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'MONGRELISING' THE NOVEL: GWYN JONES'S *TIMES LIKE THESE*¹

John Perrott Jenkins

Abstract

This essay examines an aspect of *Times Like These* outside the parameters of the 'industrial novel', though the 'industrial' narrative inevitably lurks in the background. It sees the date of the novel's publication – 1936 – as a significant moment in the heated debate over whether Anglo-Welsh novels were, by their very linguistic medium, a hybridised branch of English literature and therefore alien to Cymraeg culture. Gwyn Jones's view was that, while Cymraeg writing speaks to Welsh speakers only, 'mongrelised' anglophone Welsh writing could speak to the world. This essay offers an outline of the debate and its protagonists before proposing that Jones, a self-confessed 'mongrel', sparingly but notably hybridises his 'quiet and honest story' to locate aspects of the striking miners' leisure activities within a cultural tradition extending back to the foundational literatures of western Europe.

Keywords: Welsh Writing in English, pastoral, classical mythology, hybridity versus 'purity', Saunders Lewis.

Hybridity stands in opposition to the myth of purity and racial and cultural authenticity, of fixed and essentialist identity, embraces blending, combining, syncretism and encourages the composite, the impure, the heterogeneous and the eclectic.²

I had rather be bound to a fellow mongrel by the grime of a spider's web than parted from him by the purity of barbed wire.³
a rather hermetically sealed account of literature.⁴

In 1987 the 80 year old Gwyn Jones stated of *Times Like These*, published in 1936, that it is 'a quiet and honest story about quiet and honest people living their quiet and honest lives in a South Wales mining valley.'⁵ The

tone seems rather guarded and of itself tells us little about the novel or even about Gwyn Jones himself apart from his apparent liking for the rhetorical rule of three. Perhaps, looking back on a distinguished career as an internationally lauded authority on Viking culture and literature, and having played a prominent role in the establishment of Welsh writing in English as a distinctive form of Welsh literature and literary study, not to mention publishing other novels, novellas, several short stories, and translating *The Mabinogion* along with Thomas Jones, he felt that his early venture into the 'industrial novel' did not merit special attention. It would be hardly surprising, perhaps, given that he was described at a degree award as 'a kind of literary Barry John whose range of gifts is that of ten times normal men'.⁶ Even allowing for the generous hyperbole permitted on such occasions, it is an impressive endorsement, and particularly suited to a man who had once declared, 'If you can't make the Welsh Fifteen, translate the Mabinogion.'⁷

Centred largely on the travails of the Biesty family in the mining village of Jenkinstown in the turbulent 1920s,⁸ *Times Like These* sprang from Jones's deeply personal motivation, perhaps even a hoped-for catharsis, when his return to Wales after six years' schoolteaching in England reactivated what Cecil Price calls his 'hatred of the coalowners for what they had done to his father and grandfather'.⁹ As such, the novel has been lodged within the sub-genre of the 'industrial novel' and, situated chronologically as it is between the theatrical brio of Jack Jones's *Black Parade* (1935) and Lewis Jones's politically energised *Cwmardy* (1937), it has won praise on the one hand for 'its authenticity and restraint',¹⁰ and met with criticism on the other for its failure 'to work out in fictional terms a coherent relationship to what is, for him, emotionally charged material'.¹¹

This article suggests that it is not a novel quite like those mentioned above: it proposes that, without wishing to challenge the primacy of its industrial narrative, Jones, a self-confessed 'mongrel', also used the opportunity, via this most 'mongrelised' of literary forms, to achieve an additional objective. As Diana Wallace has observed, the reformulation of Anglo-Welsh writing into Welsh Writing in English as a field of academic study 'allows us to read and re-assess mid-century writing in Wales as well as writing which emerged in the 1980s and 1990s'.¹² Reading and reassessing *Times Like These* as a hybridised verbal artefact rather than a prescriptive industrial text, this essay begins by considering briefly the place of *Times Like These* in the ongoing debate

on the status, even the very existence, of a mongrelised Welsh literature written in English, specifically in the 1930s – very much a 'times like these' issue. It then moves on to suggest how, in exploiting the hybridised possibilities of the novel form, Gwyn Jones moves beyond these shores to make a tentative but rather daring attempt to situate aspects of this seemingly parochial narrative within the larger paradigms of what Daniel G. Williams neatly calls 'a transnational Anglosphere'.¹³ To repeat, this is not to deny the 'industrial' narrative its primacy, but it is to suggest that Jones rejects cultural insularity and looks outward in connecting aspects of the lived experience of characters in a Valleys village to a commonality of lived experience in other times and other places, places beyond Wales, and beyond England, too. In this 'quiet and honest' novel, then, Jones was making, quietly and indirectly, but nonetheless notably, a declaration of intent regarding the international status of anglophone Welsh writing.

