2], and so, I turned to cinema for a working definition of coming-of-age. Mark Kermode (2018) sets out the classic elements of the genre: "...a distinctive time and setting; a young hero trying to find his place in the world; a father figure; a first crush; a gang of buddies… and a loss of innocence, a crisis that forces the characters to grow up...All in a quest for identity."

I planned to write a coming-of-age historical novel. The main character would be finding out who she is, through a loss of innocence. I conceived of these experiences as thresholds, with the character crossing from childhood to adulthood.

Transnational Creative Writing

Transnational writing is writing 'that focuses on a whole range of connections that transcend politically bounded territories.' (Bailey et al, 2006, p.1446). These connections might be formed by the movement of people across a country's borders; perhaps by hopeful migrants establishing new lives or by refugees fleeing a crisis. They might be the movement of ideas - words across social media, or music on YouTube, shared with no apparent reference to state boundaries. They may be the connections forged when a poem in one language is translated into another.

These connections across boundaries interest me as a writer. Like Bambo Soyinka (2015), I view crossing boundaries as a creative opportunity: "When reframed as a threshold, the transnational border is a site for making meaning: it is an imaginative space through which we can move back and forth from the known to the unknown; and from safe to surprising forms of expression."

[2] See, for example, the ubiquity of references to the three-act structure in creative writing textbooks.

The very personal nature of my methodology has encouraged me to form my own view of what is meant by transnational creativity. So, for me, transnational creative writing is writing which engages with the act of moving, crossing a political, linguistic, cultural or temporal boundary, while viewing that threshold-crossing as a creative opportunity. A reading list of transnational texts (such as novels written by diasporic groups, or those left behind, etc.) is likely to see recurring themes, such as consciousness of hybrid forms of culture; contested identities or challenges to communities.

Initially, my project was simply concerned with hybridity of language - with the national and cultural boundary between Wales and England as my site of transnational creativity. However, the themes of contested identities and challenges to communities came to play a more significant role in my process.

I approached both writing forms with hopefulness, or what can also be termed naivety - a sense of possibility as I crossed thresholds. This contextual commentary is divided into four sections which chart the affect of transnational creativity when applied to writing for young people. It is divided into four sections, which mirror Mai's character arc in the novel: Protected; Disrupted; Confined, and Fledged.

In 'Protected' I set out the evolution of my poetics. My goal was to apply the transnational idea of hybridity of form to writing for young people, in the hope that the creative sparks would fly. Specifically, I wanted to use the Welsh language to inspire the English of the text. My field of inquiry at the time was limited to *how* I would achieve that, not *whether* I should.

A series of encounters 'Disrupted' the project. Conversations in real life and online fanned the creative sparks, turning them into something much more volatile - hot, angry bursts of emotion which threatened to derail the project. However, this led to a number of significant insights into the symbiotic possibilities of transnational writing and writing for young people in the form of contested identities and challenges to communities.

Reflective thinking forced me to consider my own position as a transnational artist, specifically in relation to the idea of betrayal. Using Nelson's model, the artist is also under scrutiny; my fictional characters came to embody the dilemma I faced. In ‘Confined’, I turned to other texts to expand my thinking. I discovered that the very transnational themes of betrayal and broken connections can be useful in constructing young adult fiction. *Sweet Pizza* by G.R.Gemin and *The Curious Tale of the Lady Caraboo* by Catherine Johnson provide relevant exemplars.

In the final section, 'Fledged', I consider the cumulative effect of these revelations on me as a writer for young people. Like my main character, Mai, I find myself growing-up and becoming a more responsible guardian for both my readers and my culture.

The four sections demonstrate the new knowledge and significant insights achieved through the cycle of making, reflecting and setting the work in its conceptual framework. The conclusion establishes the significance and impact of these findings: the poetics and emotional resonance achieved by bringing together the fields of transnational writing and writing for young people will be of interest to the academy and writers beyond. I also hope that the novel itself will impact young readers as they negotiate their own thresholds, should it achieve publication.

- Scope

The scope of this contextualising commentary is limited to the emergent themes of poetics and power which came about as a direct result of using transnational creativity while writing the young adult novel, *The Short Knife*.

As a novel, there are a number of other interesting themes that are also present in the writing. For example, the role of girls and women in war is a major thread in the story, as is power when wielded by women in patriarchal societies. However, while decisions about gender representation did form an important

role in my writing of the novel, they may well have been there even had I not applied transnational creativity, and so are omitted from this commentary.

I am also limiting my scope to insights gained specifically while writing *The Short Knife* which were personal to me. It seems entirely likely that another writer, applying transnational creativity to their work, would have experienced a different range of emotions and insights, specific to their own phenomenology. Others, for example, might have foregrounded imagined places, anticipation of adventure, or homesickness, to name but three possibilities. My analysis is not intended to be comprehensive, as the methodology precludes such an endeavour.

There were a wide range of 'position enunciations' which took place during the writing of this project, and there were innumerable interesting threads I might have pursued – for example, the decision to write a historical novel; the realisation that the literature of Wales can be discussed using post-colonial theory and subaltern studies; the moment I realised that transnational creativity offers an exciting lens through which to view the current #ownvoices debate, and questions of appropriation/self-appropriation in children's fiction (this area in particular offers exciting possibilities for further research). However, tantalising though each of these threads were, for reasons of word count, time, and sanity, this contextual research focuses on the very personal journey that I took alongside my main character, Mai.

That journey began at a street party.

Chapter One: Protected

‘You should go back to Wales, spend a bit of time there,’ my supervisor, Lucy Christopher, says to me in 2016.

I take a sip of coffee, slow to respond. I go to Wales, regularly, but I don't go to observe, to absorb. I go, quickly, with hurried half-hours spent in relatives' living rooms. Conversations cut short. Tea drunk, still scalding. I am always leaving, even when I've only just arrived.

‘You should,' she says again. ‘It will be good for your project.’

It would. It would be good for my project. So, I go. I choose the moment I know my corner of Wales is at its most joyous. I take my time. I take my niece, who is also Welsh, for ballast. We go to the Llangollen International Eisteddfod parade. It's a street festival, a carnival of sorts, where singers and dancers from around the world come to our valley for one week of each year.

My niece, new to the Eisteddfod, is half-terrified, half-entranced. She grips my hand. The narrow streets are lined with crowds three or four deep, calling to each other in dozens of accents and languages. The voice of the town crier booms, almost drowning out the sound of the river crashing below the stone bridge. Next, the sound of drums, a brass band, pipes and tablas, choirs and clog dancers, singers and dancers from around the world.

The streets are alive with a party that cries everyone is welcome.

In the market town where I grew up, nestled in the cup of the valley, with green hills rising to purple moors and dark conifer plantations on either side, I dance with people from Indonesia, the Punjab, New Zealand and Malaysia.

My niece waves an American flag that someone has given her.

This is what I want for her, I think.

To look outwards. To feel that the hills aren't walls keeping her in. To know that there's more out there, beyond the chintz front rooms kept for best, where the only songs you know all the words to are hymns, where half the pubs

have flat roofs, but the factories that went with them are long gone. Where judgements come from on high, but also from behind every twitching curtain.

I want her to be able to dream the world, while standing on the pavement outside Spar.

Can I give that to her? Can the books I write transcend her boundaries?

When I returned to Bristol from the International Eisteddfod, I conceived of the novel as an experiment in praxis. I would take the language of my childhood, my niece's childhood, and blend it with a world language. I'd take it out of the mountains and introduce it to the world. It would be a transnational hybrid: part-Welsh, part-English.

In this first chapter of the contextualising commentary, I explore my original intention for the novel that would become *The Short Knife.* I do so from a position of something very like innocence. Like Mai at the beginning of the novel, I felt protected from the outside (inside) world. More than that, even, I was not even aware of having anything to fear. I could play, like a child plays, with all of my attention on the game.

Already the aptness of the endeavour for a young adult audience was suggesting itself. Young adult fiction is a mutable form that has seen many evolutions in the few decades of its existence[3]. From realist fiction in the seventies and eighties, through the fantasy turn of the nineties and noughties, to the social and structural commentaries of the 2010s, it has been eager to expand its boundaries.[4]

Readers of YA fiction are, therefore, not wedded to genre conventions, and so might well be receptive to a novel which experiments with liminality within its themes and form. The market has seen work such as Alex Wheatle's (2015-18) *Crongton* series receive critical acclaim, with its wildly inventive diction,

[3] *The Outsiders* by S.E.Hinton (1967) is widely considered to be the first work of YA fiction, written as it was by a teenager, with a teenage cast, offering a teenage perspective on the themes of the novel.

[4] There are individual books that have created these paradigm shifts, so there are strong precedents in YA for books that have profoundly affected our understanding of the market. Notable works include *Forever* by Judy Blume, *Junk* by Melvin Burgess, *Harry Potter* by J.K. Rowling, *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins and *Twilight* by Stephenie Meyer.

which Patrice Lawrence (2017) says, 'captures the rhythm and movement of language though simile, humour and redefinitions of meaning'. The series, set in South London amid gang rivalries, blends contemporary street slang, neologism, and imagery co-opted from – among other things – Arthurian literature, to great effect. Regionally specific novels, which are strongly grounded in a location by their choice of syntax and vocabulary are also warmly received, with David Almond's work set in Northumberland a significant example.

So, experiments with language are not unusual in young adult fiction. Such experiments may even be of particular relevance to young readers, given the propensity of young people to generate slang and codified language which demarcates their space.[5] Patrice Lawrence goes on to warn against using contemporary slang in young adult fiction given how quickly youth language evolves; the implication being that the language of youth is full of neologism and invention.

Having said this, if I am to have young adult readers, I will also need the involvement of publishing houses, for whom the commercial realities of the industry will be of paramount importance. If the novel is too avant-garde then it may not be a commercially viable product.

These issues directed my thinking as I set about planning my novel.

I was interested in movement across borders, as I myself grew up in a border town. One of the concepts I understood to be a feature of transnational writing was that of the hybrid[6]: entities influenced by more than one culture. I saw this as a fertile discourse for a book for young adults, who are themselves still influenced by the structures of childhood - school, play, family etc. - while beginning to negotiate the structures of adulthood - relationships, work, peers

[5] For further discussion of the mutability of teenage culture, see Jo Nadin's (2016) PhD thesis, *No Me Without You,* on narcissism as a positive force in shaping young adult identity.
[6] The term has a longer, and contentious history when used in post-colonial critiques. I became aware of the contentiousness of the idea over the course of my PhD, especially when framed against the concept of a ‘pure’ culture, but this section deals with the naivety of my beginning.

etc. I wanted to create a hybrid poetics that would reflect the threshold concerns of my readership.

Poetics, in literary criticism, is the range of analysis available to answer the question 'how does this piece of writing work?'. In the field of Creative Writing, its meaning has evolved to include the author: 'How do *I* make this piece of writing work?'. Implicit in the word is the act of making, the artist's knowledge of form and media, reflective thinking and further drafting, each cycle getting closer to a functioning piece.

So, when I talk about a hybrid poetics, I'm talking about the range of stylistic decisions I made that brought me closer to an appropriate voice for the novel.

I was searching for a list of rules to follow while writing the novel; rules that might show my niece that there's joy in crossing borders.

On any given day in 2016, I sit in a train carriage, perhaps seat D12 (aisle) travelling towards London, or Cardiff, or Aberystwyth, or Chester.

I have a notebook.

I watch the parallel lines of sidings, plough furrows, forestry plantations whip past the window. The lines are invisible, until the train hits just the right angle and then the geometry of the landscape is clear, breath-taking in its precision, before being lost again as the train moves and the angle is lost.

My notebook is one that closes with a magnetic catch, a satisfying snap. I write ideas for the novel, its style and voice, searching for satisfying snaps of recognition, the sense of finding the right angle on this story that I want to tell, when the words and sentences and paragraphs align in just in the right way to make me catch my breath, and think - there, there is precision. I write waiting for the pattern of its landscape to emerge.

I write a 'test paragraph' in standard English. It's short, but it will be my control group of words. It is clearly comprehensible; it would meet the demands of commercial publishers. It is not avant-garde. I will use it, again and again, in

order to see how can I deviate from standard English, and how far, before all meaning is lost.

