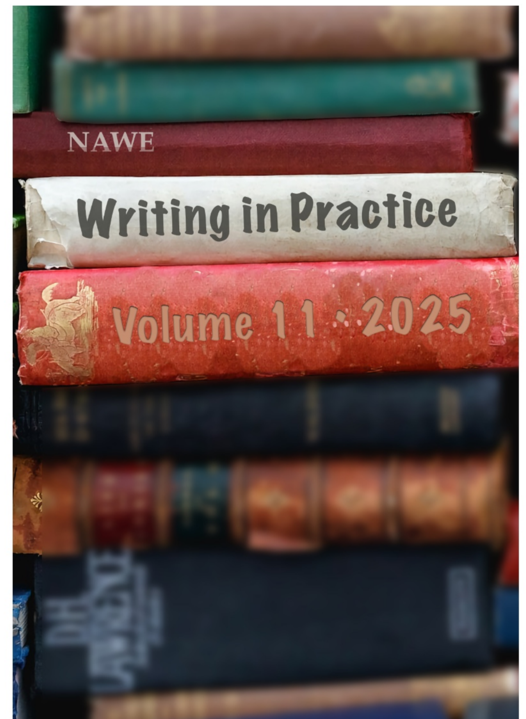

Evoking "Thrownntogetherness": place, trace and the novel

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ABSTRACT
This article explores how experimental fiction can illuminate the layered complexities of place, focusing on the Welsh town of Aberystwyth. Drawing on Doreen Massey's concept of "throwntogetherness," it examines how spatial narratives intersect and evolve through time. The article reflects on the creative process behind my novel *Storm*, a work of historiographic metafiction that blends romance, ghost story, and cultural critique. Through intertextual engagement with Welsh literature, local history, and postmodern theory, the article demonstrates how fiction can reframe our understanding of place as a dynamic, multifaceted construct shaped by memory, narrative, and identity.

Practice, place, production
In 2019, I began a PhD in Creative Writing, investigating how expressly experimental fiction could illuminate the hidden complexities of our relationships with places. As such, I was engaging in creative practice research, defined by Candy and Edmonds as that which:

combines the act of creating something novel with the necessary processes and techniques belonging to a given field of endeavour […] [It] involves conceiving ideas and realis[ing] them in some form as artefacts […]. [It] is not only characterized by a focus on creating something new, but also by the way that the making process itself leads to a transformation in ideas […] (Candy & Edmonds 2018: 64)

In its essence, creative practice is self-reflective. The process of making a "novel […] artefact", in this case literally a novel, produces new knowledge about the matters with which the novel is concerned. This comes not just from some mythic transmutation of the mind following the act of making, but through accompanying processes of research and critical practice. Creative practice is about what the act of making reveals. For my PhD that meant considering what writing a novel about a specific place reveals about place as a concept.

Increasingly, when we come to a place, it appears to us as ready-made. Towns have roads, quarters, shopping centres, and parks. Forests have lush greenery, up-kept walking paths, and various bodies of water with various species of water-loving birds. It is easy to forget, then, that forces, both of us and beyond us, shape infinite space into distinct, bordered geographies. However, we do innately understand that here, where one currently is, is different to over there, where one is not. This is

because the here, the place which one finds themselves at any given moment, is made of a series of unique factors. Doreen Massey writes:

> *Here is where spatial narratives meet up or form configurations, conjunctures of trajectories which have their own temporalities […] but where the successions of meetings, the accumulation of weavings and encounters build up a history. It's the returns […] and the very differentiation of temporalities that lend continuity. But the returns are always to a place that has moved on […] weaving a process of space time. (Massey 2005: 139)*

Massey defines place by its variety of spatial narratives, rather than the underlining of a particular one or few. That these narratives necessarily encounter each other creates history. No narrative has primacy over the others, as they return always to a place that "has moved on." The presence of all these various spatial narratives creates our sense of "throwntogetherness." (Massey 2005: 151) Here, then, is defined by the specific narratives which meet in its part of space.

