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# PAIN, PIETY AND POLITICS: WELSH MINING COMMUNITIES IN PRE-FIRST WORLD WAR FICTION

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## Abstract

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Raymond Williams has famously but erroneously claimed that 'through almost the whole of the nineteenth century, the Welsh industrial novels did not come'. This article challenges Williams's assumption using three novels set in Welsh mining villages: John Saunders's *Israel Mort, Overman* (1873), Harry Lindsay's *Rhoda Roberts* (1895) and Joseph Keating's *Maurice* (1905). Due to the prevalence of deep mining, the Welsh coalfield was particularly dangerous. Novelists struggled to make sense of the arbitrary and cruel nature of injury and death in the mines – events that were increasingly understood to be not due to individual sin but due to structural social callousness. Expanding on the critical ground opened up by M. Wynn Thomas's *In the Shadow of the Pulpit*, this article shows how authors used mining accidents to redefine the nature of faith from a passive trust in God's plan to an active engagement in social justice. The religious imagery of *Israel Mort, Overman, Rhoda Roberts* and *Maurice* provides a structure for understanding Welsh working-class experience that was not replaced by the later industrial novel, but rather adapted and continued.

**Keywords** Mining, injury, religion, politics, Joseph Keating.

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Given the importance of coal mining to the development of Wales's cultural, political and economic identity in the nineteenth century, it might be expected that the pre-First World War fiction set in Welsh mining communities would be the subject of significant critical attention. While in 1851 only 10 per cent of the male labour force in Wales was employed in the collieries, by 1914 this figure had increased dramatically to 35 per cent.<sup>1</sup> Reflecting the importance of the industry, Welsh coal mining has been subject to extensive historical research,

both by modern historians and their predecessors. Yet while literary critics have recognised the important role of twentieth-century fiction set in Welsh mining communities – with works such as Lewis Jones’s *Cwmardy* (1937) and *We Live* (1939), Richard Llewellyn’s *How Green Was My Valley* (1939) and B. L. Coombes’s *These Poor Hands* (1939) receiving considerable critical attention – the nineteenth-century fiction set in coal mining communities has until recently been largely neglected. For Stephen Knight, nineteenth-century Welsh fiction in English was only fit for the ‘armchair coloniser’,<sup>2</sup> while Raymond Williams has famously but erroneously claimed that ‘through almost the whole of the nineteenth century, the Welsh industrial novels did not come.’<sup>3</sup> Few novels of the nineteenth century, Williams believed, were set in ‘the ironworks, the rapidly developing coalmines, the docks . . . Or if they were, we have yet to discover them.’<sup>4</sup>

This article challenges Williams’s assumption by tracing the nuanced evolution of religious motifs in three novels set in Welsh mining villages: John Saunders’s *Israel Mort, Overman* (1873), Harry Lindsay’s *Rhoda Roberts* (1895) and Joseph Keating’s *Maurice* (1905).<sup>5</sup> Described by Williams as the ‘one significant moment of emergence or perhaps, more strictly, pre-emergence’ of the Welsh industrial novel, Keating has gained critical attention as the first working-class Welsh novelist to write about the Welsh collieries.<sup>6</sup> In viewing Keating as the starting point of the ‘realist’ or ‘industrial’ tradition of Welsh writing, however, critics have underestimated the religious framework provided by previous authors such as Saunders and Lindsay. For Williams, early ‘religious culture’ provided the working-class writer with a relatively accessible literary form. With the rise, ‘after the bourgeois consolidation of the eighteenth century’, of ‘a culture and especially a literature in which contemporary social experience had become important and even central’, Williams argues that the working-class writer became disenfranchised – a disenfranchisement that would last until the rise of the industrial novel in the twentieth century.<sup>7</sup> Although Williams implies an opposition between ‘religious culture’ and ‘contemporary social experience’, recent critics such as M. Wynn Thomas and Alexandra Jones have shown that the distinction was not so clear-cut. In *In the Shadow of the Pulpit* (2010), Thomas argues that ‘during the later part of the nineteenth century, Wales produced a body of Anglophone writing – possibly the first Anglo-Welsh “formation” – concerned to construct and develop “the Nonconformist nation” by

discursive means.<sup>8</sup> This article expands the critical ground opened up by *In the Shadow of the Pulpit*, using three key but under-studied texts to demonstrate the continued influence of the religious imagery of these nineteenth-century novels on the political beliefs of the early twentieth century. Saunders and Lindsay were devout Methodists; Keating was brought up as a Catholic and wrote for Catholic publications. The religious imagery of *Israel Mort*, *Overman*, *Rhoda Roberts* and *Maurice* provides a structure for understanding Welsh working-class experience that was not replaced by the later industrial novel, I argue, but rather adapted and continued.