I write the test paragraph in my notebook: *The sea came quickly up the shore and broke upon the rocks. Mai sank her feet into the surf and yelled up at the sky. A seagull cawed back, a devil's cry.*

Who is Mai?

I don't know yet. The plot and cast of characters don't matter to me yet. It's her voice I want to find first. I'm not seeking to answer everything right away, I'm letting the field of inquiry lead me.

I know that she speaks Brittonic, an ancestor of Welsh, which I'm using as a proxy. And yet the paragraph looks entirely English. I feel a little like that about myself, too. I can speak Welsh, but I've lived outside Wales for most of my life now. I seem entirely English. My Welsh-medium education is another lifetime ago.

I recall, as I sip insipid train tea, my junior school. And my sister's frustration, at the age of six, when she was told again and again and again, that 'the' was not spelled 'ddy'. The Welsh graphemes we'd learned in the classroom couldn't simply be laid over English phonemes and made to work. I recall her tears at trying to understand the Alice in Wonderland world of English spelling, where 'thought', 'rough', 'plough' and 'through' can all use the letters 'o-u-g-h' with a straight face.

I rewrite the test paragraph using Welsh graphemes: *Ddy sî cêm cwiclu yp ddy siôr and brôc ypon ddy rocs. Mai sanc her ffît intw ddy syrff and ield yp at ddy scau. A sî gyl côd bac, a defil's crau.*

I love the way it looks. I've turned it into a cipher that only people with knowledge of the code can crack. Like the in-jokes and cliquey humour of Welsh meme generator, @BolycsCymraeg (2018), with their t-shirt that reads 'cwic, Dafydd, fisitors...wî betyr start spîcing Cymraeg'[7] it requires a working knowledge of two languages to interpret.

[7] "Quick, Dafydd, visitors... we better start speaking Cymraeg"

But my initial glee gives way to unease. This iteration feels secretive, exclusionary. It feels like people going quiet when you walk into a room. It feels like whispers behind cupped hands as you walk down a corridor. It feels like the worst bits of being a teenager. I didn't want any part of the novel to feel cliquey, or alienating to English-only readers. I wanted to do what Sarah Ardizzone, in an interview concerning translation with Gillian Lathey (2012 p.190), calls, 'decalage or disjuncture at a linguistic level, a disharmony that is a reminder of the source language.' Disharmonies draw attention to themselves, and that's my goal, to have people notice the source language, but not be frightened by it, rather be thrilled that they are occupying a threshold space.

I'm not just writing for my niece, I realise. Not just for the community of young people who are fluent in Welsh and English. I want the appeal to be broader, the impact more inclusive. I imagine myself writing for a teenage girl in Newport, who has studied Welsh as a second language for years, but won't ever speak a word outside her classroom. I imagine myself writing for a boy in Lewisham, whose great-grandad arrived in the UK on the Windrush, who might have no idea that the English were once immigrants too. I imagine myself writing for an American girl who thinks Britain is Hugh Grant and Downton Abbey. I imagine saying to them, look, look, we're all mixed up, we're all touched by movement and migration and we always have been. We're all hybrids.

I will go on to discuss belonging and exclusion in 'Disrupted', but this was perhaps the first, tiny, tingling sensation I had that what I had thought was an experiment in poetics had deeper implications. But, for the time being, I ignore that tingling sensation.

I draw a thick pencil line across the page of my notebook.

If not graphemes, then what else?

I try other ideas, pulling the test paragraph this way and that, as I look for alternatives.

One of the structural differences between Welsh and English is that the initial consonants of Welsh words 'mutate' in certain circumstances. Originally a phonological shift that subsequently evolved to take on grammatical meaning, indicating, for example, the gender of the possessive pronoun in a sentence e.g. 'ei braich/ei fraich' is 'her arm/his arm'. Other mutations smooth transitions across consonants, for example 'in Cardiff' is 'yng Nghaerdydd' rather than 'yn Caerdydd', removing the harsh sound of a hard 'C'. It seemed that, perhaps, I might be able to 'mutate' English words in the same way, to make them more melodic, more aurally pleasing.

Here is the test paragraph again, but this time with the stops (t,d,k,g,p,b) between vowels altered to make the transition between vowel sounds more smooth (similar to one of the forms of mutation that happens in Welsh):

The sea game quickly up the shore and broge ubon the rocks. Mai sank her feed into the surf and yelled ub at the sky. A seagull cawed bag, a devil's cry.

It is easier to read than the Welsh grapheme version, but it is not melodic - it sounds more like the speaker has a heavy cold. Therefore, as a technique, I was unable to take this seriously. I draw another thick, black line across my notebook.

There are differences between the languages in terms of grammar and syntax. Exploiting grammar has been a productive method of establishing poetics which has been employed by transnational writers before me. For example, Xialu Guo, author of 'A Concise Chinese-English Dictionary for Lovers', struggles with the number of tenses in English - literary Chinese uses only one. She particularly hates the past-perfect-progressive. By eliminating it in her English prose, she can engage a 'Chinese worldview' which has a much larger effect than such a simple change might suggest. Here's an example of what she means:

English: "Peter had been painting his house for weeks, but he finally gave up."

Chinese-English: "Peter tries to paint his house, but sadness overwhelms him, causing him to lay down his brushes and give up his dream (Guo, 2017).

Wildly different passages created by making one simple rule change.

There are many syntactic and grammatical differences between Welsh and English that I might exploit.

Like many other languages, Welsh uses a system of gendered nouns; adjectives, and articles which can alter depending on whether the noun is masculine or feminine. It seemed that it might be possible to attach differently spelled articles or adjectives to nouns, using the Welsh classification system. Here's the test paragraph again, this time using 'o' or 'a' endings to articles to indicate whether the noun is masculine or feminine:

Tho sea came quickly up tho shore and broke upon tha rocks. Mai sank her feet into tho surf and yelled up at tha sky. A seagull cawed back, o devil's cry.

I think that this technique reveals something interesting about language to monoglot English speakers that they might not generally be familiar with - that gendered language exists in parts of speech beyond pronouns and the suffixes '-man', or '-ess'. Given the current attempts in creative writing to create an alternative to gendered pronouns,[8] I thought there may be some mileage in exploring this option. However, as the current experimentation in YA is being done with the explicit intention of moving *away* from binary models of gender,[9] it seems churlish to introduce a binary model where none existed before.

Another difference between Welsh and English that I was interested in exploiting is that Welsh has no indefinite article ('a' or 'an'). When I mentioned this casually to my partner, he exclaimed 'But what do you *do*?'. I shrugged. Nothing. There's no noticeable absence there, the grammar just is. Through experimentation, in the pages of my notebook, I quickly saw that it is perfectly possible to write English that makes sense, without using the indefinite article.

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[8] See, for example, the use of alien pronouns in Rivers Solomons' *An Unkindness of Ghosts*, or Fox Benwell's work in *Unbroken* and *Proud*.

[9] See, for example, *I Wish You All The Best,* by Mason Deaver, which employs the singular they to non-binary main character, Ben. This has been done in the marketing material too, thus expanding the impact of the political stylistic decision beyond just readers of the book.

To avoid it, you might use a pronoun instead - 'a hall' becomes 'his hall'; you can change from indefinite to definite article - 'it is a terrible risk', becomes 'the risk is terrible'; or you might turn a noun into a verb - 'Tad had a fever' becomes 'Tad lay fevered'. There is also the simple solution of pluralising the noun - 'a hall' becomes 'many halls'.

In my notebook, on the train, the tracks of the novel begin, slowly, to align.

The sea came quickly up the shore and broke upon the rocks. Mai sank her feet into the surf and yelled up at the sky. Seagulls cawed back, with devils' cries.

I found the idea of writing the whole novel without using the indefinite article very appealing. It seemed that by doing so, I would create something that was alienating, but perhaps only at a subliminal level. The average reader, whether they were English-only or bilingual, probably wouldn't be able to pinpoint what was odd, but they might think that something was awry. It also had the added benefit of suggesting something particular about the character of the Welsh - a streak of literalism, even something of the pedantic maybe. We don't talk about 'an apple', but 'this apple right here.'

I felt again the tiny, tingling sensation that there was more at play here than poetics, as I thought about 'the character of the Welsh'. What did it conjure when I thought of Wales? Was I thinking of the stereotypes disparagingly listed by Raymond Williams (2003, p5) who wrote, “if you say ‘Welsh culture’, what do you think of? Of bara brith and the Eisteddfod? Of choirs and Cardiff Arms Park? Of love spoons and englynion? Of the national costume and the rampant red dragon?” By thinking of the Welsh as pedantic and too literal, was I adding to the list of stereotypes? Or was my stereotyping, in fact, built on personal experience of literal-minded admonitions? Sticking to the letter of the law, rather than to its spirit. I remembered the twitching curtains of my childhood streets, silent judgements, cold chapels, plain walls. The stained-glass window made to mark the death of my great-uncle was installed in the vestibule, not the body of the chapel – colourful frippery didn’t belong too close to God.

What was my interest in the world beyond Wales built on? Was it attraction, or repulsion? Was I being tempted out, or was I just running away?

In considering the Welsh as pedantic, was there a note of teenage disdain in my voice?

But these thoughts were still no more than tingles.

Easily ignored.

Another grammatical difference that I found compelling is English's use of the 'Saxon genitive' form of possessive nouns in which the possessor of an item is indicated using *'s – English's use*. Welsh doesn't use possessive forms of nouns. I wondered whether English could be made to work without it. The lack of possessive forms of nouns in Wales also suggested a discomfort with ownership or consumerist display, which is again something I associate with the Wales of my childhood.

The test passage again:

A seagull cawed back, a devil-cry.

I found this iteration to be very evocative. It forced surprising, fresh language from stale or clichéd phrases. It was at this point that I began to really embrace the creative opportunities of the task I had set myself. Perhaps it wasn't just going to be possible to write a Welsh-inflected version of English, perhaps I might end up writing something that was good as well. Something that would embody and celebrate the hybridity I wanted to convey.

As the train journeys continued, from the west coast of Aberystwyth where the sun sets in the sea, to the flat plains of East Anglia where I visited the West Stowe Anglo-Saxon village with its experimental archaeologists recreating a Saxon way of life, my notebook was beginning to fill with passages that felt closer to 'just the right angle'.

Word order can also be manipulated to get a sense of the structure of the Welsh language: 'I had seen things similar before', reverses the standard English word order of adjective-noun, to the Welsh order of noun-adjective. I had

considered doing this with all adjectives, (so 'green tree' would become 'tree green'), but English readers are so used to the word order of descriptive adjectives that I worry using this too frequently will disrupt the reading experience too intrusively. I would attempt to use the technique subtly, perhaps only once or twice per scene.

Idiomatic language is also something I have long been fascinated by. Idioms and figures of speech preserve lifestyles long after whatever act they refer to has fallen by the wayside – we still ‘hang up’ phone calls, or ‘dial’ numbers long after changing apparatus has made these terms redundant. Older idioms act in the same way; they have something of ancient, lichen splattered rock about them. Why on earth does a 'stitch in time save nine?' and how does 'many a muckle make a mickle?' Patrice Lawrence's observation above, that the language of youth dates quickly, felt pertinent. If contemporary slang evokes a specific location and time, then so too, might use of ossified slang give a sense of an ancient location and time to a novel. So, I decided to re-translate Alun Rhys Cownie’s (2001) *A Dictionary of Welsh and English Idiomatic Phrases*, opting for a literal translation rather than an English equivalent, which is the more usual way to translate such a dictionary.

A second notebook joined the first. Long commutes to schools across the country, to talk about my writing, were spent translating. I felt, as I travelled landscapes that I can't help seeing archaeologically - Bronze Age barrows in fields, medieval street names in cities, Norman churches dotted like firmly pressed stickle-bricks in villages - that I was also seeing the archaeology of language somehow. In the Welsh idiom for making a mountain out of a molehill, you *make a church and mill of an issue*. To arrive late for something is to *arrive after the fair*. The phrases suggest a landscape that is pastoral and bucolic. Preserving long-lost lifestyles, even as the train rattled through the scraps yards and warehouses of Birmingham or the graffiti-daubed track of Paddington. The idioms are creatively exciting too. Euphemisms for death include the evocative to *go and get your answer*, to be *collected by your fathers*, to *sleep outside*. To be pregnant is to *grow small bones*, or to find *your apron strings are too short*.