The novel produced as part of my thesis, *Storm*, is set in Aberystwyth, and takes place over three days of a storm. Following two students, Josephine and Glynn, the narrative begins as a relatively conventional romance, before becoming a metafictional ghost story, where spectres of the town's history appear and haunt its current inhabitants. In doing this, *Storm* shows some of the chaotic fullness of Massey's "throwntogetherness", imagining a place untethered from temporality.

A cultural centre at the end of the line: Writing place

Before I go any further, let me explain, for all those who might not know of, Aberystwyth. In Meic Stephens' *The Literary Pilgrim in Wales*, it is described as a "seaside resort, university town and cultural centre facing Cardigan bay." (Stephens 2000: 20) This points to the town's seemingly contradictory identities. Aberystwyth is simultaneously a place to holiday, to get-away-from-it-all, and a "cultural centre," hosting: Llyfrgell Genedlaethol, one of six copyright libraries in the UK; the Book Council of Wales, which among other duties awards funding grants to various literary bodies; an arts centre, which hosts exhibitions and events, including from touring artists, musicians and comedians; and Aberystwyth University, an institution with over one hundred and fifty years of history and one of Wales' top research universities. But it is also at the end of a train line. Residents regularly joke about how difficult it is to arrive or leave via public transport. (Betteley 2023) Aberystwyth is simultaneously a west-Wales hub and a remote coastal town.

For creative writers, its remoteness has often been its most attractive quality. As Aberystwyth's best-known writer, Niall Griffiths, writes:

> *There's a strange draw to the place; get off the train and you can't go any further. Stand on the promenade and the next landmass is Ireland and, after that, America. Mountains pile up behind you and you feel that you can't go back into their bulwark mass but the sea, there, in front of you, is a blue world of possibility. (Griffiths 2008: 11)*

For Griffiths, then, Aberystwyth's attraction and its defining feature is its remoteness, amongst mountains, next to water, away from cities. This is notably different to Stephens' passage detailing its various institutions. Jon Anderson, writing on Griffiths' Aberystwyth, is thoroughly seduced by its apparent remoteness:

> *As a resident for three years […] I was glad to brave the inconvenience of geography and relive a plotline through the town, its hinterland and Griffiths' novels. […] Aberystwyth offers a blank Palaeozoic geology […] from which individuals can assemble a life. (Anderson 2014: 154)*

Griffiths' fictional narratives augment Anderson's spatial narrative. For Anderson, Aberystwyth's geology and geography produce a remote blankness from which identity and place can be assembled.

However, while Griffiths himself is often celebrated by contemporary scholars of Welsh writing in English, Anderson's framing of him here crosses into contentious territory. M. Wynn Thomas significantly critiques neo-Romantic English painters of the post Second World War who depict a "sense of Wales […] essentially consisting of its mysteriously expressive landscape", concealing its distinctness as a country and a culture as a result. (Thomas 2014: 44) The aesthetic of Aberystwyth presented in the above passages from Griffiths and Anderson – unpeopled, sublime and "blank" – might therefore be troubling. But it is simplistic to deny what are genuine impressions of the town, particularly given that they speak to geographical truths. Rather, we might acknowledge that, just as here is made up of different narratives and different impressions, those narratives must necessarily be read together to produce the fullest understanding of that here possible.

With that in mind, it is worth considering the memoir of Aberystwyth-born writer, journalist and academic Goronwy Rees. Rees, who grew up on a farm outside the town, describes how it had an "almost metropolitan sophistication," with "lights, though dim enough […] almost dazzling compared with the Stygian darkness of nights on the mountains." (Rees 1972: 20) Does this contradict Griffiths and Andersen's depictions? Perhaps. Does it negate their depictions? No. These descriptions are simply different spatial narratives. To use the language of Massey, it is the containing of these different spatial narratives which creates the foundation for place.