(Anglo-Welsh literature) is the literature we have [...] not the literature we don't have, or the literature that Critic A, surveying Anglo-Irish and Scottish literature, contends we should have, and that Critic B, imposing a posthumous logic on the living fact, is determined we shan't have, even though we do.¹⁴

Gwyn Jones recalled in 1987 that, after the success of his first novel *Richard Savage* (1935), based on the life of the colourful eighteenth-century English philanderer, poet and claimant to noble descent, he wrote *Times Like These* because he was:

Back home in Wales and implicated in things Welsh. Me and mine were together again. I was at a stroke recognisably not an English author. By virtue of my language, I was strictly speaking not a Welsh author. I was when my novel appeared in 1936 an Anglo-Welsh author and I was coming to know a couple of others in like case.¹⁵

On its publication in 1936, *Times Like These* entered *de facto* the long-running debate in Wales regarding anglophone Welsh writing, and whether there was such a thing as an 'Anglo-Welsh author'. Surely, it was argued by some, such a mongrel was by matter of fact and cultural

dependence a regional branch of English Literature.¹⁶ Disagreement in Wales over the matter could, as M. Wynn Thomas notes, become fractious. He tells us of:

The concept, assiduously promoted by Welsh-language literary culture for almost a century, of a cultivated rural *'gwerin'* ('volk'). This was believed to form the bedrock of national life, and was regarded as being the antithesis in quality of those *deracinés*, the degenerate industrial proletariat.¹⁷

The residual Welsh ethno-nationalism underlying the views identified here led to what Ned Thomas later called a belief in 'a rather hermetically sealed account of literature',¹⁸ not so different from the 'myth of racial purity and cultural authenticity' identified by Vanessa Guignery at the start of this essay.

The 1930s were to experience a rise of temperature in the debate, perhaps most provocatively when Saunders Lewis, writer, nationalist, and political activist, declared in 1938 that 'there is not a separate literature that is Anglo-Welsh, and that it is improbable that there ever can be.'¹⁹ But there had been considerable activity two years earlier in 1936, the year *Times Like These* was published. Jane Aaron notes that in that year Harold Idris Bell, a distinguished translator of Welsh poetry, reiterated a view that he had expressed initially in 1922 rejecting the existence of 'what I may call an Anglo-Welsh movement, as such writers, by their very linguistic medium, belong to the tradition of English literature.'²⁰ In the same year, the poet Iorwerth Peate wrote: 'It is idle to talk of an Anglo-Welsh literature. There is none: we have Welsh literature and English literature by writers ... [whose] work is not Anglo-Welsh in the sense that Yeats and Synge are Anglo-Irish. On the contrary, theirs is a substantial contribution to the tradition of *pure* English literature'²¹ (my italics). Peate's choice of the italicised adjective, where he elevates a mongrelised novel written in what is surely a 'mongrel' language by a writer who gloried in his 'mongreldom' to thoroughbred status pushes the boundaries of semantic possibilities and illustrates how deeply feelings ran at the time. Whether in response to this or not, Gwyn Jones later recalled in a radio broadcast that in the same year as Bell and Peate's assertions, a consciously anglophone but undeniably Welsh literature came into being in the winter of 1936 when he, Glyn Jones and Jack Jones met together after a literary festival.²²

Jones himself had already completed the astutely titled *Times Like These*, and, as he informs us, Glyn Jones and Jack Jones were working on *The Blue Bed* (1937) and *Unfinished Journey* (1938) respectively.

Looking back in 1943 at what had been a culturally tempestuous earlier decade, W. Moelwyn Merchant wrote in support of Saunders Lewis that, 'One of the most valuable functions of the creative – and the critical – writer is to reintegrate traditional values in the new social situation, [that of the industrial south] but this business of reintegration has been 'burked' and for it the Anglo-Welsh writers have substituted the easier task of interpretation – of explaining the Welsh to the English.' A little later, he mentions Gwyn Jones's dereliction of such a national duty when in 1939 Jones celebrated in his first article as editor of the *Welsh Review*, 'the emergence in South Wales of a group of young writers who for the first time are interpreting Wales to the outside world',²³ self-evidently not only 'to the English' but to anyone who speaks or reads it. And not so much to interpret it, but to locate it also within a broader European context.