Bosnian author Aleksandar Hemon (2017), who writes in English, said as part of a conference panel, that a translation can only be an approximation, however, that approximation ‘expands both languages’. Something that is a casual idiom, a cliché in one language, can become a fresh, meaningful image in the other.

I certainly found that to be true. I was left with a database of around 1000 idioms or common phrases that could be incorporated into my text.

Finally, I sought inspiration for my poetics from Welsh literary styles, namely cynghanedd poetry. There are many variants in the use of cynghanedd, but at its most simple, it is a stressed meter which uses repeating sounds to emphasise the stress. I want readers of *The Short Knife* to experience something akin to the experience of reading this sonorous Welsh poetry. Professor M. Wynn Thomas in his foreword to Mererid Hopwood (2004), *Singing in Chains,* calls cynghanedd poetry 'A stunning edifice of aural architecture, it is an acoustic environment that has long reverberated to all the mood music of the human imagination.' I want to borrow some of the features of cynghanedd to show this edifice to English-only readers, who are unlikely to have the same familiarity with the style as Welsh readers, who hear it in schools, Eisteddfods and even at the occasional pub open mike night.

This has been attempted in English before. Here's an example by Dic Jones:

No hymn of birds, no tremor - save the sounds
Of the sea's sad tenor,
The stars ascend in splendour,
And the dark creeps round the door.

But it is not supposed to be simply read on the page, it is a spoken-word form - an aural edifice. So, for readers of this commentary who would like to

hear it being used, here is a recent advert for Radio Cymru: http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p05g6zqr/player.

Sadly, I fear I have only been able to give an imperfect impression of this art form in the verses incorporated within the novel. I have focused on parachesis, or repeating sounds somewhat in the manner of alliteration, assonance and sibilance, which are essential features of cynghanedd. I have also incorporated some 'set piece' poems which follow something of the demanding form of cynghanedd, with the intention of marking moments of strong connection for Mai with the landscape around her, or her moments of extreme emotion.

By the end of the year, my notebook was full of experiments and notes which allowed me to create the poetics needed to write the novel. I had my original voice. All I needed now was a story to tell.

Chapter Two: Disrupted

In *The Short Knife* and this commentary, I am inviting readers to cross borders: the geographic borders between England and Wales; the cultural borders between speakers of different languages, the temporal borders between childhood and adulthood. On the face of it, it seems such an easy thing - put one foot in front of the other, one word after another, one moment after another and the thing is done. You're on the other side.

However, the protagonists (Mai and me) at the beginning of these paired tales don't know the trials that are to come – the space we have to cross is contested and fraught with danger. There are enough metaphors for liminality that should stand in warning, martial metaphors of 'no-man's lands', 'minefields' or 'marches'. I set out on the project with a naive hopefulness, but soon found myself mid-minefield.

In this chapter, I begin by explaining one last evolution of my poetics, through the use of Translation Plus. This led to the disruption of the project following an explosive encounter with a Welsh academic. However, this commentary doesn't simply describe the dangers of crossing minefields, it extrapolates the significance of those dangers and demonstrates how they can be an opportunity for writers to engage more profoundly with their subject matter. A number of key themes emerged which demonstrated the symbiotic possibilities of transnational writing combined with writing for young people. These themes grow out of recurring tropes of transnational writing, in the form of power, contested identities and challenges to communities.

By June 2016, I had a rough idea for a plot - Mai, my main character, would find herself embroiled with Saxons somehow. Perhaps as a translator between leaders, or as part of a boundary-crossing love story. It lacked detail and narrative drive. I had focused on the poetics of the piece over the content.

Then, I was invited to take part in a workshop with Prof Nicholas Jose of Adelaide University on Translation Plus. This proved to be a critical a moment of

position enunciation in the development of the novel. It was a simple enough workshop, but its repercussions were significant.

Translation Plus is defined by Prof Jose (2015, p5) as: "pedagogic experiments in creative writing involving literary texts in languages other than English". During the workshop, Prof Jose explored a translation technique which required no second language knowledge at all. The technique was inspired by Ben Lerner's 2011 novel *Leaving the Atocha Station,* in which the main character 'translates' Lorca by searching for English homonyms for the incomprehensible Spanish words. The resulting cacophony represents the character's own mental collapse. At the time, I had appreciated the technique's hybrid approach to language, as this connected with the poetics of my own project.

It seemed to me that there was potential to incorporate the technique into my project, in one final development of the poetics. I could search for homonyms, or translated homonyms, and onomatopoeia, allowing the tension between the two languages to suggest novel images or catachresis. I am translating, and retranslating as I write - playfully moving from one language to the other, searching for fruitful points of contact. I'll share three examples from the novel to demonstrate this in action.

In Chapter 15 of *The Short Knife*, I write, 'I wanted to run to Tad... and beg him go hinder me.' 'Go hinder' was originally 'forbid'. Mai wants Tad to stop her, to forbid her from accepting the task she has been set. The Welsh word for forbid is 'gwahardd'. I stopped writing for a while in order to play with the consonant pattern of that Welsh verb g/h/r/dd. I had an English thesaurus to hand, and considered 'go halt', 'go hard', 'get hurt', as options before settling on 'go hinder'. It is not, of course, an exact match, but it was one that was an acceptable compromise between meaning and sound. 'Forbid' is easier to understand than 'go hinder', but, in selecting 'go hinder' I hope that my reader will both ascertain my meaning and also wonder if they are experiencing a Welsh word 'in disguise'.

In the same chapter, I use the phrase, 'We walked towards the half day.' Like 'go hinder', calling noon the 'half day' came about as a result of translation. However, in this case it was possible to directly translate the Welsh word for noon, 'hanner dydd', which simply means half day. In this case, the characters simply walked until noon and I have found a more abstract way to express that which, again, might make a reader feel that there is something more going on in the text than meets the eye.

My third example is a more extreme form of Translation Plus, in which the original is so opaque that it is unlikely that any Welsh speaker would be able to guess at its derivation. At the end of Chapter 15, I write, 'I forced myself to step into the tumbling ash dark.' This line was originally, 'I forced myself to step into the dark'. As with 'gwahardd' above, I considered the Welsh word for the key word 'dark', which is 'tywyllwch'. I decided not to follow the same model of consonant pattern though. Instead I was caught on the sound 'llwch' within 'tywy*llwch*'. It means dust or ash. It evoked an image of darkness like falling soot. The word evolved into the final image.

I was so delighted with what was emerging by using Translation Plus that I decided to make use of it in a side-project.

The 6th July 2016 was Eid al-Fitr, the feast to mark the end of Ramadan. And, for Welsh-Muslims (along, of course, with the wider Welsh community) the day was given an extra air of celebration thanks to the fact that the Welsh football team were playing in the semi-finals of the European Cup that evening.

The competition had rumbled on in the background of my life; Eid was certainly the more personally interesting of the two events. I now live next to Jamia Mosque in Bristol and neighbours knock at my door at the end of Ramadan and give me food they've prepared for the street. However, I, like many fair-weather football fans, grew more excited the better 'my' team did. I began to look forward to the games, to learn the names of a few players, even to make special arrangements to be near a screen as the rounds went on. By the time the semi-final came, I was hooked. And I wanted to find a way to share that newfound joy.

I wondered whether Translation Plus might be a way to share joy; a way, perhaps, to widen access to this suddenly desirable commodity, Welshness.

In a moment of enthusiasm, I experimented. The Welsh national anthem, *Mae Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau*, (usual translation: Land of My Fathers) is sung before each game. I wondered whether an English homonymic rendition, encapsulating joy and sporting achievement, might be possible. I neglected to wonder whether it was desirable. After some 45 minutes of playing, I wrote this:

'My hen lad, fun had I, and willy memes,
Glad Bears and canned onions, their Wags, Graham Obree,
Hey goo-rolled, ruff-wearing, glad Gary tries mad,
Bros rubbed it, Coles asked it, I'm glad.

Ghoul-add! Ghoul-add! Play Eid all hoof heave it lads!
Try more, in field, here beer, have pie,
Oh bud-head, here hen Neath par high.'

And I promptly posted it to Facebook and Twitter with the suggestion: "A small gift to the Rest of the UK, to be used on Weds 6th July." If I'd have known that I would be using it as part of my PhD, I might have worked longer on it. But, having said that, I believe it obliquely references sports and the joyous match-going experience, with beers and pies and Gary Lineker offering commentary on the occasion.

Significantly, it does require some familiarity with the original in order to engage with it at all.

To someone with no idea what the Welsh anthem sounds like, it is utter gibberish. In this way, I thought, there were 'Easter Eggs' throughout the piece, reflecting what Elisabeth Young-Bruehl (1994, introduction) characterises as a feature of transnational writing, 'Literature complexly coded to reach more than one audience with only one text.'

The majority of interactions were positive - likes, retweets and shares. Many of the people interacting were likely to have self-identified as Welsh - friends from my Welsh-language school days, for example, or, people who put Welsh towns in their biographical information, or, more tenuously, people with Welsh names such as Rhian or Morgan. There were also responses from the kind of people I was hoping to reach - the wider community of fair-weather Welsh fans. A self-defined 'Welsh-football loving teenager' in Pershwar, Pakistan (bio since changed) liked it, as well as people closer to home in London, Edinburgh and Liverpool.

There was at least one person who was a reluctant retweeter. Lal Skinner (2016) wrote "Hilarious - even a Welsh patriot like me has to laugh at this # sing UK!". The use of the word 'even' indicates a sense of discomfort at aligning themself too closely with the reworking. The subtext of Lal's comment is that I cannot be, 'a Welsh patriot' in writing this piece; my treatment of the anthem is funny, but disrespectful.

This view was put significantly more forcefully by Dr Dafydd Sills-Jones (2016a), who was at that time Director of Postgraduate Studies at Aberystwyth University in the Institute of Arts and Humanities. On Facebook, he wrote, "C'mon, Elen, it's [the reworking's] clearly a piss take - it could be said that's intimidating to Welsh speakers, by belittling their national anthem."

Was I belittling 'their', national anthem?

I will answer that question in a moment. But I want to pause here on the significance of Dr Sills-Jones' use of that innocuous pronoun. Mine is not the first 'hybrid' anthem, nor will it be the last, I'm sure. The South Wales Argus, in *Something Fishy About the Anthem* (2006), printed a version, which was reproduced by Wales Online, claimed to be by Swansea poet, Nigel Jenkins. This version is passed around at Welsh matches from time-to-time. But Jenkins, who was a renowned poet and lecturer in Creative Writing at Swansea University is positioned as an 'insider' writing for other 'insiders'.

By using the pronoun 'their', Dr Sills-Jones is positioning me, and perhaps both of us, as outsiders. It is not 'our' or 'your' anthem. My voice does

not represent Welsh people, in the same way that a Welsh poet based in Swansea does.

So, by creating the piece, am I belittling an anthem which isn't mine?

That hadn't been my intention. The fact that some knowledge of the original was required in order to appreciate what was being done meant, for me, that the intended audience was an 'in-group' who were already interested in Welsh identity - even if only of the fair-weather football-fan kind. I asked Dr Sills-Jones for further comment, elaborating on his public statement. He kindly agreed, and wrote, "the Welsh language needs careful and respectful handling, and has been subject to several attempts at linguicide by the British state... A piss-take English version is dangerous as it threatens to blank out one of the only manifestations of the language amongst the majority of its constituents. Why would you want to do that, or even gesture towards that end?" (Sills-Jones, 2016b)

While I would certainly accept that my piece is playful, - it is framed as a gift, after all - it is in no way intended as a piss-take. From my point of view the power balance disallows such a reading. Not only does the piece require a knowledge of the original anthem in order for it to hold any meaning at all, but also Wales, as a team, were in the ascendancy (England having gone out in an earlier round) and light-hearted wishes to be Welsh were being heard from all around the UK. And yet, clearly, just such a reading is possible. To Dr Sills-Jones the piece recalls 'linguicide by the British state', a reference to situations in which English has been in the power ascendancy.[10]

It was at this point that the tiny, tingling sensation I had felt earlier became impossible to ignore. What I had thought was a stylistic experiment had deeper implications. I'd been squishing down my own disquiet, my own fears, and carrying on regardless. But this challenge forced an internal confrontation that I couldn't back away from.