In his fiction, Griffiths' most significant achievement is his capturing of various fictional versions of these spatial narratives. This is evident not just in the polyphonic nature of works like *Grits* and *Broken Ghost*, which follow various narrative voices, but by the very style in which the prose is written. Take, for instance, this description of the town's promenade:

> *Both of them look right then left, right along the curving sweep of the promenade, the hotel facades and frontages of halls of residence and Chinese take-aways and another huge hill at the end of it, this one with a funicular railway spine, and left at the large Old College […] Ahead of them is the pier; pub and curry house and video outlet and flashing, beeping arcade. (Griffiths 2000: 197)*

Griffiths is adept here at bringing attention to Aberystwyth's contrasting details, as if each is meeting each other. In the first sentence, he brings attention to its status as a holiday destination and university town with the mentions of "hotel faces" and "halls of residence". There is a kind of cosmopolitanism at play, too, with the mentions of the "Chinese take-aways" and the "curry house" on the pier. The pier, in fact, is many things at once: a pub, restaurant, shop, and arcade. It is "throwntogether" to create a sense of habitat and place. But alongside these structures, there is ruin. First, the skeletal "spine" of the funicular railway, reminding the reader of bone-picked remains. Then, the mention of the Old College, which is itself an ever-re-transforming ruin, beginning life as a "villa", then a "hotel of unprecedented grandeur", bought by Aberystwyth University before being "severely damaged by fire", and, at time of writing, again under reconstruction. (*Cadw* 2021) Griffiths' prose aesthetic embodies Aberystwyth's particular "throwntogetherness".

I wanted to emulate this sense of the "here" in my own writing about the town. Incidentally, an early passage of *Storm* depicts the very same part of the town's seafront, albeit decades later. There is a similar attention to various details which create a sense of place:

> *Now there are the shapes of buildings. Hulking above everything, hiding in shadows, like the silhouette of a half-moon, is the Old College, yellow brick and high towers and etchings of leaders from long ago. There is the curve of the coast upon which a lone car moves. A great wave whirls along the promenade, crashing against old brick and covering the road in water as the car turns the corner and disappears. There are people walking, looking out at the sea, eating kebabs, stumbling, singing and shouting. There are people in the bedrooms of houses and flats trying to sleep. (Hubbard 2023: 12)*

While contrasting images are presented together, here, there is a greater emphasis on the people moving through the town. The reader is shown both the Old College and the people "eating kebabs". They are reminded of a place's intermingling of human-built and geographical features with the wave crashing against "old brick." Griffiths and I are both attempting to capture something of a panoramic view of Aberystwyth.

However, our works differ significantly in their depictions of students. Students are notably absent in Griffiths' work. When they appear, they are often an unwelcome, loud presence. In *Broken Ghost*, one character observes a student in a pub with what might be described as notable dislike:

> *And there he is, knobhead at the bar, fin haircut and Home Counties accent, bound to be a student, wearing a shirt with "20" on the back of it which he turns to show his mates[…] I see Tit-head 20 slapping his knees, I mean he's actually slapping his fuckin knees as he roars with laughter[…] some of the people at the bar, the proper people like, are glaring daggers at him. (Griffiths 2019: 9-10)*

This rare example of Griffiths depicting student life is clearly farcical. The student is present only to rouse the reader's dislike, to serve as a contrast to Adam and the rest of the bar's "proper people". University students are linked with privilege by the mention of the student's Home Counties accent. The narrator also suggests that the student is not a "proper person", unlike the other people in the bar. Of course, this is Adam, a fictional character, not Griffiths, who is speaking.

However, even though there are many novels written about Aberystwyth, there are few that focus on its university students. It is therefore interesting that in one novel that includes them, they are excluded from the place. In *Storm*, I wanted the student characters to be "proper" characters. It is not that the novel looks to defend the student lifestyle. One of its antagonists, Robbie, shares some of the loud, bullish arrogance displayed by the student in *Broken Ghost*.