The vexed matter of the tension between the duty to integrate into an existing culture and a desire to innovate in literature that troubles Merchant, and which Jones addresses, is discussed by Pascale Casanova in *The World Republic of Letters*, in which her geopolitical model for the study of literature offers an interesting frame for reading *Times Like These*.²⁴ Within her literary republic, dominated spaces seek either integration with dominant cultural authority or innovate away from it, Cymraeg writing – and culture – in this particular case positioning itself as the dominant authority. The autonomy of such cultures, she argues, 'obscures the political origins of literature; and, by causing the link between literature and nation to be forgotten, encourages a belief in the existence of a literature that is completely pure, beyond the reach of time and history'.²⁵ For her, the achievement of Irish writers like James Joyce constitutes an 'Irish miracle',²⁶ challenging this seeming immutability of literary standards 'naturalised' by dominant cultures, and creating a fresh literary space in the republic of letters. However, Casanova rejects the idea of a crude binary opposition between the dominant and dominated, arguing instead that 'One would do better to speak of a continuum'.²⁷ Placed in a more modest position along the continuum than the great Irish writers Casanova cherishes, *Times Like These* may be seen as contributing to the formation of a distinctive, hybridised literary space called Welsh Writing in English. It exists,

then, within a wider national conflation alongside literature written in Cymraeg and carries a different weight of meaning and significance. Gwyn Jones acknowledges that it is a hybrid form but argued that it merits serious regard because:

The Anglo-Welsh, though they are a danger to the Welsh language, must never be its enemy; and the Welsh Welsh, even if they are the true dancers before our tribal ark, will be unwise to try and impose an irresistible logic upon an immovable fact; they must accept that they cannot speak for, even to, half their fellow-countrymen; while to the great world outside they may not speak at all.²⁸

The closing sentence, so similar in sentiment and ambition to his earlier view noted by Merchant of ‘interpreting Wales to the outside world’, leaves us in little doubt of Jones’s position on the matter. Casanova sees new literary spaces emerging through ‘revolts, assaults upon authority, manifestos [...] the subversions of traditional order that, little by little, work to create literature and the literary world,’²⁹ but what Jones appears to propose here in effect is a co-existence not a subversion, an alignment not a resistance.

Not every revolution need be bloody, and to adapt the literary resources of existing cultures is not necessarily synonymous with being assimilated by them. After all, and most memorably, Joyce did that in *Ulysses*, a novel whose very title is the Latin version of the Greek hero to tell a story in English set in Ireland. Indeed, Casanova follows her fiery rhetoric of ‘revolts’, ‘assaults’, and ‘subversions’ with the more moderate claim that new literary spaces emerge ‘little by little’. The following section proposes that in *Times Like These* Gwyn Jones, ‘little by little’, positions the striking male inhabitants of a Welsh mining village within a cultural continuum that quite unknowingly but also quite naturally draws its emotional and psychological sustenance and habits in times of industrial upheaval from prototypes of the ancient world, and as such reveals what Jones described elsewhere as ‘the continuous and recognisable identity of human beings’.³⁰

Here you have a reputable literary form upon which any variation is both possible and permissible.³¹

More particularly, even daringly, the cultural stream from which Jones draws, not often, invariably allusively but with cumulative suggestive effect, is from Europe's foundational literatures, most particularly classical myth, prominently, though not entirely exclusively, classic pastoral. Refracting aspects of Valleys industrial life through such a prism might appear to nudge the discursively inappropriate, and it has indeed invited criticism from some commentators,³² but the power of the pastoral mode reaches beyond its specific geographical and temporal contexts to represent an enduring human enjoyment of *otium* - of leisure, pleasure, and an escape into nature from the impinging realities of everyday labour, regulation and duty. It is the pastoral mode, writes Andrew Ettin, that 'embodies a statement about ideals and satisfactions, about ways of life and attitudes to experience, about nature and human values.' It is solace where 'the landscape is emotionally comfortable or appropriate for its inhabitants. It surrounds them with an unchallenging setting that may actually be a relief from life's troubles.'³³ Pastoral landscapes of the kind Ettin describes as sources of respite from care, and freedom from coercion are notably common in 1930s Valleys fiction and represent the view that while 'the unnatural state of South Wales was stressed in debate at the time, "natural" was Welsh neo-pastoral.'³⁴ In *Times Like These*, however, Gwyn Jones gives Welsh neo-pastoral a concisely expressed literary source and a more specific contextualising effect that locates it within the continuum of European culture. The classical references act as signifiers carrying a referential weight beyond their unadorned, unexplained presence in the text. They create a chain of association that invites the reader first to understand the story they tell, and second to ask what these stories are doing in such a narrative as *Times Like These*.