[10] D Sills-Jones is likely to be referring to state-sponsored repression of the Welsh language in favour of English. See, for instance, the 'Blue Books', the findings of a mid-19th century public enquiry which concluded that the Welsh language contributed to the laziness and immorality of the Welsh people. The long-term effect of the Blue Books was to contribute to a wider social perception of Welsh as a language that could handicap its speakers.

Language isn't just a collection of random sounds. I knew that.

The poetics I was using *meant* something, beyond the game I had been playing. Young people don't invent words *just* for fun (though, of course, it can be), they do it to establish difference, boundaries. Words can put up walls. Metaphorical bombs were exploding all over the no-man's land I had wandered into.

The martial landscape was further brought home to me during a conversation with Dr Simon Rodway (2016), in which he said 'Welsh and English are engaged in a battle that is so one-sided, the other lot don't even know they are fighting.'

Whose side was I on? Did I have a right to speak? If I spoke, was I a representative of Wales? Or was my position, as a writer published by London houses, living in England, too close to the 'centre', as Dr Sills-Jones' use of 'their' seems to suggest? Could I not 'write back', as post-colonial studies calls it, because I had moved too far from the edge?[11]

Up to this point, I had been treating the project like a game, a puzzle to solve. Now it was time to put on armour and think more seriously about the endeavour and the implications of using transnational creativity. Spivak (1993), famously draws the distinction between 'representation' in art, as attempting to create a portrait, and 'representation', in politics, as standing in proxy. I had been thinking only of the art, now I had to think of the politics.

The methodology I am using, of Arts Praxis, encourages a feedback loop between the creation of the art, the conceptual framework, reflection, and back to the art. And so, I was able to absorb the criticism my poetics had received and reflect upon the political questions *in the novel*. I was able to articulate my personal concerns, in reference to the wider context of post-colonial writing and writing for young adults, and go on to embody those concerns in the character of

[11] It was at this point that I realised that Welsh Literature could be, and is often, read through a post-colonial lens. While I did read around the subject, the appropriateness of such a reading is beyond the scope of this thesis. For a fuller study of this contentious issue, see Kirsti Bohata's illuminating body of work on the subject.

Mai. As a result, I found my plot evolving. The conflict in the real world informed the conflict in the novel. Mai is walking through a physical manifestation of her internal emotional landscape, which is, in fact, my emotional landscape as I negotiated the fallout from the conflict I had unintentionally started.

The affect on my work, of using transnational creativity when writing for young people, was beginning to be felt. My actions, in creating poetics based on hybridised language provoked questions relating to community versus personal identity; cultural versus political power; power imbalance, and betrayal. All of which are directly relevant to young adult audiences. I will return to betrayal in the next chapter. Discussion of the other themes will form the basis of the rest of this chapter.

"For every child, or stunted adolescent at the centre of the coming of age movie, there's a grown-up who helps define them - either by inspiring them, or understanding them, or giving them something to revolt against." This passage follows on from the definition of a coming-of-age story used in the introduction above (Mark Kermode, 2018).

This question of a young person being defined by the adults around them, as they move across the space between childhood and adulthood was crucial in constructing both Mai's story, and my own. It is intuitive to think of childhood as the space where adults have the most power - deciding on everything from what a child wears and eats to what religion or political beliefs they might hold. More than this, though, the adults in a young person's like can also have a symbolic role, as keeper of social mores. When adults say 'while you live under my roof, you live by my rules,' they are not only claiming power over the quotidian details of a young person's life, they are also setting the rules of the community to which that young person belongs.

Adults, or more powerful peers, in coming-of-age stories hold the means of defining the adolescent's status as a member of the in-group, or out-group.

It was with this awareness of the power to confer or refuse belonging that I considered Dafydd Sills-Jones' criticism. The nature of my PhD is such that I

am jointly registered at Aberystwyth University, where Dafydd was Director of Postgraduate Studies. In my creative response, it became important that Mai should be confronted with a powerful man who had the means to accept or deny her status as a rightful member of the in-group.

As I wrote, I realised what a powerful trope adults holding control over young people was in the wider YA context. *After the Fire* by Will Hill (2017) is a significant recent example. The novel won the 2018 YA Book Prize. It is told, like my own novel, over two time periods by an internal narrator who struggles with the loyalty she owes to a charismatic leader. In this case, Father John leads the cult in which the heroine, Moonbeam, was raised. Following a devastating fire, Moonbeam is rescued from the compound and put into state care. There Moonbeam has to choose whether to tell her story to another father-figure, Agent Carlyle, who, along with her therapist, manages her case. Moonbeam sees herself primarily in relation to these men, who are able to confer 'insider' or 'outsider' status. Father John does so explicitly in the text by expelling those he deems as Outsiders, literally forcing them outside the perimeters of the compound; whereas the state system does so more subtly, by holding the children in care until they are deemed well enough to re-join any family. Independence is only gained, at the end of the novel, when Moonbeam decides to reveal all of her secrets to Agent Carlyle.

In this scenario, it is adults who control the liminal space between the quotidian safety of childhood and the relative freedom of adulthood. Heroes have to negotiate this space, and risk falling foul of society's expectations - as represented by the adult gatekeepers - on their way, gaining or losing freedom as they negotiate.

I was finding that, as my writing progressed, other people were to be arbiters of my insider, or outsider status. Simon Rodway warned that I would be seen as an insider, by those who were definitely on the outside – English readers in England or beyond. I would be seen as a representative, with the danger that my opinion of Wales and Welshness would be taken as Gospel, whether I wanted that or not. And yet, another encounter demonstrated to me

how tenuous my claim to insider status was. I was recently introduced to a friend-of-a-friend, who told my new acquaintance, 'This is Elen, she's Welsh too!'. The new acquaintance replied, 'Is she? I'll be the judge of that.' He then spoke to me in Welsh and it was my ability to reply that was the marker that allowed me into his 'in group'. Interestingly, I could tell from his accent that he had learnt Welsh as a second language, in school. He had the passion, and judgmentalism, of a new convert. He saw his role as a gatekeeper of Welshness.

Language as a marker of insider or outsider status, judged by self-appointed arbiters, is often seen in coming-of-age fiction. It is one of the ways that an individual can define themselves in relation to the wider community. Recent publishing phenomenon, *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas (2017) expresses this explicitly. Starr lives in 'ghetto' Garden Heights, but attends 'bougie' (bourgeoisie) Williamson Prep. After witnessing a police shooting of a young black friend, Khalil, Starr has to decide whether to speak out, or not. This passage comes early in the book, on Starr's first day back at school after the shooting:

“For at least seven hours I don't have to talk about One-Fifteen [the police officer]. I don't have to think about Khalil. I just have to be normal Starr at normal Williamson and have a normal day. That means flipping the switch in my brain so I'm Williamson Starr. Williamson Starr doesn't use slang - if a rapper would say it, she doesn't say it, even if her white friends do. Slang makes them cool. Slang makes her "hood". Williamson Starr holds her tongue when people piss her off so nobody will think she's the ‘angry black girl’. Williamson Starr is approachable. No stank-eyes, side-eyes, none of that. Williamson Starr is nonconfrontational. Basically, Williamson Starr doesn't give anyone a reason to call her ghetto.

I can't stand myself for doing it, but I do it anyway.” (pp73-4)

Starr uses the third person to express the performative, external aspect of her coded language - the way she moves between different registers to create the right impression on the world around her. It isn't just teenagers who use

coded language; we all adapt our language register to our circumstance. However, the final line in the quote, returning to the first person to indicate the very personal revulsion she feels about herself, does suggest a particular discomfort with the practice among teenagers, who are maybe not yet reconciled to the mutable and contingent nature of 'who we are'. Holden Caulfield's strong antipathy toward what he sees as adult 'phonies' in the classic crossover novel *Catcher in the Rye* (Salinger, 1951) is perhaps the most quintessential example of this tendency towards distrust of the performative.

In working transnationally, creating a language register between Welsh and English, I was surprised to find myself being challenged, not simply by the critics of the project, but by my own deeper understanding of language as a performative marker of identity. The idioms I was writing in weren't just novel expressions of ideas, they were attached to a land and a culture that I had deliberately distanced myself from. Did I want to belong? Does Mai want to belong? Her ambivalence towards the groups she meets in the novel reflect my own negotiation with this question. As she travels from the farm, to the camp, to the village and beyond, Mai becomes deracinated, cut off from her family and childhood experiences. She reinvents herself as a warrior, as a mouse, and finally as a free young woman. Throughout, her sense of self is in flux.

Challenged identities is a common trope in young adult fiction. As with *The Hate U Give*, that may be expressed by language, but it can also come about by more extreme methods, for example in David Levithan’s (2012) body-switching *Every Day* in which we see the main character, A, wake every day in the body of a new 'host'. Each embodiment offers A the potential to be someone else. To literally try out new identities. It is though stories that A manages to maintain a connection with their fixed consciousness: "I show her [A's friend Rhiannon] *Feed.* I tell her about *The Book Thief.* I drag her to find *Destroy All Cars* and *First Day on Earth.* I explain to her that these have been my companions all these years, the constants from day to day, the stories I always return to even if mine is always changing." (p221)

A tells themself stories in order to maintain a constant core that is 'them'. Mai attempts something similar, holding on to the stories of her childhood, told to her by Tad. But, unlike A, she is not successful. The stories are hand-me-downs, with misremembered details and oral embellishments. They are fractured, their relevance waxes and wanes depending on circumstance.

I'd been telling myself similar stories, holding on to memories of a Wales where all the houses were built of bricks that had been fired in kilns at the end of the road; the roofs made of slate, quarried from the hills that sided the valley. Everything around me had been made within spitting distance. Even the entertainment was stubbornly home-grown, with school plays taken from the Mabinogi, or other local legends. Every idea was one that had been passed down like an heirloom. Stale and tired.

I had decided, long ago, that it was a culture I wanted to shrug off.

But Wales is a place where cultural belonging is hard to ignore.

The Welsh independence movement has historically emphasised the role of culture and language above politics and economics, even if there are shifts in that landscape today. Kirsti Bohata (2004, p9) says, "Significantly, Welsh nationalism has focused on resisting the *cultural* imperialism of England, with political autonomy regarded as a means to securing and protecting Welsh cultural difference." Her position is that political independence is a means to secure a cultural end, rather than the cultural demos securing political independence. It is on its culture that Wales traditionally placed emphasis, not on political autonomy.

This situation seems entirely resonant with the young adult experience. The Scottish independence referendum notwithstanding, it is unusual for anyone under 18 to play a role in British politics, and writing for young adults rarely addresses political power directly. Rather YA fiction gives its young protagonists cultural capital - especially in the case of contemporary fiction; or it deals with political structures more allegorically - especially in the case of fantasy genres, where the government is often some totalitarian menace. Identity politics and

activist culture matters more in YA fiction than traditional party or parliamentary politics.

Mai experiences the force of cultural power at key points in the narrative - Tad's stories are influential in forming her aspirations, for example. There are other moments where music is powerful: shared singing, in an oblique reference to Welsh choral music, serves to soothe her. She even succumbs to singing in Saxon following her capture. Descriptions in the text make it clear that other art forms, such as textiles, jewellery and wood carving are not only present, but are used as identity markers to establish belonging.

Art and artists are regularly used as tropes in YA fiction, often with the protagonist using their creativity to define themselves. This perhaps reflects the fact that writers are themselves artists and are simply writing what they know. But it also seems likely that the protagonists of young adults fiction are (through the authors) using art to help construct themselves, and understand themselves, with cultural power viewed as an alternative to the political power they lack.

We see this trope in many examples, across all art forms: the photographer in Julia Green's (2012) *Drawing With Light;* the sketcher in David Almond's (2018) *The Colour of the Sun;* the designer and blogger in Sara Manning's (2012) *Adorkable,* and the musician and tattoo artist in Non Pratt's (2015) *Remix,* to name just a handful.