But whereas the unnamed student is nothing more than irksome, Robbie is depicted as dangerous, with his female flatmates feeling unsafe around him. His properness does not celebrate him, but rather acknowledges that he, too, is part of the place's makeup.

In this way, Joanna Davies' novel, *Freshers*, is an important influence on *Storm*'s portrayal of student life. It depicts three childhood friends from Cardiganshire during their first year at Aberystwyth University. Davies details the more sordid elements of student life, like sexual relations, drug-taking and excessive drinking, but always with a keen sense of place framing the plot. When one of the friends, Lois, first arrives at Taliesin Hall, a student accommodation building seemingly based on Pantycelyn, she is disappointed by it:

Yes, her room at Taliesin Hall was a bit of a let down, Lois thought. The walls were painted a faded and yellowing magnolia. The furniture was basic […] two small ancient wardrobes and two tiny single beds. There was no carpet just cheap grey vinyl on the floor, which had also seen better days. And, as the room was on the ground floor, the window looked out at the car park; not the most inspiring view. The room smelt stale and musty[…] In her mind, Lois had imagined an airy, freshly decorated room with a beautiful sea view. (Davies 2008: 13)

Everything in the room is derided due to its agedness. The wall paint is "faded," the wardrobes are "ancient," the grey vinyl has "seen better days," and the room smells "stale and musty." The passage is reminiscent of Cresswell's description of a hypothetical student room. Everywhere there are "the hauntings of past inhabitation," proof that "this anonymous space has a history" (Cresswell 2014: 7). However, Lois does not want proof of history. She wants "an airy, freshly decorated room," one that is as absent of hauntings as possible. Her desire is also selective: she wants a "beautiful sea view" that inspires, not a window that looks "out at the car park."

Davies seems to have a more nuanced critique of students compared to Griffiths. Rather than focusing on their loudness, their potential alienness to the landscape, Davies focuses on how the mind-set of the university student – excited as they are to begin a life away from their parents, to indulge in some form of independence – becomes similar to that of the consumer, demanding of a place that their needs be completely satisfied. *Storm* also shows students struggling to live in a town that does not meet all of their expectations. For instance, early in the novel, Anna, describing a night out, says:

But when I was dancing, I don't know, it was one of those mixes they always play, and not just in [Dry Eyez], but in every bloody bar. And I'm dancing and I just feel like every move I'm making is a move I've made before. It's like I'm in a repeat or something[…] There's nothing to fucking do around here. (Hubbard 2023: 18)

Anna's existential worry about going out is translated to a frustration with Aberystwyth. If only the place would do more for her, would offer more nightspots or more music mixes, she would not feel quite so worried. But this is Anna expecting the place to cater to her and her wants. Partly, the novel's events, particularly the appearances of the past imitations, are written to critique and undermine this attitude of apathy and boredom. Aberystwyth is not a "nothing" place, as all places, to return to Massey, have spatial narratives that interact and create a history.

Acknowledging the importance of these different spatial narratives allows for the possibility of interaction between peoples of different identities and nationalities. Eluned Gramich's novella "The Lion and the Star" takes place during a Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg protest. The protagonist, Seren, has a Welsh name but is not from Wales. Having left an off-grid commune, she comes across Llew, a Welsh language activist who has climbed up a television mast in an act of public protest.

The novella is about the interaction of spatial narratives, of people unlike each other mixing, and this is made clear from the opening, where Llew shouts in Welsh to Seren, who hears only "heeeees and aaaaahs" before shouting up "I don't understand you" (Gramich 2018: 122). Llew asks her to take his bike to the Coopers Arms, an Aberystwyth pub, and here Seren has her first encounter with Welsh speaking culture:

The presence of these strangers is almost like being blinded. She can't see properly when there are so many people she doesn't know; her mind is working too hard, thinking too much. It can't perform its normal functions[…] They're speaking Welsh; although she can recognize the language, she can't follow it. (Gramich 2018: 144)