This strategy begins early, in the second chapter of the novel. After establishing the industrial setting and identifying several key characters, Jones introduces the schoolmaster Theocritus Jones, who is 'an important man. He had earned a second right to his christian name by fitting himself to read his namesake in the Greek.' (31) While there is an element of gentle mockery in Jones's representation of his parochial Theocritus, it is through him that he nonetheless pays homage to a foundational Greek pastoral poet. Aligning him with a common Welsh surname, one that also happens to be Jones's own, to create the hybridised Theocritus Jones has clear symbolic resonance, allowing Gwyn Jones to connect the enduring influence of the ancient world to

a contemporary Welsh context. An observer and evaluator of others, it is Jones's Theocritus (predominantly addressed throughout by his first name) who observes a large tree of his being felled by skilful miners. An 'ineffectual help' himself (47), for Theocritus it is a moment of aesthetic and cathartic engagement: 'He felt like crying out: Let him have it! as Oliver chopped so beautifully. He picked up a spotless chip and rubbed it between his fingers' (48), as if it is only tactile contact with a sliver of unspoiled nature that can complete the moment of wonder. Jones's Theocritus might not be a poet, but he has a poet's reflective sensibility.

Having introduced and identified this figure with the mongrelised name, Gwyn Jones makes his first foray into the world of classical myth. At a swimming hole called the Horse Washings, the rejuvenating effect of a different form of tactile contact with nature from Theocritus's experience is referenced when, after work underground, young miners, glorying in their youth, strip off their working clothes to wrestle and swim. They find their 'vitality kindled anew, Anteus-like (sic) at the touch of their bare feet on the grass by the river, lark, horseplay and dive like lunatics' (35). In Greek mythology, the wrestler Antaeus, born of an earth goddess, was invincible provided that his feet remained in contact with life-giving mother earth.³⁵ As Jones's reference serves no necessary lexical or syntactical purpose in the sentence, perhaps it is merely a piece of rhetorical ornamentation, though the earlier reference to the Greek Theocritus suggests otherwise. This essay proposes that Jones's audacious alignment of a mythical figure with young miners experiencing such a similar physical rejuvenation is not so much a shock of the new and therefore somehow inappropriate, as a shock of the old, an old world that experientially and powerfully speaks to us still.

Much of Chapter IV is devoted to the pastoral Whit-Monday celebrations (64-68) where, on the 'lovely sight' of Fender's Field, 'its green dotted with groups of children' on this sunshine holiday, there is 'tea under the trees'; and clergymen become 'shepherds (who) reached for their crooks and sought their wandering flocks'. It is through what Peter V. Marinelli calls 'the happy coincidence in meanings of the word *pastor*, shepherd and priest' that a word pagan in origin becomes fitting for a Christian celebration, while allowing Jones to locate the occasion within a bucolic literary mode.³⁶ As the occasion permits 'so carefree a relation of the sexes', the evening gives way to 'the innocent intoxication' fermenting 'in the veins of the adolescents.'³⁷

Overseeing the courtship rituals of the young in this verdant setting is none other than the schoolmaster Theocritus, once again an observer not a participant, who smiles approvingly and comments *virginibus puerisque* to his uncomprehending headmaster. In this restorative green space, it requires a little effort of memory to recall that Fender's Field is situated near where 'the shafts of the Cwm Colliery had been sunk in all their ugliness, just where the prevailing south-west wind would carry its smoke towards the village' (33).

Then there is the young miner, rugby player and exhibitionist Ben Fisher whose 'curling black hair that covered his legs, thighs and lower belly and thence ran like a thin tether up the middle of his chest gave him an oddly faun-like appearance' (209). Jones's terminology here is interesting for the adverb 'oddly' suggests that even the narrative voice is surprised by the similarity, and that surprised realisation further validates the comparison. But Ben's similarity to this mythical creature goes beyond mere physical appearance for, like Ben, fauns were often delineated as musical, mischievous admirers of beautiful young women and were depicted in woodland settings. Ben Fisher occupies an oddly hybridised space here, at once of his time and outside it. Perhaps not surprisingly then, having helped fell a tree for Theocritus, the faun-like, mischievous Ben takes off into the woodland singing (50), for in Theocritus's Greek pastorals any number of workmen sing.³⁸ Jones here provides a richly suggestive moment where the 'then' and the 'now' touch hands.

