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## The Green, Green Hills of Home: Mining in the Fiction of Appalachia and Wales

Considering any region in an international context may lead to what Homi Bhabha terms “the anxiety of enjoining the global and the local,”<sup>1</sup> While scholars agonise over maintaining local distinctiveness alongside discussions of the global, it may be that at grass roots these concerns cause less disquietude. Such was the case in April 2006 at the Cultural Arts Center in Appalachia, Wise County, Virginia, when local thespians gave a performance that explored the impact of the coal industry on a small, mountainous community. The play chosen to mark the town’s centennial year aptly mirrors the lives of Appalachia’s early inhabitants, many of whom lived and worked in one of the town’s eight coal camps. The play, though, was not written by a Virginian, or by a writer from the wider coal mining region of southern Appalachia, but by the Welsh dramatist Emlyn Williams.

Williams’ play, *The Corn is Green*, focuses on the coal industry in his native country and on the attempts by the English Miss Moffat to educate the local children. The Appalachia director, Harry Wiseman, when asked about the appropriateness of a Welsh play for the centennial celebrations, claimed that

It may seem an odd choice, but it’s not. It’s a rather appropriate choice. . . . It’s about mining even though it takes place in Wales. But the problems and the lifestyles and difficulties, what should I say? The obstacles people face here, they faced there. So it’s very applicable.<sup>2</sup>

Wiseman’s adaptation of the Welsh drama furthers the numerous comparisons drawn between coal mining regions around the world. Dennis, Henriques and Slaughter, in their anthropological and sociological study of coal mining in Yorkshire, recognise that while certain local characteristics make one mining community unique from any other, “the particular conditions and history of the coal industry” result in one mining area possessing “social relations in common with

other mining communities.”<sup>3</sup> Certainly, whether in Appalachia or Wales, in Pennsylvania or in Yorkshire, miners encountered poor wages, unsafe working environments and were involved in, or affected by, industrial action. As David Harvey states “flows of commodities, capital, labor, and information always render boundaries porous.”<sup>4</sup> Mining communities that produce coal for world markets and that are often managed in similar ways regardless of national differences certainly find their “boundaries porous.” Wales and Appalachia, in particular, share a more peculiar type of mining experience.

The similarities between the two regions have long been noted by ethnographers and literary critics. Although coal mining began in southern Appalachia long after the valleys of South Wales had witnessed the first large scale removal of coal in the early 1800s, both “have a common history as resource-centered economies . . . in each case, industrial development was launched from a foundation of rural, small-farm, family production.”<sup>5</sup> The discovery of coal in Wales and Appalachia undermined any notion of those places as isolated from larger national and international markets. Additionally, both places are othered within wider national discourses, with Appalachia bearing the weight of hillbilly stereotypes and Wales regarded, particularly during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as backward by its English neighbours. An 1846 report on education in Wales stated that:

The Welsh language is a vast drawback to Wales and a manifold barrier to the moral progress and commercial prosperity of the people. Because of their language the mass of Welsh people are inferior to the English in every branch of practical knowledge and skills. The Welsh language distorts the truth, favours fraud and abets perjury.<sup>6</sup>

Substituting Appalachian for Welsh here would not distort any of the long held stereotypes about those living in the southern mountains. In Denise Giardina’s *The Unquiet Earth*, when Rachel leaves her Kentucky home to attend nursing school, her instructor informs the students that “If you are to make nurses, you must overcome your backgrounds. You must rise above the handicaps of inbreeding and the filthy conditions you are used to.”<sup>7</sup> The two regions, then, share not only similar industrial heritages but are also perceived as othered spaces within their larger national cultures.

In recent years, with greater discussions of globalisation, and the international nature of capital, the links drawn between these two places have become more visible. Visits between Wales and Appalachia

by miners, theatre groups and students have all contributed to the perceived connections between the regions. In 1979 Helen Lewis arranged an exchange between Welsh and Appalachian coal miners as part of her study of coal communities in South Wales. More recently, in 2003 students from the Master's Program in Appalachian Studies at Appalachian State University in North Carolina conducted a one month field course in Wales. While the organisers of the trip acknowledge that the students encountered many aspects of life in Wales that they found "strange," "other aspects were familiar," most notably the "economic history, environmental beauty, and the practical concerns of revitalising community life."<sup>8</sup> The students' appreciation of the Welsh landscape ties to one of the most significant connections between the two regions.