Seren has already lived in the area, but her meeting with Llew has interrupted her relationship with the place and its people. Indeed, her brain seems to be almost reconfiguring itself, "thinking too much," as she adjusts to this newness. Seren feels "almost like being blinded," calling attention perhaps not to any sudden lack of sight, but a previous lack of sight that is now being felt, as she interacts with Aberystwyth's Welsh language community for the first time. I wanted to evoke a similar sense of awareness in *Storm*. Glynn is a Welsh-speaker who is engaged with Welsh cultural issues, and Josephine is neither of these things. After arguing with Glynn, she cannot help but look at the town differently:

Having always looked only at the pleasure crafts, the large yachts and sailboats before, she now looks down towards the large fishing ships, which are in fact quite small, but compared to the rest of the marina seem to tower like old, weathered giants. They tower over her, too, and suddenly it seems the whole town does, like this tiny fragment of a town on the edge of things is its own hole she has fallen into. (Hubbard 2023: 110)

Josephine, like Seren, has had her sense of place remade, and is reminded that she is a small part of it, not its customer or consumer. In both "The Lion and the Star" and *Storm*, place announces itself upon people living in it.

Reading and analysing fiction about Aberystwyth, then, helped produce a more complex considerations of the various interactions and tensions which make it a place. This, in turn, fed how these dynamics were in themselves depicted. However, this still left the question of how to consider and capture some of the place's history.

An interrupted love story and a historiographic metafiction: Writing trace

Researching Aberystwyth's history led to a radical reconfiguration of *Storm*. Initially, the novel was going to focus very specifically on the relationship between Josephine and Glynn, Josephine's difficulties with her deceased mother, and general student life. But it felt negligent to not have any mention of how student life in Aberystwyth has developed over the years, and that the town's history is not entirely synonymous with the university's. The possibility of introducing more expressly experimental techniques would allow an airing of different historical narratives, ones that perhaps even clashed with each other.

To consider how experimental writing might help to air differing narratives under one narrative, it is useful to return to Massey's discussion of "here", particularly on the "successions of meetings" that "build up a history" (Massey 2005: 139). As my research into Aberystwyth went on, due particularly to the influence of W.J. Lewis' book on Aberystwyth, *Born on a Perilous Rock*, I became more and more interested in these various meetings, and what other meetings could be manufactured through fiction. For instance, the town established itself from the 18th century onward as a centre of Nonconformity. Pro-sobriety communities of Nonconformity clashed with some of the town's heavy-drinking sailors. This "interaction" leads to new events, such as the Reverend John Williams leading a march through Aberystwyth, including converted sailors (Lewis 1980: 72). This event is recreated in *Storm*. Now, as chapel congregation numbers dwindle, as pubs open late and cater mostly to students and tourists, this iteration of Aberystwyth's "here" could easily be forgotten. I wanted to consider how our relationship to "here" could be problematized by bringing back to the surface submerged historical narratives. The best, if also the bluntest, method of problematization seemed to be to imagine these figures speaking for themselves.

As such, I came to view the novel specifically as a work of historiographic metafiction. Linda Hutcheon defines the differences between historiographic metafiction and historical fiction as follows:

In many historical novels, the real figures of the past are deployed to validate or authenticate the fictional world by their presence, as if to hide the joins between fiction and history in a formal and ontological sleight of hand. The metafictional self-reflexivity of postmodern novels prevents any such subterfuge, and poses that ontological join as a problem: how do we know the past? What do (what can) we know of it now? (Hutcheon 1988: 115)

Historical novels use historical figures to "authenticate the fictional world", to give the narrative a sense of realism. This is a "sleight of hand," a trick, as fiction is not the physical world, but a representation of it. In historiographic metafiction, self-reflexivity "prevents any such subterfuge." In other words, depictions of historical figures acknowledge their own artificiality, in order question the reader's relationship with the past.