Later, presenting Jenkinstown life during the 1926 strike, Jones references two Arcadian characteristics in which, as Andrew Ettin reminds us, the 'pastoral place is defined by feelings of peace and contentment, belonging and long association, as well as of easy possession.'³⁹ In the first (187–9), the emphasis is on harmony and simple pleasure, where 'Companionship and the open air brought tolerance', where the striking miners, 'with their wives' connivance and discreet encouragement, took young children (to play) without undue noise at the safe little brooks that ran along the hollows' (187). Meanwhile, the men relax on green spaces where they would 'find a pleasant spot under a tree and stretch themselves, interminably yarning the same old stories' (187). Jones offers here an example of pastoral *otium*, where *otium* signifies relaxed and leisurely engagement with the world rather than vapid slothfulness. Throughout the passage the diction emphasises this pleasurable state of being, where the strikers ramble 'in leisurely

fashion'; there is 'harmony of spirit' that breeds 'tolerance' where they find 'content untouched with anxiety' (188). Jones returns to the theme of pleasurable *otium* later when describes the miners taking 'the mind from Tempe and its shepherds piping in the shade' (205). The angle of authorial vision is interesting here for it is very unlikely that the miners themselves are making this *recherché* comparison; rather, it is another moment when Gwyn Jones himself takes on the mantle of Theocritus Jones, who smiles indulgently at the young lovers on Fender's Field and resorts to a scholarly tag to validate the moment.

A little later in the novel, Jones returns explicitly to his classical sources, via Shakespeare this time, to develop his theme of *otium* and once more connects the now with the then, this time with a sequence of celebratory, richly sensuous images, when

To this new Horse Washing, as to Arden, *many young men did flock every day, and fleet the time carelessly as they did in the golden world* (...) These were the Arcadian characteristics of the strike – the soft swirling bodies in the water, the soft pad of feet on turf, the crumble of brown soil, sappy chewing of grass, the fly and leaf stippling the smooth river pools (205, my italics).

The italicised section is virtually a transcription of Charles the Wrestler's words in *As You Like It*, when he describes how the banished Duke now lives in the Forest of Arden, along with 'many young gentlemen (who) fleet the time carelessly as they did in the golden world.'⁴⁰ In his reference to pastoral delight, Shakespeare here is drawing, at several removes, on the Greek poet Hesiod's taxonomy of the five stages of human development,⁴¹ where the Golden Age of innocence, plenty and personal fulfilment moves through various stages of decline and ends with the present (whenever that it is) Iron Age of frustration, degradation and despair. Hesiod's mythical paradigm of the golden age might seem suited to Elizabethan romantic comedy, but in *Times Like These* Hesiod's five stages are compressed into two stages, where moments of a Golden Age of pastoral freedom and simple pleasures in the green spaces above Jenkinstown, already hinted at in the innocent Whit Sunday revels, co-exist alongside an Iron Age of exploitation and despair in the valley below, where, in the agonised words of young Luke Biesty, (who has lost his wife, his job and has no future prospects except penury): 'what are we in the world for? Everything do seem so useless, somehow?' (319)

In presenting the bleakness of the General Strike in 1926 strike, Jones switches on two occasions from the pastoral mode but remains within the contextualising frame of classical reference. The switch of tone and scale from the pastoral to the heroic reveals once more Jones's insistence on using surprising juxtapositions without apology or explanation to contextualise continuing human fortitude and resolution. Almost by way of introduction he pointedly directs the reader's attention to the similarity between the now and the then through one of Aesop's fables. When the striking miner Edgar Evans complains bitterly of 'genteel blacklegs' who undermine the strike that 'It's a funny sort of lark for one man when it's the bread out of another's mouth', the narrative voice intercedes to inform us that Edgar 'came near Aesop's famous fable', most probably 'The Lion's Share' (159), a fable so famous, it seems, that it requires no explicit explanation. It is a fable, unsurprisingly, about the ruthless misuse of power by the strong.⁴² What follows are two examples where the text positions the physically daunting struggles of the striking miners striving to heat their homes in winter within the frame of two famous myths, specifically the Latin reference in *The Aeneid* to Avernus and the Greek to Sisyphus, one a place, the other a doomed figure. Once more, Jones takes a great risk here as the switch of tone and scale from the pastoral is marked, and the references remain unexplained. Virgil's *The Aeneid*, after all, has the heroic Aeneas enter the world of the dead through a passage near Lake Avernus. As may be imagined, visiting such a place is to take a perilous path, as there may be no return. A modern translation reads:

The road down to Avernus
Is easy. Black Dis's door gapes night and day.
The toil, the struggle is to get back up
Into the open air.⁴³

This is the unmarked backdrop against which Jones describes the exhausting experience of the striking miners collecting coal slag by the hundredweight from tips, loading it into sacks of 'a hundredweight or more' and facing the daunting effort of getting it home:

You could get your sack hoisted, swing it behind your shoulders,
and start the killing ascent, have a rest when tired, start off, rest
again, and so on until you reached the eighty-eight steps of the

railway bridge. The stiff jerk down was no easy slide to Avernus; the ascent – that the labour, that the toil. To the oldest and weakest it was indeed a hell-climb. (242)

Notably, Jones's use of the second person draws in the reader, makes difficult any glib dismissal of the comparison.