The challenge from Dafydd Sills-Jones was serving to reconnecting the adult-writer version of me with the long-dormant teenager me, by means of this art-as-construction trope. I was choosing to create and use poetics as a means to express who I was: a person raised near the border, still living near the border, although now, in Bristol, on the English side. I am Welsh, but only at a distance. I was able to 'perform' Welshness-at-a-distance by using a constructed poetics that reflected the dominant influence of England on me as an adult.

Holly Bourne (2018) further explores this connection between art and politics in young people: “Teenagers are continually undermined and underestimated: every successful YA book and film is so because the creators refuse to patronise them, telling them the truth about what it is to be young...I go

into schools a lot to talk about my books, and teenagers today are so politically engaged and brimming with energy and an urgency to fight for a fairer world. The success of *The Hate U Give* and *The Hunger Games* reflect this anger and it's really exciting to watch how art stokes teenagers' political fire. Stories really can change the world, and it's a brilliant time to be writing for this age group."

Both of the texts cited by Bourne see young female protagonists struggle in the face of government structures that institutionalise violence against them, albeit in very different settings. Bourne views the anger represented by these text as full of energy and urgency. What she's describing is counter-cultural, rebellious, activist. Teenagers want to 'change the world', not maintain the status quo. Although I do think there is an element of rhetoric at play, it is reasonable to see teenagers as outsiders in society; they can't vote, after all. They have no voice in the chambers of power.

Voicelessness, in the face of government, resonates with the power imbalance suggested by Dafydd Sills-Jones and Simon Rodway in the relationship between Wales and England. *The Hate U Give's* Starr could be seen as fighting a battle 'so one sided the other lot don't even know they are fighting', with the 'other lot' being the structurally-racist Police Department.

It seemed that a power imbalance has the potential to be a dynamic driver of plot.

As I considered this, I realised we see it time and again in young adult fiction. The cases mentioned by Bourne above are two such examples. But there are many, many more. Stories where an outsider struggles against a more powerful system. A writer, searching for a plot, might very usefully ask themselves 'Who has the power in my story, and how might it come to be redistributed?'. *Asking For It* by Louise O'Neill (2015) makes dramatic use of this idea. Its protagonist, Emma, is unsympathetic, shallow and callous. We are not naturally 'on her side' which is unusual for a YA protagonist. We are not inclined to root for her as an underdog. This means that, when Emma is sexually assaulted by a group of boys at a party, readers find themselves in uncomfortable territory - the boys, supported by the wider community, hold all

the power and the reader finds themselves somewhat complicit in the judgement that is heaped on Emma. The power imbalance between Emma and the boys' sports team; the police; the judicial system and the society it represents is starkly exposed and yet, as Emma is not part of the reader's in-group, we find ourselves destabilised and uncomfortable. In *The Short Knife,* Mai is more likeable than O'Neill's Emma, but, like Emma, she doesn't fit neatly into the power structures established around her and suffers as a result.

There's one further power imbalance of particular interest in young adult fiction, which I've sought to exploit while writing *The Short Knife,* which is the dynamic between author and reader. As the example of O'Neill suggests, the author can be in a position of power over the reader, manipulating them. The author controls the reader's emotional experience, usually without being visible at all in the text.

When the audience is young adult, that dynamic is heightened by the likely age difference between author and reader. There are, of course, teens writing for teens - from S.E. Hinton to Beth Reekles - and adults reading YA fiction. However, most writers of YA fiction will be significantly older than their readers. There is a pretence, especially in the stylistically common first-person, present-tense novel, that the author is a peer of the reader - of a similar age, with similar interests and concerns. But, of course, they may be decades older, with wildly different concerns.

By thinking more generally about power imbalances, as a result of using transnational creativity, I was struck by the relationship between reader and writer in terms of power. Was I holding the most power, as the emotional manipulator, or were readers, who, collectively decide the path of a writer's career? Did the nexus shift? It certainly felt slippery.

I sought to reflect this within the novel. Mai imagines she has power at the beginning of the novel, framing herself as a warrior, but, confrontations with more powerful people during the course of the novel diminish her standing, in her own eyes. These people include her big sister, who makes the decisions; Gwrtheyrn, who can withhold care, and Horse who can sell her, if he so

chooses. Beyond the plot points, I also wanted to explicitly demonstrate the power of the author through stylistic means. In early drafts, when Algar initially appears at the farm, every beta-reader assumed that he rapes Haf. This was never stated in the text, but the conventions of historical fiction, the rampant damselling[12] that is a staple plot device in all manner of storytelling media, and the fact that sexual violence against women is a widely reported horror of contemporary conflicts, all seemed to invite this conclusion. So, I decided to make use of reader's own expectations in order to pull the rug from under them at the mid-point, when we discover that the sister Mai has been caring for during labour is Viola, not Haf.

I've made the power of the author more prominent than might usually be the case by 'tempting' the reader to make assumptions about plot. It only works if they have enough experience of the world to know that rape is used as a weapon in conflict. I am playing with their understanding of textual possibilities in a way that feels more god-like than usual in texts, where the author tries to hide.

Readers of later drafts commented on how frustrating this reveal was. They had been aware of the authorial manipulation and felt betrayed by it. It was entirely my intention that readers should be aware of the power the author holds over them, so I felt no need to alter the text. I was content to 'betray' my readers. Which leads me to the most compelling insight of the writing process. In my case, the use of transnational creativity affected the novel for young people most powerfully when it came to the theme of betrayal.

[12] For an insightful exploration of damselling and more general violence against women in narrative tropes see https://feministfrequency.com/video/damsel-in-distress-part-2-tropes-vs-women/

Chapter Three: Confined

By using transnational creativity in writing for young people, I was left with a heightened awareness of the themes of betrayal and loyalty - themes which are creatively useful for the author of young adult fiction and can be harnessed to enrich a writer's fiction. In this chapter, I unpick the notion of betrayal in a Welsh-English context, and how, through the multi-modal cycle of reflection required by my methodology, this affected *The Short Knife.* I demonstrate the explosive creative power of betrayal, specifically parental betrayal, betrayal of childhood and betrayal of community. I also compare my treatment of the theme with others in the field, specifically with *Sweet Pizza* by G.R. Gemin (2016) and *The Curious Tale of the Lady Caraboo* by Catherine Johnson (2015).

I have selected these texts for a number of reasons: both authors have close links with Wales, Gemin was raised in Cardiff, while Johnson was raised in London by her Welsh-speaking mother and maintained close ties with her Welsh grandparents and cousins. Both writers embody their own transnational experiences in their novels: Gemin was born in Italy and *Sweet Pizza* is set in one of the many cafes established by Italian immigrants to Wales; Johnson's father arrived in the UK from Jamaica and *The Curious Tale* is written with a keen awareness of Britain's place at the centre of empire. Finally, both novels contain elements of historical fiction: *Sweet Pizza* has two parallel stories that intertwine. In one strand, teenager Joe tries to revive the fortunes of his family's Italian cafe; meanwhile, Joe is also recording his grandad’s oral history of internment during the Second World War. *The Curious Tale of the Lady Caraboo* is entirely historical, based on the true story of Mary Baker who, in 1817, adopted the guise of an 'exotic' princess mysteriously transplanted to Bristol. Her deception takes in a wealthy family, the Worralls, who choose to believe her and support her. The story was reported in newspapers at the time and has been retold in many forms. In her version Johnson makes Caraboo younger, her lie is told as a result of extreme trauma, and so Caraboo is seen entirely sympathetically.

I was keen to read these texts as a writer, to see what I could learn from them while writing my own transnational historical YA.

In order to understand the criticism that the use of Translation Plus in a Welsh-English context constitutes a betrayal, it is necessary to understand the cultural role of the Welsh language in Wales.

The Welsh language is, for many of its speakers, simply the language they learned when they were infants - it is their mother tongue. But Dr Andrew G. Livingstone et al. (2009, pp302-5) has also identified a role for the language as, what he calls, 'an identity management resource'. His research found that it is considered to be of symbolic importance to the national identity of both Welsh and non-Welsh speakers alike. Which is to say that, in this study, even those Welsh people who don't speak Welsh consider the ability to speak the language as one of the identifiers of nationhood - thus denying themselves full access to their own nation.

Within this framework, where the language signifies an end-goal in and of itself, as an expression of nationhood, any challenge to the language must be loaded.

Statistics For Wales' (2011) analysis of the census found that only 19% of Wales' population self-identify as Welsh speakers[13]. Which implies that the 'identity management resource' is guarded by only 19% of the population. I am one of those guardians, or, more accurately, my parents made a conscious decision that they intended me to become a guardian, and sent me to school to train in guardianship (which, in itself, sounds like the set-up of a YA fantasy).

By hybridising the national anthem I am encroaching on one of the few shared identity markers of a nation who value the language far more than might be expected from the limited number of people who speak it. I am diluting the opportunity to belong. Perhaps, even challenging nationhood itself by subsuming the identity marker within the English language. And I'm throwing my role as guardian into question.

[13] The Welsh Government has ambitious plans to increase this to 1 million speakers by 2050, see 'Cymraeg 2050' report, which is roughly 30% of the population.

This casual side-project has clear implications for my main project. The Welsh language is a marker of identity and a site of resistance. By trying to use it as an inspiration for a form of English, am I, prima facie, not a 'Welsh patriot'? Is my desire to give a flavour of the Welsh language to non-Welsh speakers a betrayal?

So far, I've presented this issue in an unemotional way. As though I were writing about someone else, or something from long ago.

But that isn't how it happened.

I was at Sunday lunch, in a pub, with my partner and two friends. Our table had a view over Bristol's Old Town, within seagull-cry of the harbour. I'd ordered, and was drinking a pint, when my phone pinged. I wouldn't normally check messages in company, but that morning I'd had an unsettling exchange on Facebook with an academic I barely knew and had asked him for clarification.

So I checked my phone, and saw it was a private message from Dr Sills-Jones. I read it.

I felt an immediate adrenaline hit, as though someone in the pub had thrown a bar stool. My heart pounded. I had to get up, leave the table and my chatting friends, and head down to the bathrooms. I read the message again, washed my face, breathed.

Read it again.

Yes, this is a cerebral, theoretical discussion, but it is a personal, embodied, emotional one too. Robin Nelson's Arts Praxis model sees the phenomenology of the artist as a required element in the generation of knowledge. I *felt* the effects, as much as I considered them. For a moment, I was a teenager again. Told off by someone in authority. Hiding in the bathroom. A classic scene in many coming-of-age stories. The tingling sensations about the significance of my actions that I had felt earlier become tremors. Feeling like a teenager, experiencing the classic teenage emotion of shame.

I am not for one moment comparing my work to Chinua Achebe's, however, he said something in an interview that resonated strongly with me: “The real question is not whether Africans could write in English, but whether they ought to. Is it right that a man should abandon his mother tongue for someone else's? It looks like a betrayal and produces a guilty feeling.” (Achebe, 1997, p348).

I did feel guilt. Guilt and shame. I'd been enthralled by the puzzle I'd set myself with this project, thinking exclusively about techniques, methods and the emerging poetics, I'd not considered what it might mean in terms of my relationship with my country, my family and my identity. Amy Coquaz (2017), writing about what she calls 'bilingual writing' suggests that writing which allows two languages to come together offers a form of 'reconciliation'; that there can be healing in the act. However, she also acknowledges that the 'contact between two languages [reveals] tensions and fragmentations.' At least initially, in the first flush of emotion, healing felt improbable. I found myself confronted by fragmentations - of my own image of myself as a loyal person; and tension - what on earth was I going to do with this project now?

But tension is a necessary ingredient of drama, conflict is at the heart of what makes a story. And these feelings of questioned loyalties, betrayal and shame could all be incorporated in the Arts Praxis model. The emotional drama could be embodied, in the person of Mai, and become drama on the page.

In one way, this experience was a blessing. I honestly couldn't remember the last time I had felt such raw guilt and shame in relation to my roots. And both are emotions I associate with my teenage years. By working transnationally, I had inadvertently opened up an avenue to re-feeling the intensity of youthful emotion. It was an intensity that is extremely valuable to a writer.