To define the historiographic metafiction, one must first define the postmodern novel. Hutcheon admits that a working definition of the postmodern novel is difficult to establish, due to postmodernity's slipperiness as a concept, before offering her own:

[The postmodern novel] always works within conventions in order to subvert them. It is not just metafiction; nor is it just another version of the historical novel or the non-fiction novel […] both metafictionally self-reflexive and yet speaking to us powerfully about real politics and historical realities […]. (Hutcheon 1988: 5)

The postmodern novel, then, does not reject narrative, or attempt to rid itself of that which makes it a story. Rather, it accepts convention so as to subvert it.

In the case of *Storm*, the conventions being subverted are those of the romance novel. These are defined briefly by Jennifer McKnight-Tronz as "woman meets man, complications arise, obstacles are overcome, the two lovers marry" (McKnight-Trontz 2002: 10). Putting to one side the heteronormative bent of McKnight-Tronz's definition, it provides a useful framework.

In *Storm*, Josephine meets Glynn, and complications do arise. But these complications – namely, their different relationships to the town they live in, the spectral presence of Josephine's mother and the spectral appearances of the town's past – are not overcome in order to reach a new form of togetherness like marriage, but to acknowledge a pre-existing one reliant on their inhabitation of a shared space. *Storm*, then, is both a

historiographic metafiction and an interrupted love story. This interruption is a self-reflexive one, as the realist love story is interrupted by imitations, characters who even within the novel are not real. This draws attention to what is often excluded in conventional narratives that depict place in order to protect those conventions.

Initially, I had thought to simply have characters already known to the reader discuss Aberystwyth's history in order to avoid suggesting an ignorance about the town's history. However, that ran the risk of keeping the history inaccessible and on the periphery of the narrative, perhaps even being distracting. As such, I made the decision to have stand-alone chapters from a series of fragmentary voices discussing Aberystwyth's history that interrupt the narrative.

This allowed me to focus on making these narratives as entertaining as possible, without having to balance other aspects of the novel (for instance, what would lead Josephine, Glynn or any other character to talk about a specific, niche aspect of Aberystwyth's history). From there, I used the version of the history retold to create the imitations of the past that appear, primarily in the novel's final part. These are indeed imitations (representations of the narratives as they are previously told), as opposed to ghosts (fragments of a deceased person's spirit).

However, these appearances meant history could be felt by the characters in the novel, rather than just discussed. Having the characters literally encounter (an imitation of) history is self-reflexive and metafictional in that it breaks away from generic realism to consider a historical reality, that we live in places with more layers of meaning than we can understand.

As such, *Storm*'s postmodernism became increasingly pronounced. I developed a methodology for writing the novel based on Hutcheon's understanding of postmodernity's relationship with history, literature and discourse:

What the postmodern writing of both history and literature has taught us is that both history and fiction are discourses, that both constitute systems of signification by which we make sense of the past. […] In other words, the meaning and shape are not in the events, but in the systems which make those past "events" into present historical "facts." This is not a "dishonest refuge from truth" but an acknowledgement of the meaning-making function of human constructs. (Hutcheon 1988: 89)

It is not that past events did not happen, or that fact and record do not matter, but that there are discursive and interpretive systems which make meaning of these records, and this meaning can always be re-contextualized and re-written. This re-contextualizing and re-writing is central to *Storm*. The Prelude depicts the storm that struck Aberystwyth in 1938, where "hurricane-force winds" tore much of the seafront to pieces and led to the end of the Royal Pier "vanishing." (Ceredigion Archive 1938) Here, the historical research has a relatively simple purpose, to render more accurate my own depiction of a specific event.