As Derrick Price suggests "Wales has, for several hundred years, precisely been seen as a site of nature." For Price, Richard Llewellyn's sentimental coal mining novel *How Green Was My Valley* is a text not merely about the industrial experience, but one that derives "much of its form and its view of Wales from the travel books and romances of the nineteenth century."<sup>9</sup> Travellers often found Appalachia an equal source of fascination, particularly during the nineteenth century when large parts of the country were experiencing rapid industrialisation. Lee Smith captures that desire to take a 'pilgrimage' into the mountains, in order to return "to a simpler era, back . . . to the very roots of consciousness itself" in *Oral History*, through Richard Burlage's account of his journey from Richmond into the Appalachian hinterland.<sup>10</sup> Burlage thinks that "I had probably picked the most remote area still left in these United States; certainly I could not have felt more a stranger had I just entered India" (108). However, Burlage, making the journey in 1923, arrives too late to see Appalachia as an untouched wilderness. As he notes "Constructions of roads throughout the remote areas of this county will soon commence – is slated, in fact, for spring" (138). Despite the obvious signs of modernisation in the area, Burlage continues to view himself as a pioneer: climbing the mountain to Dory's home he writes, "I forded the lovely creek and took the steeper, rockier grade – the 'path less traveled'!!!" (125). Burlage needs to see the hills as alien and uncharted for his 'pilgrimage' to have any credibility. If Burlage and other travellers into Appalachia found a strange, foreign place, the Welsh immigrants who settled in the region from the seventeenth century onwards found a place that looked like home.

West Virginian writer Jayne Anne Phillips, after a visit to Wales, felt that Welsh settlers in southern Appalachia had “found the place that was most like where they’d come from.” During Phillips’ visit to Europe on one of her first trips outside of Appalachia she specifically remembers the train journey “from England to Wales,” during which she “was shocked to see towns that looked like towns in West Virginia. The landscape itself was similar, valleys and densely green hills. Old, worn-down mountains.”<sup>11</sup> Indeed, in Denise Giardina’s *The Unquiet Earth*, the Lloyd family are descendants of Welsh immigrants, and Dillon recalls that “My people were from the Black Mountains in South Wales. . . . I have seen pictures in books at the Justice Public Library. They are like our mountains only bald of trees” (208-209). Phillips charts her awareness of her region’s shared connections with other areas to her childhood when she read Llewellyn’s *How Green Was My Valley*. Reading Welsh coal mining novels certainly reveals numerous links with Appalachia texts, placing that othered southern and American space within a global discourse.

Indeed, Llewellyn’s often romantic account of the Welsh landscape shares distinct parallels with the pastoral images that permeate Appalachian writing. Llewellyn’s Huw Morgan mourns the destruction of the surrounding hills by mining, yet when nostalgia takes him back in time he recalls “The quiet troubling of the river, and the clean, washed stones, and the green all about, and the trees trying to drown their shadows, and the mountain going up and up behind, there is beautiful it was.”<sup>12</sup> Huw’s Eden can be transposed onto Myra Page’s description of the Tennessee mountains in her novel *Daughter of the Hills*. In that novel Dolly thinks of how:

Our hills were green and shining under the early light, and things so quiet I could hear woodpeckers already hard at it in woods back of our cabin. Greedy robins were jumping about in our clearing, pecking for worms in the loosened soaked earth. Beyond High Top the fresh-washed sky gleamed through clouds still rosy and drifting off as day broke. It was a morning to set your heart to.<sup>13</sup>

At this point in the novel Page’s account of the natural landscape contains no traces of the mining taking place beneath the surface. What emerges from Page and Llewellyn’s novels, as well as the many other novels from both places, is that the mountains and valleys of Appalachia and Wales go some way to defining a shared structure of feeling between the regions.