The ability to re-connect with the teenage landscape is an important requirement for YA authors. Mary Kole (2012, p20) writes about the range of emotions, given added potency because of their newness in what she calls 'the electricity of adolescence'. She elaborates: “You have your first love, your first

heartbreak, your first truly selfless act, your first betrayal, your first seriously bad decision, your first moment of profound pride, the first time you're a hero...You feel by turns invincible and vulnerable, inconsequential and permanent."

By crossing borders, I was accessing what felt like first betrayal, first shame, all over again. There are clear parallels between crossing national borders and crossing temporal and developmental borders - teenagers are moving away from their childhood, their homes, and their families. The steps might be uneven, and erratic, but the direction of travel is clear: they are moving away from their roots; therefore the risk of experiencing all the attendant emotions of deracination is high. Young readers are likely to empathise with my – and Mai's – dilemma, if I could embody it within the novel.

Following John Yorke's (2014) suggestion in *Into the Woods* that synthesis in a novel comes about by the interplay of the protagonist and the forces of antagonism, I made the motif of betrayal the dominant force of antagonism in *The Short Knife. By e*xposing my readers to multiple instances of betrayal, each thesis and antithesis creates a better understanding of the nature of betrayal and why it happens, with Mai also synthesising the betrayals as she grows into adulthood. This sense of growing up, from innocence to experience by means of incremental betrayals, is a theme of both *Sweet Pizza* and *The Curious Tale of the Lady Caraboo*. In this section, I will show how this is expressed across the three texts and consider what implications this has for writers of young adult fiction. There are four motifs I consider: betrayal by family members; betrayal of the childhood self; betrayal of innocence, and betrayal of community - though, of course, these motifs are interlinked within the plots of all of the novels.

It is a truism of writing for children and young people that writers have to get rid of the parents. Usually this is for practical reasons - an orphan has more narrative agency than a child still protected by family. However, as I wrote *The Short Knife* the loss of a parent took on a deeper utility. The realisation that parents are vulnerable and fallible people in their own right is a necessary and painful discovery in the lives of young people - coming to terms with that

'betrayal' is a crucial step on the road to independence. There are examples throughout fiction of young people being let down by a parental figure, from Todd and Mayor Prentiss in Patrick Ness' (2008) *The Knife of Never Letting Go*, to Emma and her keeping-up-appearances Mam in *Asking for It,* to J.K. Rowling's (1997-2007) Harry Potter being let down by the Dursleys, not to mention James, Lily and Dumbledore who all desert him, however unwillingly.

I gave Mai this essential rite of passage in two forms - unwilling desertion by Mam and Tad, and a supposed betrayal by her surrogate mother, Haf.

In Chapter 15 of the novel, Mai gives us an alternative view of what her life might have been if it weren't for the loss of her parents. We see the 'natural' state of being that she might reasonably have expected for herself: In Bryn's warm, comfortable home Mai says, “I wanted to stay here. To stand with his mother at her loom and keep the weights straight, or mind the little ones who gurgled and lolled with rag dolls.” In Mai's imaginings a mother weaves, children play with toys. Their lives are simple, ordered and uncomplicated. With the death of her mother and father, Mai also sees the death of these simple dreams. She is forced to grow up and live in a messy, painful world much sooner than she would have wanted.

Haf's 'betrayal' of Mai is also a crucial plot point that sees Mai forced to engage with the adult world. In the role of surrogate parent, Haf wants to protect her younger sister, but she is not yet an adult herself and an indiscreet moment sees her sharing her sister's secret with people who then hurt Mai. I don't want to ascribe a single meaning to this plot point, but it was important to me that an unreasonable burden be placed on shoulders that are too young to carry it - Haf is an unwilling and unprepared guardian and the repercussions of that failure propel the plot.

In the *Curious Tale of the Lady Caraboo* we see the consequences for another young girl who is forced into adulthood before she has the resources and knowledge to be able to cope. Mary (subsequently Caraboo) is not orphaned, but her father is estranged and she has had to fend for herself as best she can. This betrayal of parental care leaves Mary fractured and broken, a

victim of abuse and violence. It seems possible, for a while, that Mary can reinvent herself as Caraboo from a rag-tag assembly of markers she curates for herself: a language rehashed from the various languages heard on London streets; clothes refashioned from Cassandra Worrall's 'Indian muslins'; rituals reimagined from Mrs Worrall's' books on 'all the countries of the world'. Mary is certainly channelling Orientalist ideas of the Noble Savage, but she is doing so as a defence mechanism, as a way to heal herself.

Despite her reinvention, Mary is more vulnerable than she was before, not least because her own sense of self-worth is threatened by the betrayal she perpetrates against the Worralls who have trusted her:

"What was she thinking?! She should stop this now. She did not want to hurt Cassandra, or Mrs Worrall, who was kindness itself...

It had been too diverting, being the Princess, worshipping the sun, imagining a life far away where her father was King, speaking in tongues like the old ladies in the Primitive Baptist chapel in Witheridge, another lifetime away." (pp56-7)

Caraboo is caught up in her own invention despite awareness of the pain her lies will cause. By the end of the novel, Caraboo has become trapped in her own pretence, liable to being unmasked at any moment. This idea that identity is contingent and mutable, but that getting it wrong will cause pain and shame is a very power idea in relation to young people - and, indeed to people experiencing transnational lives, as my own experience demonstrates.

Removing parental protection, having guardians betray those in their care, offers the author the opportunity to construct plots that expose the character's 'un-readiness' for adulthood. Lucy Coats (2018), the author of teen novel, *Cleo,* says "I think that... family betrayal is the one which hurts the most. You are supposed to be able to trust your family above all others so when that dynamic breaks down it's an interesting thing to explore as a writer." Pain and hurt are key ingredients of drama, it is a truism of the writing class that authors should 'torture' their characters.

If pain caused by family disloyalty is one that hurts the most, then betrayal of young protagonists by those meant to protect them will lead to stories with the biggest emotional impact. Protagonists in those situations will make mistakes, fall prey to temptations and constantly have to reinvent themselves as they get closer to an adult construction of the world. The coming-of-age story tests young protagonists and it is betrayal by adults who should be guardians that make this testing possible.

Conversely, there is similar narrative potential in having young people betray their childhood. The interplay between what a family wants for their offspring, and what that young person wants for themselves is a recurring trope of young adult fiction, and one which has the competing compulsions of loyalty and betrayal at its heart.

Caraboo wishes she could give the female Worralls what they so desperately want. The women of the family are bound to their roles in the domestic sphere and yearn for the sort of travel and adventure that is only possible for the men of the family. Caraboo represents that adventure and brings a much-desired energy to their home. But it is an energy built on a lie. It is only in fiction, in stories and in art that Caraboo can be the child Mrs Worrall wants:

“The portrait [of Caraboo commissioned by Mrs Worrall] was beautiful, in a way she had never thought possible for Mary Willcox, but had always imagined for Caraboo. The girl in the picture, regal in her turban, looked as if she had been painted on the distant shore of some kingdom she ruled, only now brought back to England... Caraboo smiled. She could walk away from Knole Park and the Worralls now; she could do so knowing that she had not lied, she had entirely become the Princess they all desired her to be.” (p176).

It is the tension between what her surrogate family want, and what she wants for herself that drives so much of the conflict in the book.

In *Sweet Pizza* the tension between family aspirations and individual desires is less fraught with peril - Joe doesn't risk imprisonment, as Caraboo

does - but it remains an important driver of narrative. The tension at the heart of the domestic drama in this case is that Mam, the third generation of Italian-Welsh owners to run the family cafe, wants to sell-up in the face of a failing High Street. Joe, whose relationship with Italy is symbolised by his infatuation with his unobtainable, glamorous older cousin, wants to revive its fortunes:

“He was Joe Davis, heir to Cafe Merelli of Bryn Mawr. If it sold, he'd just be Joe Davis who lives in a house.” (p17).

The word 'heir' invokes grandeur and significance. Joe sees his Italian ancestry as a mean of imbuing his humdrum life with meaning. For Mam the cafe is a millstone she would rather be rid of. Joe's schemes and plans, executed throughout the novel, are done despite his mother, and cause a rift in their relationship.

By prioritising his own Italian identity above his family relationships, Joe betrays his mother - he encourages his cousin to take over cooking, which side-lines Mam in her own business. However, Joe sees himself as part of a lineage which his mother has betrayed by giving up on the cafe. He sees his family as being multi-generational, with interdependence and mutual responsibility, so he is able to frame his betrayal of his mother as a necessary evil for the greater good, self-justifying a nefarious act.

This self-justification resonated with me, as I reflected on my own betrayal. Alongside the very teenage emotions of guilt and shame, I also engaged in a little denial and self-justification. Yes, I could see Dafydd Sills-Jones' point, but I wasn't hurting anyone, it was just a joke, it was no big deal, and anyway, I was only speaking for myself, I wasn't representing Wales.

But, like Joe, I kept coming back to the idea of heritage - of *being an heir.* My parents had had a dream for me, when they were young and I was an infant. They had spoken to me in Welsh; a language my grandmother had been ashamed of speaking, a language that my dad had been beaten for using in front of visitors. They had sent me to a Welsh medium school, despite their

private worries that it might hinder my educational development.[14] My acquisition of two languages, English and Welsh, had been a deliberate political act by my parents. They wanted me to become an active member of a confident, self-determining nation (they still do.)

But I had left.

I had taken a teenage mind-set with me, and it had ossified in the intervening years. In writing through Mai's story, and searching for betrayal in other novels for young people, I was also finally embarking on my own, very late, coming-of-age.

Mai was already speaking in a voice that was an avatar for my own linguistic situation - comfortable somewhere between Welsh and English. Now she also became an avatar for my own understanding of loyalty and betrayal, my own relationship with Wales and the community I had once belong to.

The Short Knife begins with Mai heavily influenced by Tad's construction of her as an heir to a Romano-British heritage. Tad keeps this crumbling identity alive as he shelters her from the post-Roman deterioration of infrastructure. The stories he tells are classically influenced, but as crumbing as the cities around them, - Goliath and Polyphemus have become fused; he has formed his own understanding of the Trinity, untroubled by the Council of Nicaea. Without any outside influence, Mai is able to accept his version of who she is. Her childhood is, as mine was, constructed by the narrative of her parents.

When she journeys to the camp on the hill, she hopes to be joining kin. But she finds the relationships is transactional and conditional. Gwrtheyrn expects loyalty, work or other value in return for shelter. Belonging is dependent on a willingness to subsume her individuality for the good of the group.

The third landscape in the novel, the Saxon village, seems, on the surface to be easier. There are freedoms here, despite the fact she is captive. Mai is able to form strong bonds with the other women and feels that she

[14] The influence, no doubt, of the Treachery of the Blue Books being felt down the generations. However, my parents need not have worried. It seems being bilingual is good for you, and has even been associated with a delay in the onset of dementia, see Ellen Bialystok *Ageing in Two Languages* (May 2016).

belongs. But it is a false consciousness; she has sublimated her oppression into a more palatable narrative. It is only when she visits the pagan temple that she realises she has been lying to herself. Freedom eventually comes by embracing what she is - a young British woman, beneath notice.

It is the synthesis of all of these experiences that make the coming-of-age elements of the novel meaningful. The tension between what the parental figures want for Mai and what she wants, or is able to be, create the situations in which her character can develop.

Betrayal of and by parental figures can also be expanded to represent betrayal of community. This was at the heart of my own denial and guilt over the task I had set myself, and it is a powerful motif in the novels for young people which engage with transnational creativity.

The finale of *the Short Knif*e is played out against the backdrop of the legend of the 'Treachery of the Long Knives' in which Horse and his brother kill the native British at a feast, thus violating all rules of hospitality. A world in which the mores of good behaviour are tossed into the air is, of course, ripe with possibility for conflict and drama. But, more than this, a setting where a character is forced to choose between the society they are part of and their own wellbeing – physically or mentally – is a question that must be of profound interest to young adults as they cross the threshold between childhood and adulthood: what is required to fit in? Is the price worth it? When Mai decides to let Haf leave without her, in Chapter 55, Haf asks:

“Who are your people?'