My preferred method of using my research was re-telling recorded moments in the town's history in the novel. For instance, during my research I came across a passage from W.J. Lewis discussing the Town Council's attempt to complete a sewage scheme for all of Aberystwyth in the 1920s (a project that had been ongoing since 1869), where he tells this anecdote:

The Bridge St. sewer had to be relaid and caused an incident which has long remained in the memories of some older inhabitants. While the large trench was open, a young horse drawing a milk float took fright and fell into the trench. Working on that stretch was a well-known character named Tommy Parnell of Glanr'afon [sic] Terrace, a man of enormous strength and a boxer, but not fond of regular work. […] When the horse was unable to get out of the trench, Tommy used his strength to lift it out. (Lewis 1980: 26)

This is re-imagined as "the story of the big man" in the novel, one of several interludes featuring three unspecified male voices having a conversation in a pub. I wanted these scenes to seem as if they could take place at some point during the same timespan as the rest of the novel. No specific dates are given as to when *Storm* takes place, but I was inspired specifically by Storm Brian, which took place in October, 2017.
Therefore, it was unlikely that any of the three characters would be old enough to have witnessed or been alive when Tommy Parnell's successful rescue attempt took place. So, they remember "the story of the big man," not the event itself. (Hubbard 2023: 142) One specifies that he knows how big the Big Man was from "what my taid used to say," and later another says "we were all told the same tales by our taids too." (Hubbard 2023: 142) Other than some references to Welsh mythology ("the big man" is compared to Welsh giant king, Brân the Blessed) the rest of story of the Big Man is relatively conventional, embedding many of the details of Lewis' recounting:

Big man had been boxing back then to pay the bills. Couldn't get much normal work. Didn't like it much, anyways. […] Forty years before, a big flood had come along and the town's pipes were all smashed and shaken and done […] The council were […] making new pipes and sewers, so big man joined, hammering away at pipes, lifting things. […] Milk spilled in with shit. And big man approached, just finishing his fag, peeked over and looked at the fallen animal. […] He got on his hands and knees, he wrapped his arms around the horse's belly, he whispered easy now and come on now, he lifted hard, felt the pulse of the beast's blood. (Hubbard 2023: 145-46)

These details, created by me rather than recounted, are what make these narratives stories rather than history. Once they are story, they are at play – as it were – to be imitated later in the novel, aligning with Hutcheon's idea of historiographic metafiction. In this instance, the story of the big man appears again, but with Glynn playing the part of the animal, even transforming into it. The imitations are not representations of the historical truth but impressionistic portraits constructed from how the narratives relating to them are told and perceived. Other than Josephine's mother and the Preacher, every imitation must re-enact the events of the story told about them earlier. For the Big Man, the re-enacting happens when Glynn transforms into a horse after falling over. The Big Man lifts him out and then turns into water. All the imitations are made from rainwater to link them to the storm taking place.

However, the process by which these imitations are generated is not always a simple one. Each imitation is affected by the variable of how it is told. For instance, in one early scene, Glynn tells the story of Owain Glyndŵr whilst sat round a fire on the beach:

So, Glyndŵr was like this guerrilla fighter […] and he basically spent his whole life fighting in forests, ambushing his enemies. Never beaten, never captured, and never killed. (Hubbard 2023: 156)

Glynn's recounting is a gently parodical romanticisation of Glyndŵr's rebellion. It was inspired by the lightly comical portrait Welsh poet Dannie Abse paints of his schoolteacher:

I see myself now, ten years old, sitting at a desk listening to our teacher Mr Williams: "The grave of our own Owain Glyndŵr, princely Owain, who took up his sword in defence of justice and liberty, is not one visible, boys, but it's known. Known. Oh aye, you'll not find it in any old churchyard, no old tomb of his under the shadow of a yew. No stone tablet do bear his name. So where is it? I'll tell you where it is – in the heart and in the noble soul of every true Cymro." (Abse 2001: 205)