The literature that emerges out of both places repeatedly turns to the mountains as temporary sites of relief from the coal industry’s

nineteenth-century encroachment into the hills. Even when coal companies moved in and began their lengthy excavation of the areas' natural resources, the hills continued to provide a pastoral escape for the writers who catalogued the battles between communities and companies. Raymond Williams argues that the mountains of his native Wales provide:

a shape which manifests not only a consciousness of history but a consciousness of alternatives, and then, in a modern form, a consciousness of aspirations and possibilities. The traditional basic contrasts of dark and light, of being trapped and of getting clear, are here on the ground in the most specific ways, and are the deepest basic movement of all this writing.

The mountains in coal mining novels from Appalachia and Wales certainly provide 'alternatives' to the lives of those who work in, or live around the mines. In these novels, characters seek out that natural world for refuge from their daily lives.<sup>14</sup> For Williams, the mountains, in combination with the industrial experience, contribute to "a specifically Welsh structure of feeling" (221). Without attempting to eradicate all the socio-historic factors that have led to such a national structure of feeling, Williams' account can, nevertheless, apply in equal measure to southern Appalachia.

The distinctiveness of mountainous regions becomes clear when compared with coal mining novels set in flat landscapes, such as Zola's *Germinal*. *Germinal* opens "On a pitch-black, starless night" with "a solitary man . . . trudging along the main road from Marchiennes to Montsou. . . . There was not a single tree to darken the sky, and the cobbled highroad ran on with the straightness of a jetty through the swirling sea of black shadows."<sup>15</sup> Zola's emphasis on the blackness of the night prefigures the darkness that the solitary man, Étienne, encounters when he enters the mine for the first time. For almost the entirety of Part I, readers, like Étienne, experience a dark netherworld. Zola's opening lines stand in stark contrast with those of Lewis Jones' first novel about coal mining in South Wales, *Cwmardy*: "Big Jim, known to civil servants and army authorities as James Roberts, stopped abruptly and let his eyes roam over the splendour of the mountain landscape."<sup>16</sup> While the novel begins with Jim, and his son Len contemplating the damage beneath the surface of the mountain, Jones simultaneously highlights the picturesque quality of the hills:

Here and there the landscape was splashed with patches of purple heather and rich brown bracken whose blended colours stood out boldly in the telescopic clarity of the midsummer evening. (2)

As opposed to Zola's bleak lowlands, Jones' description recalls a Spenserian landscape with his emphasis on the natural colours and the tranquillity of 'the midsummer evening.' After the drudgery of a day working underground, the Cwmardy workmen can return to a surface of what Raymond Williams describes as the "open hills and the sky above them, of rising light and of a clear expansion, into which it is possible, both physically and figuratively, to move."<sup>17</sup>

The surface certainly impacts upon the consciousness of the men even when they are in the pit. In *The Corn is Green*, Miss Moffat spots the talent of the young miner Morgan Evans when she reads his first assignment. Having asked the children to write about "How I would spend my Holiday," she gives up hope of reading anything interesting until she comes upon Evans' writing:

But when I walk through the . . . shaft, in the dark, I can touch with my hands the leaves of the trees, and underneath . . . where the corn is green. . . . There is a wind in the shaft, not carbon monoxide they talk about, it smell like the sea, only like as if the sea had fresh flowers lying about . . . and that is my holiday.<sup>18</sup>

The scenery that Evans encounters when he leaves the mine at the end of each day clearly has a deep impact on his thinking, and allows him to imagine that nature even when he is in the depths of the pit. Zola's miners have no such respite from the "blackness, thick with flying coal-dust and heavy with gasses which pressed down upon the eyes" (51). The world that they return to at the end of their shifts is as dark as the one below. In *Germinal* one particular spot draws curiosity seekers because of its macabre quality:

Le Tartaret was a piece of wild moorland on the edge of the forest, sterile volcanic rock beneath which a coal mine had been burning for generations. It went back to legendary times. . . . The fire from heaven had fallen on this Sodom in the bowels of the earth where long ago pit girls committed untold abominations. . . . The dark red calcined rocks had taken on an efflorescent coating of alum, like leprosy. On the edges of fissures sulphur grew like yellow flowers. (291)

With his emphasis on the diseased nature of La Tartaret Zola draws a picture of a landscape that offers no alternative from the pits. While a green hill prospers around Le Tartaret and the fields remain exceptionally fertile, the "hot vapours, stinking of lecherous sin" continue to rise out of the chasm. Unlike the French miners in *Germinal* who find no escape when they return to the surface, the Welsh mountains offer a healthy contrast for the miners in Jones' and Llewellyn's texts.

That open space is reflected in the Appalachian novels that chart the effects of mining in the region. Just as Lewis Jones begins both

*Cwmardy* and *We Live* with a gaze over the mountains, so the Appalachian novelists who deal with coal mining employ the surrounding hills as a source of escape. In *Daughter of the Hills*, Dolly repeatedly climbs the mountain to seek refuge or clarity of mind. On one particular excursion she states how she “looked down across the ridge back into our valley. Things took on a different shape and hue, from this distance” (71). Denise Giardina paints a similar pastoral scene in *Storming Heaven* as C. J. Marcum remembers how “My mind’s eye could see all the land – the mountain wrapped like a protecting arm around the cabin, the prickly grass in the pasture . . . the dark fields fanning out along the bottom, soon to be dense with corn.”<sup>19</sup> Appalachian and Welsh coal mining novels are, then, shaped by the often stark contrast between the cavernous pits and the mountains.

Yet, the characters in these novels can never retreat into a completely pastoral setting since the mining industry leaves its mark not only underground but also on the surface. That which the characters seek to escape inevitably returns to haunt them, not least in the ever increasing slag heaps that surround the mines. As Dennis, Henriques and Slaughter note “The dominant feature of the landscape is the spoil or slag heaps. . . . Houses and mine-workings crouch under their shadow” (11). Indeed, the mountains that provide refuge for the characters in Welsh and Appalachian coal mining novels are the same mountains that, due to the excavations under the surface, pose a threat to the community. Rondall Lloyd, Giardina’s political activist in *Storming Heaven*, remembers being a child and hearing the blasts in the mine, claiming that “I tried not to think of the mountain pushing down on us” (23). The huge slag piles are central to all these novels, indeed to any account of mining communities, yet the pastoral backdrop of the mountains sets a sharper contrast for this waste. When Llewellyn’s Huw Morgan steps outside for the first time after months of convalescing, he recalls that “The first thing I saw was the slag heap. Big it had grown, and long, and black, without life or sign, lying along the bottom of the Valley on both sides of the river. The green grass, and the reeds and the flowers, all had gone, crushed beneath it” (98). Llewellyn plays heavily upon the image of the slag pile as the literal sign of the damage caused by the coal industry. Throughout his text the pile takes on a life of its own:

The slag heap moves, presses on, down and down, over and all round this house which was my father’s and my mother’s and is now mine. Soon, perhaps in an hour, the house will be buried, and the slag heap will stretch from the top of the moun-

tain right down to the river in the Valley. Poor river, how beautiful you were, how gay your song, how clear your green waters, how you enjoyed your play among the sleepy rocks. (97)

While Llewellyn's language becomes overly romantic when he turns to nature, the slag pile that he describes forms part of the rhetoric of these coal mining novels. In effect, the mountains of both regions lead to a form of literary environmentalism.