'You and Viola.'

'Is that enough?'

'That's all I have left.”

Here Mai is choosing to reject the wider community, Haf is choosing to accept responsibility for the remaining Britons. Both choices will cause pain, but take the girls closer to becoming adults.

Caraboo finds a temporary respite from the pain of adulthood in her disguise - a disguise which is constructed by rejecting her Englishness. Although Mary as a character is 'English', Johnson makes it clear that the interconnectivity of Empire has affected Britain, as well as its colonies. This is not a static community, exporting ideas only, but a mutable one, receiving ideas from without, and Mary is in a position to exploit that. She arrives in at Knole Park - a British stately home - and walks “past the painting of [Cassandra's] mother's family in Philadelphia in America... past the dainty Chinese drawing room, past the library... and Mama's books on all the countries of the world.” (p11)

Johnson makes it clear that Britain itself is a fertile community, where ideas and cultures are able to cross-pollinate. In becoming Caraboo, Mary is rejecting the pain and squalor of her English existence and, instead, identifying as someone altogether more 'exotic'. Mary, and the Worralls, have a view of Empire that we could identify as classic Orientalism. However, I think such a reading would miss the power-dynamic at play. Caraboo is a fantastical creation who empowers her creator Mary, the traumatised English girl, and lets her become a superhero of sorts. Johnson also chooses to make Mary's race ambiguous in the text. I contend that Johnson is engaging with Homi Bhabha's (1994, p.247) understanding of 'culture as an uneven, incomplete production of meaning and value, often composed of incommensurable demands and practises, produced in the act of survival'. Mary's rejection of Englishness in favour of an identity constructed from the materials of Empire is an act of survival - the transnational serving to heal her trauma.

We see the same struggle to a lesser extent in *Sweet Pizza.* Joe is caught between two communities - Welsh and Italian, as was his grandfather before him. The decision to belong, or not belong, is multi-generational, with each new Merelli-Jones having to make the decision for themselves.

Throughout *Sweet Pizza*, the question of betrayal of community - indigenous Welsh and immigrant Italian - is a strong driver of narrative. In the historical story, the crisis of war demands social conformity. Beppe's father is

arrested, and the local boys insist that Beppe denounce his Italian-ness, as we can see in this extract:

“It was sometime later, while I was making a delivery for him, that Johnny Corbett was waiting for me in a back alley. He stood there grinning.

'How's it going, Adolf?' he asked.

I didn't feel scared this time, what with everything that was happening. I was in no mood to put up with him.

'I see you had a spot of bother with the cafe window?' he said.

'Was it you?' I asked.

'Me? No. But you Eyeties are not welcome - go back to Mussolini.'

'I was born here.'

'Welsh, are you?' He came up to me. 'Say you love Wales and hate Italy then.'

'I love Wales,' I said, 'and I love Italy. We've done nothing wrong.” (p99)

The same drive to conform colours Joe's contemporary understanding of what it is to be of immigrant heritage in Britain. Joe asks his friend. Combi:

“What's wrong with being proud of my Italian roots?'

'Because you're Welsh.'

'I'm Italian!'

'Welsh.'

'So you're not Afro-Caribbean then?' Joe asked.

'I'm Welsh,' said Combi. 'And Afro-Caribbean on my dad's side, but I don't go on about it. Not like you, "*Oh, I wish my name was Joe Merelli instead of Joe Davis,"'* he said in a whiny voice. "*It sounds SO much better...*"'

Joe kicked him under the table.

'Did you *say* that?' Mam asked.

'I can't remember,' said Joe, narrowing his eyes at Combi.” (p8)

In both of the parallel stories a hybrid identity is seen problematic, or even traitorous to the community. The individuals have to suppress their minority identity in order to find acceptance. It is only at the end of the novel that Joe finds a satisfactory synthesis - reconciliation, even, to use Coquaz' term - when

he brings together the community under the banner of a food festival to celebrate Beppe's release from hospital. The diversity of cultures is seen, finally, as a strength, rather than as a weakness.

However, in personal conversation, the writer Giancarlo Gemin (2018), acknowledged that this reconciliation, this happy ending for Joe and Beppe, 'romanticises an ideal'. He characterised his writing as 'self-censorship' in this coming-together. He expanded on this by saying the gatekeepers of fiction for young people - parents, booksellers, librarians, editors and so on - are often too uptight and want a more palatable word-view for the young readers in their care. It is significant that *Sweet Pizza* is written for a slightly younger age group that *Lady Caraboo,* more tween or teen than more solidly young adult. It might be that the gatekeepers of eleven or twelve year olds' reading material are less willing for the price of belonging to be set too high. That the painful tension of choosing to belong, at the expense of your own well-being, is a dilemma reserved for older teens.

I found my own expression of this tension in *The Short Knife* by having Mai consciously consider what she might or might not owe to the community she was born into. Most tellingly, in terms of plot, this comes at the point where she is asked to rob a Roman tomb in order to earn her keep. In Chapter 15 Mai reluctantly agrees to the raid, in exchange for food from the leaders at the hillfort where she has sought sanctuary. When I first came across evidence of 5th century grave robbing in an archaeological report, by P. Rahtz (1992), I was thrilled by the creative possibilities. The act of actually robbing a grave, told in first person, blow by blow, or body, horns and hooves, is emotive. Readers will, hopefully, feel some of the squeamishness and doubt about the wisdom of the endeavour that I have felt about writing this book. This extract is one of those key scenes, as Mai is caught between two quite adult concerns. On the one hand, she is being asked to pay her own way, to contribute to her society in order to eat. On the other hand, the task she's been given breaks a strong cultural taboo. Traditions like burial rites - or using our mother tongue - are bargains we have made with those who have gone before us. We can

reasonably expect that our children, and the generations to come will honour those shared traditions, as guardians. They are the essential ritual acts that create the bonds of community. By opening tombs – or rejecting a mother tongue – we not only risk desecration, but we are also saying that the bonds of culture are breakable. As a writer who might be seen to be betraying my cultural inheritance, the symbolism of a ransacked tomb is delicious. So, betrayal forms the bedrock of a beat of action in the novel. Mai is forced to decide which is the lesser evil. The black and white world of childhood morality becomes the shades of grey of adult understanding: a point of transition. At the time, Mai judges the adults for their moral ambivalence: "This one's empty,' Rhodri said, as though talking about flour bins or water troughs - not the homes of the dead." Mai has not yet learnt how to negotiate difficult choices like an adult; as she is exposed, again and again, to betrayals, she sees that the same set of circumstances look different, depending on the viewer's perspective and that she herself looks like a traitor from Haf's point of view.

Ultimately, the growth through betrayal that Mai encounters is the victory of experience over innocence. Escape looks like abandonment; betrothals turn into massacres; love turns to rejection. Each of these incremental steps allows Mai to reach a better understanding of herself and her position in the world. She is finally able to construct her own identity, as a Welsh runaway, on the river with the family she has chosen for herself.

It is to this notion of personal reconstruction that I turn in the next chapter.

Chapter Four: Fledged

In this final chapter I consider how using transnational creativity while writing *The Short Knife* led to a shift in my own understanding of my role as a writer. The cumulative effects of incremental betrayals were playing out for Mai, on the page, but the nature of Arts Praxis, specifically the critical reflection stage, meant that they were also affecting me too.

I realised, as I embodied my concerns in the characters in the novel, and I considered the theme in other books for young people, that I was resentful of my past. But I still cared; I was still emotionally attached to the people and places I'd grown up with. As Mai grew towards adulthood, during writing, I was also growing. Here, I will set out some of the insights I gained more personally from the experience of using transnational creativity while writing a novel for young people. I will touch on the usefulness of stories in creating conceptions of ourselves, my own relationship with the stories of and about Wales, and the synergies between 'Welshness' and 'adolescence' in my writing.

As discussed in both Disrupted and Confined, Mai experiences a number of significant betrayals that shape her understanding of herself and her relationship with the communities she finds herself in. Her journey is propelled by a search for a home, and all that it symbolises.

As my protagonist, Mai, grows older and moves location, her understanding of what it is to have a home changes. At first, it is solidly and reassuringly represented by a building, the farm, and the family within. Then, once the farm is gone, the family turn westward to the camp – away from the liminal uncertainty of the Saxon-influenced east. But Mai finds the camp stifling and oppressive. Later, as she runs from the camp and is captured, she is taken east and lives through the medium of the Saxon language.

This pattern of movement has something in common with my own - growing up near the border, with a family who looked to the west (which is

traditionally more Welsh-speaking), then leaving eastwards, to earn my living exclusively through English.

Mai lacks power through most of the novel, until she begins to come to terms with Haf's betrayal, and with the realisation that Haf considers Mai to be the one who is the traitor. It is this recognition, becoming cognisant of her own flaws, that allows her to turn her weaknesses into strengths. She isn't a warrior, she's a pretty ordinary, slightly mousey, young woman. She finally escapes by being honest about herself. I had to do the same. The Wales I grew up in wasn't perfect, but I wasn't perfect either. I had been sulky and recalcitrant, keen to take offence and slow to forgive. Perhaps the people I'd grown up with had had reason to judge me. I had been a poor guardian.

Such a galling thing to realise about oneself.

Mai ends the book floating on a river, away from the Saxons *and* the British. She still has further to go before she finds a home. Partly because she is still an adolescent at the end of the book, she still has more to learn before becoming an adult; but partly because any kind of belonging is impermanent and negotiable, it is possible to self-exclude or self-integrate, as I was discovering.

The power of stories was making it possible for me to exclude or include myself, as I wished, as I imagined, or conjured. Daniel Pennac (2010, p.82) wrote, of the act of reading:

“...most of the books that shaped our lives were read in a spirit of opposition. We used to read (and still do) defensively, positioning ourselves in a state of siege. If we are escaping reality, in thrall to the magic of the book, then we are escapees busy constructing ourselves, in the process of being born.

Reading is an act of resistance. Against what? Against all constraints.”

It seemed to me that writing too was a way for the escapee to construct themself. Me. I could escape the stories I had been telling myself for so long about the responsibilities I had shirked, the duties I had rejected, and the guardianship I had abandoned. I could be born again, temporarily, as Mai.

Pennac draws here on the martial imagery I was familiar with already - language as a site of resistance, readers in a state of siege, invisible battles being fought using syntax and sounds instead of arms and armour.

If I was on a metaphorical battlefield, then perhaps I could write myself out of it.

Mai chooses to reject both a British and a Saxon way of life, in favour of an idealised, dreamed-of community beyond the sea. Returning to what Kermode views as a trope of coming-of-age cinema - 'if you don't decide who you are, others will decide for you,' - Pennac suggests that the same is true of coming-of-age fiction. I contend that it is also true of *writing* coming-of-age fiction. I was edging closer to deciding for myself who I wanted to be in relation to my roots. Stories were helping me get there.

English is a rapacious language that has absorbed and assimilated other languages that have crossed its path.[15] I had grown up believing that Welsh was weak in comparison, a little mouse of a language clinging on at the very edges. And, in some ways, it is. But I didn't have to believe that the only way to defend it is to turn westward, to speak Welsh in every conceivable circumstance, or feel guilty for failing. By 2018, some two years after this process began, I had realised that I could listen to Radio Cymru when Georgia Ruth was playing really interesting, exciting music, and I could *turn it off* when the interminable *Taro'r Post* was interviewing planning officers about the relocation of some chapel. I could do imaginative play with my niece in Welsh, but moan to my sister about university admin in English. My language choices could be situational and contingent and there was no need to feel guilty.

In the same way that a young adult reader can construct themselves by picking up Dostoevsky or Austen one day, then Louise Rennison or Charlie Higson, or even Dahl or Walliams the next, I could choose who I wanted to be, through language and storytelling.