With the coal backbreakingly gathered and collected into sacks, the next stage is to get it home. Jones's reference to Sisyphus (243) appears less apposite, for Sisyphus was a tyrant king condemned for eternity by the gods to roll an enormous boulder up a steep hill only for it to roll back down as it neared the top. The miners' activities are not futile and, as Jones states, when these 'luckier Sisyphuses' had rolled their stones to the top, for most of them the next stage was easy'. (243). Easy for most, but not for those unfortunates 'living up the inclines to the right' who face 'a new ordeal'. (243). As Jones comments in a telling litotes, 'Altogether, the coal was not won easily' and to be a 'luckier' Sisyphus is as ironic as it is true in this context.

If Jones was taking a risk by locating Valleys pastoral *otium* within the context of classic pastoral, he was taking a bigger risk here, one that again belies his claim to writing a 'modest novel'. *The Aeneid* is the foundational epic of Rome itself. Its scale is monumental. Among much else, Aeneas undertakes an arduous and dangerous journey to the underworld to seek wisdom from his father, Anchises. Jones's miners undertake an exhausting journey to a coal tip to scavenge coal for warmth. Of course, the miners' actions seem parochial alongside the mythical figures he references, but both take place within their own contexts. For the mythical Aeneas the return journey is a 'struggle'. The journey home for Jones' older and weaker miners is 'indeed a hell climb' (242). Once again, Jones frames his novel within the context of foundational European culture by utilising the power of classical myths that speak to us of eternal truths of the human condition represented through a magnified lens, of unimaginably cruel punishments, of adversity bravely borne, of resolution impressively displayed. They offer a doorway through which a culturally hybridised novel like *Times Like These* may pass into what Pascale Casanova calls The World Republic of Letters, where what happens in a South Wales mining valley has a noted and noteworthy resonance beyond its time and topographical setting. And, as Raymond Williams observes, in much Early Modern English pastoral literature, 'living tensions are excised, until there is

nothing countervailing, and selected images stand as themselves: not in a living, but in an enamelled world'.⁴⁴ The 'countervailing' realities of an exploitative, uncertain, living world, from which pastoral derives its continuing significance are very much present in a culturally mongrelised novel like *Times Like These*.

Poems grow in flower-beds, novels grow in forests.⁴⁵

This paper has been an attempt to approach *Times Like These* outside the parameters of industrial fiction, to suggest, as Diana Wallace observed, that the reformulation of Anglo-Welsh writing into Welsh Writing in English as a field of academic study 'allows us to read and re-assess mid-century writing in Wales'.⁴⁶ Gwyn Jones's involvement in the longstanding debate on whether there could be such a hybrid as anglophone Welsh literature, and the appearance of *Times Like These* in 1936 when the debate reached a new level of activity, offer an opportunity to reconsider aspects of the novel as an early response to this debate. It positions *Times Like These* as a hybridised novel which, while being focused on life in the narrow seam of a Welsh mining valley, also locates aspects of that life within a context of wider European culture. The early part of this paper offered an outline of this involvement, and then developed the argument to examine what other engines might have motored the narrative, apart from Jones's hatred of the coal owners. The embedding in the text of references to and quotations from Shakespeare, and the odd Latin phrase or two of Theocritus Jones might, of course, be attributed to Jones's wish as a young academic to display his scholarly credentials, but the references to classical literature, though never numerous, occur throughout the novel and suggest a more serious intent than a mere showmanship. Had *Times Like These* been a Victorian publication, these references might have been duly footnoted and explained. Instead, they lie unmarked and, for the large part unexplained, which, of course, begs the question, for whom was Jones writing this novel? Reflecting on such a matter later in life, Jones wrote:

Every writer engaged in an act of creation has, I suspect, some small private audience cast much in his own image, with which he communes and whose known expectations he knows he can meet;

but beyond that he will normally delight in being read by as many people as possible.⁴⁷

Nonetheless, for James A. Davies, *Times Like These* reveals Gwyn Jones to be 'a highly-cultured man used to speaking to those like himself and whose rarified dialogue with his implied readership emphasises the essential incoherence of his relationship with those valley people'.⁴⁸ For Moelwyn Merchant, Jones was merely 'explaining the Welsh to the English'.⁴⁹ Perhaps, as this essay suggests, Jones was using this 'quiet and honest novel' to contextualise the lives of the villagers within a much wider stream of human experience; to take aspects of Wales to other parts of Britain and to shores beyond, in contrast to Cymraeg writers, who, as Jones stated, for all their achievements 'cannot speak for, even to, half their fellow-countrymen; while to the great world outside they may not speak at all'.⁵⁰