Just as the authors capture the workers' movements in Wales and Appalachia, they also employ the surrounding environment to make their cases against the damage wreaked by mining. That damage is central to these novels, particularly in Giardina's *The Unquiet Earth*, in which slate, a by-product of strip mining, has filled "the head of the hollow and has become a dam, holding back the waters of Pliny Branch and sludge from the strip mine" (274). Despite Dillon Freeman's warnings to the coal company that the dam will break at any point, no action is taken, turning his warnings into reality. The novel closes with a flood that destroys the holler, Giardina's man-made disaster echoing many of the disasters that have affected mountainous, coal mining regions including the Aberfan disaster in Wales, on 21 October 1966 when a tip of coal waste slid onto a village, killing 144 people, 116 of whom were children. The Aberfan disaster had a direct impact on Appalachian mines, with U.S. Secretary of the Interior, Stuart Udall ordering a study of slate dumps in the area, in the immediate wake of the Welsh tragedy.<sup>20</sup> In literary terms, the authors of these coal mining novels chart the damage caused to the environment by the mining industry, imbuing the texts with ecological concerns as well as class politics.

The clearest sign of how nature and coal merge and collide in these novels comes in the way that the characters often struggle to consider their environment without thinking about the coal industry. The Welsh industrial novels, as Raymond Williams terms them, are part of a movement "towards describing what it is like to live in hell, and slowly, as the disorder becomes a habitual order, what it is like to get used to it, to grow up in it, to see it as home" (214). Williams' account again works in direct relation to all coal mining regions, but in this instance, particularly in relation to Appalachia. In *Daughter of the Hills*, Dolly repeatedly aligns the natural surroundings with mining. She claims that "In time it seemed clouds, mountain and coal cars grew all of a piece" (20). As a child she blurs the lines between the natural and the industrial until she can no longer distinguish between

them. For Page, and for her characters, daily life can only be considered in relation to the environment and the industry which has encroached upon it. Jones draws a similar analogy in *Cwmardy* when Len looks at the “black power-houses and the lake of feeding water near them. A score of pipes with tiny holes intersected this latter and sent bubbling sprays of boiling water into the air, where each became a miniature rainbow before falling back into the lake.” The industrial rainbow dazzles the young Len and even his father claims that “you did ought to see it first thing in the morning when the sun be rising. Ah, that be a sight for sore eyes” (5). Just as Dolly struggled to differentiate between nature and industry in Page’s novel, so Jones captures the way that mining has impacted upon the people’s consciousness. Given that many of the characters in these novels have never known their home places without the presence of the coal industry, when they seek to challenge poor wages or the working conditions in the pits, they effectively challenge a way of life. Indeed, the class politics in the novels capture the difficulties of trying to alter a system that has structured local ways of living.

The class politics of the novels do move beyond the limits of mountainous regions and link southern Appalachian coal mining texts to a global body of similar fiction. All the novels under consideration here, including *Germinal*, revolve around the growth of socialism amongst the miners and the subsequent battles that ensue between the miners and the coal operators. For Harvey “The capacity to link workers in united action across space has always been an important variable in class struggle” (236). Many of these novels do show the growth of the workers’ movement beyond the confines of the locality. When Étienne forms his movement against the coal operators in the area in *Germinal*, Souvarine tells him that the miners should “join the Workers’ Association so that their brothers in all countries could come to their rescue” (176). While Souvarine’s belief in the support of workers from around the world does not come to fruition, Zola clearly suggests that no locality is isolated in its battle against exploitation. Jones, an active member of the Communist Party, offers the most detailed account of the international nature of the workers’ struggle in *We Live*.

The novel begins with the workers’ unrest in Cwmardy but by the end of the novel the span of the workers’ concern has spread to the Spanish Civil War. Jones sends Len to fight in that conflict, a conflict that ends Len’s life. Len’s last letter from Spain reveals that he, at least, has come to realise that not only the fight against the coal op-

erators, but against oppression in all its guises, creates a universal struggle:

But it's strange, Mary (or is it?), that while there are certain differences I could swear sometimes I was still in Cwmardy and that the Fascists are not far away in a strange land, but are actually describing our birth-place and all it means to us. The men who are dying don't seem to be strangers, but our comrades as we know them at home. The same old hills are somewhere around here, and I know the same old smoke-stack and pit is not far away. The faces I see about me are the same faces as those in Cwmardy. It is only when they speak that I notice any difference.<sup>21</sup>