I've always written in English, and, since I left school, I've consumed most of my stories in English too. It hasn't been a conscious choice, more a reflection

[15] See, for example, https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/jul/27/english-language-global-dominance accessed 05.09.18

of the situation I've found myself in, living in England with more knowledge of the London publishing scene than the Welsh one. I maintained an interest in telling marginal stories, however, ones which consider the role of class, roots and language in creating the characters. One of the books I'm most proud of writing, *Diamonds and Daggers* is the story of Piotr, a boy whose Polish father wants to return home, despite the fact that Piotr has only known the UK as his home. In that book, Piotr reflects on how the fact his father speaks English with an accent; has at least two words for every object; is a beat too slow at understanding jokes, still thinks of Gdansk as home - all of these things differentiate Piotr's experiences from those of his father. There is a chasm between them created and sustained by language. In the story, reconciliation is made possible by music, a move away from language completely.

The division I had perceived, between me and my country of birth, was created and sustained by the stories I had been telling myself.

Perhaps I could change those stories.

Anecdotally, it's common, for those who have left their childhood home, to feel alienated from it. But it seems that 'being Welsh' is a designation which is strangely ephemeral, and can slip away if it's not carefully tended. John Osmond (1992-3, p.24), writing in the New Welsh Review, wrote about one of the border towns, "...on the face of it, you might not readily recognise it to be Wales. You see in that sublime gradation...Abergavenny is not 'very Welsh'. What other mainstream nationalism in the British Isles has such an attribute applied to it, indicating that its identity is a question of degree?"

If it is a question of degree, then there is no 'getting it right', being 'proper Welsh'. Rather, like the formative years of adolescence, I could try definitions on for size, and feel freedom in that playfulness.

Suddenly, my sense of being an outsider was lessened. We're all outsiders, and policing each other is a hiding to nothing.

Diane Green (2009, p.6) proposes one solution to celebrating what might seem like a negative; she writes "Whereas in the (arguably colonial) past the Welsh speaker might have been perceived as inferior (or marginal), today he

would be almost unilaterally bilingual and therefore, in terms of culture, both of the centre and simultaneously marginal... What is needed to prevent such stigmatizing demarcations [of those without an implied connection to Welsh decent because of a lack of language] is an acceptance of alterity."

Like Coquaz' vision of transnational writing as reconciliation, Green offers a view of bilingualism as acceptance of alterity, of a state of otherness. A way of embracing and celebrating alienation. And what could be more relevant to teenage readers than work which celebrates alterity and alienation?

I began reading more Welsh fiction, especially writers for children and young people like Bethan Gwanas and Lleucu Roberts. I saw the same teen concerns emerge in their work as I'd observed in English YA: betrayal by adults; betrayal of community, and struggles with identity. In addition, I saw recurrent themes about belonging and alienation in a Welsh context. For example, *Gwylliaid* by Bethan Gwanas sees the main character, Rhys, ridiculed for the anglicised Welsh he speaks, and statistics about the use of the Welsh language are included in dialogue as a natural teenage concern.

I downloaded Welsh bands to my Spotify playlist[16] and found myself singing along, after a while, on dog walks around Bristol. I had favourite Welsh podcasts.

I found that, while I had been getting on with my life in England, Wales had been evolving too. Of course it had. And, like a teenager seeing their parent's flaws and loving them anyway - I finally grew up.

In August 2018, I returned to the Eisteddfod.

Not, as in 2016, the Llangollen International Eisteddfod, with my niece in tow as emotional ballast.

This time I was braver. I went, alone (though with Twitter for company) to the National Eisteddfod. This is, traditionally, a coming together of Welsh-Wales, over the course of one week, to celebrate art, craft and literature in the

[16] Gwenno and Band Pres Llareggub are worth listening to, if you like Radio 6 Music. Swnami are good if you like boy bands.

language. 2016's Elen wouldn't have gone near the event. In her mind, it was akin to a week spent in chapel, atoning for being not quite good enough.

But I've changed. And the Eisteddfod also claimed to be changing.

This year the site would be in Cardiff Bay. Once this was Tiger Bay, an area of docklands with a reputation for poverty and violence; connected to the outside world via the cargo ships, but somehow not quite part of Wales, perhaps because of the migrant communities that settled there. It was a liminal space, set between city and sea. Far removed from the quaint valley I'd grown up in. Here was yet another kind of Wales. It has been redeveloped, and is now home to the Welsh Assembly building, but a chatty security guard assured me that there were still more murders than male voice choirs in Butetown, no matter what the re-branding said.

There would be no fences at this festival, for the first time ever. No entry fee, no wristbands. If you were curious, you were welcome.

So, I went in.

And found so many kinds of Wales. Everyone testing boundaries, negotiating, choosing what and who they were through their language and stories.

Some of it was joyous, like the camp, middle-aged man I met who was selling coffee. Surrounded by steam and the smell of roast beans, he yelled the few Welsh words he knew, with gusto. Dredged up from his schooldays, perhaps, or learnt especially from a YouTube clip, he 'os gwelwch yn dda-ed' and 'diolch-ed' every chance he had.

Or the woman who tweeted in advance 'I don't speak Welsh, any advice?' who later tweeted a smiling photo of herself on site. No advice was needed. Turn up, do your best, have fun.

Or the Welsh-speakers who stood in line to buy vegan salads, who wondered if latte was a Welsh word now. Was Americano? Flat white definitely

wasn't, perhaps it should be a gwyn-gwastad[17] from now on. The suggestion snapped up by the linguistically inventive barista.

There were other, more subtle negotiations on display: two hijabi girls, sitting together on the Senedd steps sharing a tray of chips; the bookshop selling children's book by both Welsh-language and English-language publishers side-by-side, rather than segregated; a Pride flag with a dragon emblazoned on the rainbow.

Other negotiations were less welcome. The Crown was won by Catrin Dafydd, who's poetry was praised by the judges in their press release (Eisteddfod, 2018) as a hopeful collection on 'mixed Welshness', but the award was overshadowed by the comment of the archdruid during the crowning ceremony that she wouldn't have achieved her win without the men in her life. He later apologised. A similar apology was demanded of the Eisteddfod president who asked whether Uganda or Rhyl had the higher levels of savagery.

These comments were crass and blundering, and reminded me – forcefully – of the Wales I'd wanted nothing to do with. However, it was Welsh-Wales, via Twitter for the most part, that called for the apologies. Welsh-speakers who had heard the comments and considered them outdated and unwelcome. They wanted Wales to have different stories to tell.

By serendipity, I was invited to an exhibition opening. The sort of thing I quite like to do. But I'd been invited to go by the exhibition's Chair. That made me more cautious. What kind of an exhibition opening needed a Chair? Weren't they all about warm white wine and standing about awkwardly not knowing whether to look at the paintings?

The kind of exhibition, it turned out, where stories were up for negotiation, and where words were objects to be played with. The exhibition was called 'Dim Ond Geiriau (Ydi Iaith): (A Language) Is Only Words'. The group of artists presenting had been invited to take the words of the Welsh language and incorporate them, as objects, into their art practice.

[17] Gwyn gwastad does just mean flat white. But the translation is ludicrous (both in the sense of being ridiculous and in the sense of being playful).

Here were a group of people, with varying degrees of familiarity with the language, who were using Welsh words as toys. The sort of robust item that is safe to bash about. Playful. Inventive. Unrespectful. I don't mean without respect, I mean without the stifling, Sunday-best respect required when visiting someone aged, someone critically ill.

One artist, Paul Eastwood, came from Wrexham. He had attended the same school I had. His family background was similar. It was to his project that I gravitated. It was a lexicon, a collection of salvaged words, pieced together following the death of the Welsh language. A kind of Dictionary of Christmases Yet to Come.

In his project I saw the fears my parents had had. But it was a paradox. It only worked *because* the language wasn't dead.

Words here were playful, paradoxical, set free from the fears of older generations. Like the best kind of adolescence, where there is joy in independence, words at this exhibition were free to be whatever their users wanted, without fear of harm.

If I wanted, I could be part of that. My contribution would be welcome.

There was no need to create a contradiction between being a good guardian and a good writer.

Conclusion

In the preceding chapters I have considered the affect of using transnational creativity when writing for young adults, using my own work and experiences as the starting point for the conversation, following the Arts Praxis model as proposed by Robin Nelson. There were a number of dominant motifs which emerged which are of significance. The creation of a unique poetics in *The Short Knife* was one, using a combination of grammar, translated idioms and Translation Plus to establish a form of English in the space between English and Welsh. But beyond this technical achievement came the realisation that the emotions generated using a transnational approach were directly relevant and useful for a writer of young adult fiction. Metaphors of travel, such as journeying, crossing boundaries and thresholds are relevant, more surprisingly, martial metaphors such as no-man's lands and minefields were also apposite. By reflecting on these metaphors, I gleaned insights such as the importance of community versus personal identity; cultural versus political power; power imbalance, and betrayal all of which had a profound effect on my work. I have explored these themes in relation to *The Short Knife,* but also with a consideration of the wider literary landscape and my own development as a writer.

In the case of *The Short Knife* it was by engaging with transnational themes that I was more powerfully able to re-connect with Kole's 'electricity of adolescence'. This made the resultant work more likely to be of relevance to my target audience.

These findings have a number of potential impacts, with a range of potential audiences, within and outwith the academy.

Within the academy, I hope that the poetics of *The Short Knife* will inspire writers working in a transnational context to experiment with their own linguistic situations. The emergence of creative translation (with Translation Plus, as

discussed above, only one example)[18] within the field of creative writing has been an exciting recent development; I hope that *The Short Knife* and its poetics will provide a useful text for study.

Beyond the academy, there are also implications for my work for creative writers for young people. It is my intention to present my work to writers working in commercial publishing. For authors wanting to deepen the thematic and emotional content of their work, embracing the model of coming-of-age as a transnational experience would be useful. Whether or not the writer consciously has personal experience of living between two cultures, they will have had recent relevant experiences, living as we do in a world where willing and unwilling movement of people and the fabric of international interdependence create daily headlines. Authors will be able to reflect on their own understanding of movement, and find the emotional resonances to exploit in their work. I have limited myself here to discussing the resonances of identity, power and betrayal, as these were the dominant concerns of my own phenomenology. However, I suspect that there are a much wider range of emotions that might be usefully mined through considering the transnational and its relevance to writing for young people. I will be running a workshop on the subject for professional children's writers in winter 2018, and I anticipate that participants will explore other travel-based emotions such as anticipation, fear, confusion, loneliness, excitement, embarrassment, frustration, communication difficulty, homesickness and nostalgia. By tapping into their recent relevant experiences and memories of travel, writers for teens can forge empathy with their readers, and, crucially, represent that on the page.

I hope that *The Short Knife* will have an impact on readers. My decision to write in English means that there is the potential for the book to sell in a number of territories without translation. If it does, then I hope that the disruptive

[18] For further examples, see Clementine Beauvais' recent post on 'Literary Translationese' http://awfullybigblogadventure.blogspot.com/2018/08/literary-translationese-clementine.html; Jen Calleja's workshops on creative translation at the British Museum, or Gill James' workshops in *Writing in Education* issue *53*.

poetics will encourage readers to find out more about Wales, and minority languages in general.

Closer to home, I hope to encourage British young adults to reflect upon the fact that the United Kingdom is made up of a multiplicity of peoples and languages, indigenous and immigrant, and has been since recorded history. It seems particularly important at a time when politicians can espouse the existence of a singular national identity[19] to remind readers that their world is already more complex than politicians might have them believe.

For Welsh young adults too, I want to offer them further access to an identity which respects the central role of the Welsh language, without insisting that mastery of the language is required. They will be learning the language in school. I hope that *The Short Knife* will be a further encouragement for them to feel comfortable using the language at whatever level they choose. By seeing the language as something playful and plastic, their own natural errors and adaptations will seem less loaded.

Writers for young people must speak to them about topics that are of concern to them, and they have to do so in ways that are relevant. Using transnational creativity is one way to achieve both, in my experience. It offers a way to engage and empathise, and it also offers a means to celebrate the inevitable changes that a young person experiences between childhood and adulthood. It demonstrates that mutable ways of being are not necessarily to be feared; we are all insiders and outsiders; we can choose the stories we tell about ourselves. Adolescence might be a no-man's land, but it doesn't have to be a battlefield.

[19] See, for example, Boris Johnson (who at the time of writing is considered a potential Prime Minister), compounding British identity with English https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zIu2a7lYYGQ accessed 07.09.18

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