One closing query regarding mongrelising. Why title the novel *Times Like These* rather than *Times Like Those*, given that it was written and published a decade later than the one in which it is predominantly set? There is, course, the need to satisfy the convention of immediacy, of representing characters through their lives as they unfold before them, in the case of this novel in an industrially unsettled and socially turbulent decade. But in the 1930s, too, as we have seen, there were also significant disruptive forces at work in the definition of the literature of Wales. Anglophone Welsh writers were consciously forming a new stream of literary expression and enquiry, and were channeling this stream, narrow though it yet was, into the world republic of letters. Perhaps, then, this mongrelised novel, written by a self-confessed mongrelised novelist, has a mongrelised title also, one that speaks with a double voice, both industrial and cultural, and shakes its head at a 'fixed and essentialist identity'.⁵¹

Notes

- ¹ *Times Like These* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd), 1936, rep. 1979.
- ² Vanessa Guignery, 'Hybridity, Why it Still Matters', in *Hybridity: Forms and Figures in Literature and the Visual Arts*, eds Vanessa Guignery, Catherine Pessó-Miquel and François Specq (Newcastle, England: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), p. 3.
- ³ Taken from the typescript of Gwyn Jones's draft on Welsh Writing in English entitled 'Being and Belonging', with his emendations and notations for emphasis, pauses, etc. broadcast on Radio Wales and Radio Cymru Nov 14, 1977. Repeated on Radio 3 March 1st, 1978. Gwyn Jones Archive, National Library of Wales, University of Aberystwyth, 19/44.
- ⁴ Ned Thomas describing the essentialist features of Cymraeg literature, from his essay 'Parallels and Paradigms' in *A Guide to Welsh Literature: Welsh Writing in English*, Vol VII, ed. M. Wynn Thomas (Cardiff: University of Wales Press), 2003, pp. 310–26 (p. 314).
- ⁵ Gwyn Jones, 'Anglo-Welsh Literature, 1934–1946: A Personal View', in 'Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion' (London; Issued by The Society, 1987), p. 184.
- ⁶ From an address by Professor A. J. Smith of Southampton University on Gwyn Jones's receiving an honorary D. Litt in 1978. Gwyn Jones Archive, 62/3.
- ⁷ From Gwyn Jones's 'Being and Belonging', 19/44. *The Mabinogion* is not italicised in Jones's script.
- ⁸ Like the upright miner Oliver Biesty in the novel, Jones's father had been sacked as a collier on a point of principle and never again worked underground.
- ⁹ Cecil Price, *Gwyn Jones* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1996), pp. 9–10.
- ¹⁰ Meic Stephens (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to the Literature of Wales* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 306.
- ¹¹ James A. Davies, 'Kinds of Relating: Gwyn Thomas (Jack Jones, Lewis Jones, Gwyn Jones) and the Industrial Experience', *The Anglo-Welsh Review*, 86, 1987, pp.73–86 (p. 74).
- ¹² Diana Wallace, 'Inventing Welsh Writing in English', in *The Cambridge History of Welsh Literature*, ed. Geraint Evans and Helen Fulton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), p. 557.
- ¹³ Daniel G. Williams, 'Afterword: Old and New Shibboleths' to *A Last Respect: The Roland Mathias Prize Anthology of Contemporary Welsh Poetry*, ed. Glyn Mathias and Daniel G. Williams (Bridgend: Seren Books), p. 146.
- ¹⁴ From Gwyn Jones's draft of Welsh Writing in English entitled 'Being and Belonging'.
- ¹⁵ Gwyn Jones, 'Anglo-Welsh Literature, 1934-1946: Personal View', in 'Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion', p.184. The 'couple of others' he mentions were Jack Jones and Glyn Jones.
- ¹⁶ Diana Wallace remarks that it was 'a heated debate which ran right through the twentieth century'. 'Inventing Welsh Writing in English', p. 557.
- ¹⁷ M. Wynn Thomas, 'Keeping his Pen Clean: R.S. Thomas and Wales'. *Miraculous Simplicity: Essays on R. S. Thomas*, ed. William V. Davis (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1993), pp. 61–79, (p. 64).
- ¹⁸ Ned Thomas, 'Parallels and Paradigms', p. 314.
- ¹⁹ Saunders Lewis, 'Is There an Anglo-Welsh Literature?', published in Cardiff by the Guild of Graduates of the University of Wales, in 1939, p. 13.
- ²⁰ Jane Aaron's essay, 'Forming the Subject: The Genesis of Welsh Writing in English as an Academic Discipline' is essential reading here. (Association of Welsh Writing in English [History]), May 2017.
- ²¹ See Jane Aaron, "'Worth the Record": A Brief Introduction to the Life and Work of Roland Mathias', *A Last Respect*, p. 12.