Len understands that his Welsh experience is not unique and that it shares distinct parallels with other conflicts, in other countries. Jones' turn to the Spanish Civil War forms part of what Bhabha terms the "subaltern voice of the people, minority discourses that speak betwixt and between places and times" (158). As Jones opens his novel up to a wider battle against oppression he shifts the focus to encompass the village of Cwmardy and distant Spain. Len's understanding of that wider discourse comes not only from the time that he spends in Spain, but in his adoption of Communist ideas. Jones certainly promotes his own political ideals throughout the novel, although he does show the resentment that some of the local community harbour toward what is termed throughout *We Live* as "foreign theories" (190). Early in the novel Len faces the accusation of being more concerned with the Party than with the specifics of the local fight against the coal operators. Mary challenges him after one Party meeting asking:

"Tell me, how much time was spent last night talking about conditions in Cwmardy?" She answered herself without giving him time. "Five minutes and not a second more. Bah! Fitter if you and Harry Morgan thought a bit less about people in other countries and a bit more about your own." (15)

However, by the close of the novel Mary has not only joined the Party, but has been elected the local leader. Jones alters Mary's thinking to show the limits of her father's localised vision for the workers and the wider possibilities of Len, and the Party's, transnational concerns.

In Page's novel, her Marxist beliefs echo those in *We Live*, as Dolly understands that in leading the protests against the coal operations in her own town, she must then move outside of her holler to foster similar movements. On hearing of Dolly's success in forcing the coal company to provide fresh water for the inhabitants of her community, a man from a nearby camp pleads with her:

“I’ve footed it from Marked Tree camp, Ma’am, to be asking you a favour.” We have fallen on bad times, he said. Folk pulling two ways. The last cavein took seven of their men. “Our Hollow would take it kindly, Ma’am, if you’d be journeying back with me? We’re needing somebody like you abringing the Word.” (243)

While Jones and Page attempt to capture the intercommunity and international nature of the workers’ struggle, certain parallels continue to emerge between Welsh and Appalachian experiences.

Giardina’s *Storming Heaven* charts the events that led to the Battle of Blair Mountain in 1921 when armed federal troops fought against miners for ten days. That battle brought the miners’ campaign into public view. Across the Atlantic in Wales, the late 1920s and early 1930s saw the Hunger Marches as hundreds of miners marched against the government to demonstrate against cuts in welfare to unemployed miners and their families. In *We Live*, Len and Mary lead a march against the local government who intend to cut the relief for miners. In capturing the Battle of Blair Mountain in *Storming Heaven*, and the marches against the government in *We Live*, Giardina and Jones both use the mountains as a symbol of the miners’ struggle. In *Storming Heaven* Carrie Bishop thinks that:

Blair Mountain was one of the most powerful mountains I’d ever seen. It sprawled the length of Hewitt Creek and thrust out its arms to push away the punier hills. Shadows rolled across the folded slopes to mark the time of day, and sometimes the folds opened into a cove, seductive, that promised a way across. But there were no passes through. (263)

While Giardina describes a real mountain here, she nevertheless turns that mountain into a literary device. She transposes the difficulties that face the miners as they oppose the government onto the natural landscape with the rugged terrain of the mountains of southern Appalachia reflecting the determination and resilience of the people. Jones also draws on the Welsh hills to create a sense of the obstacles that must be overcome in the fight against exploitation. In *We Live*, in a chapter entitled “Cwmardy Marches,” all the miners of the region and their families march together and successfully force their local representative to call the government on their behalf. When Len looks back to see how many people have joined the march, he thinks that “The mountain which separated Cwmardy from the other valleys looked like a gigantic anthill, covered with a mass of black, wavering bodies” (243). The mountain helps to accentuate the vastness of the movement and Jones’ ant analogy serves the useful purpose of indicating that all those involved have only one objective in mind.