Abse's teacher mythologizes Glyndŵr by making reference to ideas of Welshness as both ancient and knowable, written as comic pastiche of a kind of Welsh nationalist thinking. It references the particular style of certain early to mid-twentieth century Welsh historians, as Martin Johnes writes:

a passage from Owen Rhoscomyl's Flame Bearers of Welsh History (1905). Rhoscomyl was perhaps the most over the top of writers of such texts but more sober books shared that ability to explicitly draw connections between past and present. G. P. Ambrose's The History of Wales (1947), for example, finished by declaring "The survival of her national life through the crises of centuries is due to efforts of her best men and women to cherish a worthy heritage. Only by similar efforts will this be preserved in the future." (Johnes 2015: 672-73)

Glynn is partaking in this mythologizing of Glyndŵr not just by echoing these statements, but making additions to them. His aligning of Glyndŵr's rebellion with guerrilla warfare has an ideological bent, with guerrilla warfare generally being seen as a way of resisting "authoritarian states" that are "corrupt." (Clutterbuck 1990) When the spectre of Glyndŵr later appears in the novel, he has been shaped significantly by Glynn's telling, even wielding a pistol. (Hubbard 2023: 183) *Storm*, here, attempts to add something to Massey's concept of "throwntogetherness": it is not shaped only by spatial narratives, but how those narratives are told and remembered.

To consider Aberystwyth's history requires contemplation of Welsh nonconformity. As such, one significant spectral presence in *Storm* is the Preacher, the novel's anti-hero. He is based on John Williams, a nineteenth century Methodist minister who had a significant influence on the town during his life. However, I decided to change the name of the imitation to the Preacher, in an attempt to represent a more ambiguous spirit of nonconformity. I used M. Wynn Thomas to help construct the character of this spirit:

Nineteenth-century Nonconformity was truly hegemonic, colouring consciousness and not just institutionally dominant. Such a powerful psychic hold did it continue to exert, long after its theological and institutional power had waned, that it could appear to be unkillable. (Thomas 2010: 33)

I wanted to consider this "powerful psychic hold," and explore what emotional and philosophical pulls it might have. Thomas's analysis of the Welsh language, Nonconformist hymn, "Dyma Gariad fel y Moroedd" was something I regularly considered in the writing process:

The treacherous embrace of Judas is here reversed as pure justice and peace fuse in a rapturous kissing of a guilty world. No wonder this spiritually sensuous hymn became known as the "love song" of 1904-5. No religious culture capable of producing "Dyma Gariad fel y Moroedd" could possibly be all bad. (Thomas 2010: 19)

Storm subverts the "treacherous embrace" – depicted in "Dyma Gariad fel y Moroedd" as Jesus kissing the cheek of Judas and therefore forgiving him and indeed all sinners – yet again. Initially, the Preacher sees himself as needing to

play the part of Jesus, as kissing the guilty world. But it is Josephine who kisses his cheek, and in doing so "fuses" the past with the present, offering a moment of "rapture".

I did not engage in historical research only to make any depictions more convincing. Rather, this research was used in the novel to help problematize notions of authenticity, imagining a sense of place which is temporally untethered and chaotically populated.

Place: The large, elusive mark

It is difficult to imagine place as anything other than what we literally see. Fiction, then, makes us imagine and, in doing so, can make us see place differently. It is not that place has no singular identity, but that this identity is too complex to be understood in its fullness. *Storm* is an investigation into Aberystwyth's place and temporality, but it out of necessity chooses how it investigates and what it investigates. To write *Storm*, I had to choose how I was looking, who I was empathizing with, what particulars of Aberystwyth I was examining and when I was examining them. If ever I was led away from these, I tried to do so in a way that was limited, that did not distract from what I had deemed to be my focus. This may not seem a satisfying conclusion, particularly given that *Storm* does attempt to capture something of Aberystwyth's fullness. I would only say that in this regard, that the novel and this article should be read in conjunction as a glorious failure which gives some impression of how large and elusive the mark might be.

BIOGRAPHY

Alex Hubbard lectures in English and Creative Writing at Aberystwyth University. His research interests include place, the politics of place, and experimental fiction. Fictions of his have been published in *The Forge*, *Nawr*, *Prole*, and *Bandit Fiction*, among others.

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