- ²² From Gwyn Jones's 'Being and Belonging'.
- ²³ W. Moelwyn Merchant, 'The Relevance of the Anglo-Welsh', *Wales* Vol. III. No.1, 1943, pp. 17–19, (p. 17–18).
- ²⁴ For a lengthier and more critical reading of Casanova's theories, see Andrew Webb's *Edward Thomas and World Literary Studies: Wales, Anglocentrism and English Literature* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2013), pp. 27–45.
- ²⁵ Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, translated by M. B. DeBevoise (Cambridge Ma.: Harvard University Press, 2004), p. 86.
- ²⁶ Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, p. 84.
- ²⁷ Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, p. 83.
- ²⁸ Gwyn Jones, 'The First Forty Years: Some Notes on Anglo-Welsh Literature', in *Triskel One: Essays on Welsh and Anglo-Welsh Literature*, ed. Sam Adams and Gwilym Rees Hughes (Swansea: Christopher Davies Publishers, 1971), p. 82.
- ²⁹ Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, p. 175.
- ³⁰ Gwyn Jones, 'The Novel and Society', Gwyn Jones Archive, 21/9.
- ³¹ Gwyn Jones, Lecture for Canadian Broadcasting Corporation: 'The Refuge of Genius: An Introductory Talk'. 12 lectures to follow 12 distinguished scholars, 1960, Gwyn Jones Archive, 21/2.
- ³² Stephen Knight, *A Hundred Years of Fiction* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2004), p. 84.
See also James A. Davies, 'Kinds of Relating', p. 76.
- ³³ Andrew Ettin, *Literature and the Pastoral* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1984), pp. 59 and 129.
- ³⁴ Hywel Francis and David Smith, *The Fed: A History of the South Wales Miners in the Twentieth Century* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1980), p. 39.
- ³⁵ Hercules defeated him by keeping him lifted and squeezing the breath out of him.
- ³⁶ Peter V. Marinelli, *Pastoral: The Critical Idiom* (London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1971), p. 10.
- ³⁷ The scenes of Jones's narrative here are often redolent of Milton's *L'Allegro*.
- ³⁸ See, for example, Theocritus's *Idylls*: 'The Singing Match' Idyll VI, 'The Second Singing Match' Idyll VIII, 'The Third Singing Match' Idyll IX.
- ³⁹ Andrew Ettin, *Literature and the Pastoral*, p. 129.
- ⁴⁰ *As you Like It*, ed. Agnes Latham, 'The Arden Shakespeare' (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1975), 1. i, ll. 126–9.
- ⁴¹ Ovid in his *Metamorphoses* followed Hesiod, and it was his version of the golden world that became known and translated throughout Renaissance Europe.
- ⁴² Probably a reference to Aesop's fable, 'The Lion's Share', where a lion, fox, jackal and wolf share out equally the carcass of a stag the wolf has killed. As king of beasts, the lion takes the first share, and then because it is the strongest the second share, and then the third because it is the bravest. It then offers the final piece to anyone brave enough to try to take it from him.
- ⁴³ Virgil, *The Aeneid*, translated by Sarah Ruben (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021), Book 6, p. 144, ll. 126–9.
- ⁴⁴ Raymond Williams, *The Country and The City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 18.
- ⁴⁵ Gwyn Jones, Lecture for Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.
- ⁴⁶ Diana Wallace, 'Inventing Welsh Writing in English', p. 557.
- ⁴⁷ Gwyn Jones, 'Writing for Wales and the Welsh', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 28.7.1972, Gwyn Jones Archive, 12/40.
- ⁴⁸ James A. Davies, 'Kinds of Relating'.

⁴⁹ Moelwyn Merchant, 'The Relevance of the Anglo-Welsh'

⁵⁰ Gwyn Jones, 'The First Forty Years: Some Notes on Anglo-Welsh Literature', in *Triskel One: Essays on Welsh and Anglo-Welsh Literature*, ed. Sam Adams and Gwilym Rees Hughes (Swansea: Christopher Davies Publishers, 1971), p. 82.

⁵¹ Vanessa Guignery, *Hybridity: Forms and Figures in Literature and the Visual Arts*. p. 3.