The miners in *Germinal*, however, lack that unity of purpose and Zola does not have hills to turn to as a source of alternatives for his characters. In the novel the march that comprises Part 5 descends into chaos as the miners destroy the machinery at every pit they encounter. As the miners continually change direction, their purpose weakening as the day-long march unfolds, Zola writes:

indeed rage, hunger, and two months of suffering, and then this wild stampede through the pits, had lengthened the placid features of the Montsou miners into something resembling the jaws of wild beasts. The last red rays of the setting sun bathed the plain in blood, and the road seemed like a river of blood as men and women, bespattered like butchers in a slaughterhouse, galloped on and on. (334)

Their forward surge leads to the brutal violation of the dead body of the local shopkeeper, Maigrat who had denied the miners more credit, and would often demand sex with the miners' wives and daughters in lieu of payment. After ramming earth into the dead man's mouth, Ma Brûlé rips off his penis, putting it on the end of a stick and waving it around as a sign of their victory. Their macabre celebrations are cut short by the entrance of the gendarmes, with the hollowness of their actions reinforced when the local mine owners, congregated for a dinner party, receive the "vol-au-vent cases" that had been delayed by the march (354). Zola struggles to find alternatives for his miners and the lack of mountains denies his characters the pastoral retreat that the characters find in Welsh and Appalachian fiction. Indeed, when Étienne has to find a place to hide from the authorities he is forced to seek refuge in a disused part of the mine. Étienne encounters many difficulties 'living underground,' not least the limited light and his dependence on the young thief Jeanlin, the only person who knows the whereabouts of the hideout. Unable to hide on the surface, where he would be more likely to salvage his own food and light, Étienne is rendered temporarily helpless while he attempts to outwit the soldiers above ground.

Even at the close of *Germinal*, with the onset of spring partially breaking up the darkness that has pervaded the text, the sun that awakens the countryside "to a new and happy day" cannot distract Etienne from contemplating the work beneath the surface (495). As he walks away from Montsou, heading to Paris where he will help to lead the fight against the coal operators, he can still hear "the hum of work. . . . Under these fields and roads and villages now smiling in the sunshine, one blow, then another, then blow after blow were being struck as the work went on in the black prisons" (497). In effect, while

the workers in *Germinal* may encounter similar working conditions and effects on the labouring body as those in other coal camps around the world, they do not have the mountainous escape routes that provide Welsh and Appalachian coal mining characters with what Williams terms the ‘consciousness of alternatives.’

Those alternatives often point to the world beyond the hills. The valleys of both regions may never have been completely immune from the political and economic changes taking place in the rest of Wales and southern Appalachia, yet there is little doubt that the growth of the coal industries opened up these places to an economic trend that turned these once agricultural areas into industry-based communities. That move, more than any other, rendered, in Harvey’s terms, the boundaries of both places porous. Indeed, the coal mining novels set in South Wales and southern Appalachia form part of what Bhabha terms ‘world literature.’ For Bhabha “Where, once, the transmission of national traditions was the major theme of a world literature, perhaps we can now suggest that transnational histories of migrants, the colonized, or political refugees – these border and frontier conditions – may be the terrains of world literature” (12). Wales and Appalachia have long been considered colonised spaces within their own national cultures, not in the least as a result of the way that coal operators bought and used the land. Additionally, the coal mining novels of these places consider the ways in which the immigration and emigration that became synonymous with the coal industry radically altered the notion of these places as homogenous.

In Wales “a mining boom in the 1870s brought immigrants to the valleys from the English agricultural shires of Hereford, Gloucester, Somerset, Cornwall, and Devon and from the rural areas of Wales.”<sup>22</sup> Likewise, in Appalachia the rapid development of the mining industry resulted in the diversification of the local communities as “Welsh and English miners moved from Pennsylvania to West Virginia,” and as mining areas throughout Appalachia drew workers from Europe, including “Hungarians and Italians.”<sup>23</sup> These immigrants figure, in varying degrees, throughout these coal mining novels. In Llewellyn’s novel *Len* reveals the nature of local hostility to these outsiders, terming the families of mixed Welsh, English and Irish stock “half-breeds” (188). In Giardina’s novels the Italian immigrants who move into the area remain on the margins of the community, despite the fact that in her first novel, *Storming Heaven*, she dedicates one of the narrative strands to the Italian immigrant Rosa Angelelli, whose husband and

sons work in the mines. In *The Unquiet Earth* Rosa's grandson, Tony, marries Rachel Honaker, yet their failed relationship, and the references to Tony's infidelity and violent rages means that Giardina presents Tony as an interloper in Rachel's world, someone who comes between Rachel and her cousin Dillon.

The movement of immigrants into mining regions underlines the heterogeneous nature of these places. The shipment of coal out of the areas mirrors the movement of workers both to and from the locality. In *How Green Was My Valley* Len recalls the emigration of Welsh miners: "Some of the men went to work in other valleys, some went to Sheffield, to Birmingham, or Middlesbrough, some even went to the United States of America" (297). The boundaries rendered porous by mining resulted in the diversification of local ways of life, positioning these novels in a wider national and international context. Indeed, the shared experiences of life in coal mining regions bridges gaps across nations, rendering local concerns and anxieties global.

### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994) 216.
- <sup>2</sup> Stephen Igo, "Appalachia Players Tackle Ambitious Drama," *The GoTriCities Network*, vers. 2006, September 2006 <[http://www.gotricities.com/content/article.dna?idNumber=060327085711\\_2006](http://www.gotricities.com/content/article.dna?idNumber=060327085711_2006)>.
- <sup>3</sup> Norman Dennis, Fernando Henriques and Clifford Slaughter, *Coal is Our Life: An Analysis of a Yorkshire Coal Mining Community* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1956) 26.
- <sup>4</sup> David Harvey, *Spaces of Hope* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000) 35.
- <sup>5</sup> Graham Day, "The Reconstruction of Wales and Appalachia: Development and Regional Identity," *Appalachia in an International Context*, ed. Phillip J. Obermiller and William W. Philliber (Westport: Praeger, 1994) 47.
- <sup>6</sup> Helen Lewis, "Industrialization, Class, and Regional Consciousness in Two Highland Societies: Wales and Appalachia," *Cultural Adaptation to Mountain Environments*, eds. Patricia D. Beaver and Burton L. Purrington (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1984) 52.
- <sup>7</sup> Denise Giardina, *The Unquiet Earth* (New York: Ivy Books, 1992) 16.
- <sup>8</sup> William R. Schumann and Patricia D. Beaver, "Conversations with the 'Strange' and Familiar: An Appalachian Student Trip to Wales, 2003," *The Bevan Foundation Review* 4 (Summer 2004): 31.
- <sup>9</sup> Derrick Price, "How Green Was My Valley: A Romance of Wales," *The Progress of Romance: The Politics of Popular Fiction*, ed. Jean Radford (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986) 76-77.
- <sup>10</sup> Lee Smith, *Oral History* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1983) 97.
- <sup>11</sup> A. M. Homes, "Jayne Anne Phillips," *Bomb* XLIX (Fall 1994): 49.

- <sup>12</sup> Richard Llewellyn, *How Green Was My Valley* (London: Penguin, 2001) 43.
- <sup>13</sup> Myra Page, *Daughter of the Hills: A Woman's Part in the Coal Miners' Struggle* (New York: The Feminist Press, 1977) 49.
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- <sup>15</sup> Émile Zola, *Germinal* (London: Penguin Books, 1977) 19.
- <sup>16</sup> Lewis Jones, *Cwmardy* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1978) 1.
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- <sup>18</sup> Emlyn Williams, *The Corn is Green* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1981) 30.
- <sup>19</sup> Denise Giardina, *Storming Heaven* (New York: Ivy Books, 1987) 4.
- <sup>20</sup> For a comparison between the Aberfan Disaster in Wales and a flood that destroyed Buffalo Creek, West Virginia, see Paul J. Nyden, "Miners for Democracy: Struggle in the Coalfields," vers. 2006 <<http://wvgazette.com/static/series/buffalocreek/NYDEN.html>>.
- <sup>21</sup> Lewis Jones, *We Live* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1980) 331.
- <sup>22</sup> Helen Lewis 53.
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* 59.

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