Although Saunders and Lindsay were English authors, in their Welsh novels they set up a framework of religious imagery that would continue to inform the writing of the working-class Welsh authors of the twentieth century. Much of the imaginative and linguistic energy of later working-class political movements builds on the religious language of these late nineteenth-century novels, as when the protagonist of Lewis Jones's *Cwmardy* and *We Live* describes left-wing political ideology as 'gospel' and speaks of the union leaders 'as one would speak of God.'<sup>9</sup> This article traces the evolution of such language in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century novels set in Wales, as Saunders, Lindsay and Keating redefine the nature of faith. Saunders's *Israel Mort*, *Overman* is chosen for its particularly early and extended exploration of religion's role in shaping the lives of Welsh colliers, showing the miners using the allegory of *Pilgrim's Progress* to help them navigate the dangers of the mines. Lindsay's 1895 *Rhoda Roberts* reflects the more conflicted attitude towards trust in providence that developed as the century progressed, as it advocates a new political activism able to build on the strong social bonds provided by religion. Finally, the 1905 publication of *Maurice* by Joseph Keating provides a link between these nineteenth-century authors and a new generation of working-class Welsh writers.<sup>10</sup> By concluding with Keating's allegory of the collier as a secular Christ, I demonstrate how the collier progresses from pilgrim in *Israel Mort*, *Overman* to the political agent of *Maurice* and of later twentieth-century novels. As a Methodist collier explains in *Rhoda Roberts*: 'I prefer to call it humanity, and downright, whole-hearted sympathy with all that concerns the human race. That's the religion I b'lieve in, Rhoda, and the only kind.'<sup>11</sup>

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## Salvation through providence: John Saunders's *Israel Mort, Overman*

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Published in 1873, Saunders's *Israel Mort, Overman* is, it appears, the second surviving English-language novel set primarily among the Welsh mining communities, and the first of this kind to have a collier as its protagonist.<sup>12</sup> Saunders was both a prolific and respected writer. He founded and edited *The People's Journal*, working alongside William Howitt and Harriett Martineau, and his plays were praised by Landor, Tennyson and Dickens. By far his most sustained literary achievement, however, was his eighteen well-received novels, the majority of which ran for several editions.<sup>13</sup> Although based in London, Saunders chose to set several of his novels in the Welsh collieries in order to explore the role of faith in navigating dangerous working conditions. 'In the whole British realm,' Engels wrote in his 1844 survey of 'The Mining Proletariat', 'there is no occupation in which a man may meet his end in so many diverse ways as in this one.'<sup>14</sup> Due to its specific geology and the prevalence of deep mining, the Welsh coalfield was particularly dangerous. Of the miners killed in major disasters (resulting in more than twenty-five deaths) between 1880 and 1900 almost half were Welsh, so that '[a]lthough the miners of south Wales constituted only 18 per cent of the miners of Britain, 48 per cent of the 2,328 deaths occurred there.'<sup>15</sup> Providing both consolation in the face of injury or death, and an imaginative escape from the repetitive monotony of work in the mines, religion in *Israel Mort, Overman* is central to the collier's experience of life.

Stephen Knight dates the first use of the 'classic Welsh industrial fiction routine of a boy's first day down a colliery' to 1905 and the publication of Keating's *Maurice*.<sup>16</sup> In fact, as has also been recently recognised by Alexandra Jones, the theme was first utilised in *Israel Mort, Overman* over thirty years earlier.<sup>17</sup> Saunders's eponymous protagonist Israel is the brave but ruthlessly ambitious overman of the 'Cwm Aber' mine. The novel begins when, ignoring the impassioned protests of his wife, Israel sends his son David to work in the mine as soon as he turns twelve, the then legal minimum age for entrance to the collieries. David's understandable apprehension is conditioned by the teachings of chapel and of Sunday school:

When David prayed 'deliver us from evil,' he thought of the mine only. When he heard of heaven being above the stars, nothing

seemed to him so natural and certain as that the mine – with all its horrors, destructive fires, and treacherous waters – should be the very mouth of the world of darkness, confusion, and misery beneath.<sup>18</sup>

Using the child's naive perspective to reveal the workings of the mine, Saunders introduces its dangers with all the power and shock of a first impression. Swept up in the 'current of collier life' and made anonymous by their covering of coal dust, the colliers appear to David only as 'ghastly spectre shapes' (p. 11) in the darkness of the mine. Living amongst the unnatural extremes of light and dark, fire and water, the colliers seem to the recently arrived David to have lost their individuality under the weight of a divinely inflicted punishment.

In Saunders's work, however, the use of religious imagery is subtler than has commonly been recognised. As the novel progresses Saunders introduces other religious tropes that complicate this original imagining of the mine as a hell on earth. Notably, in *Israel Mort, Overman* a distinction is made between the religious imagery used by outsiders and by the colliers themselves. For the mine owner, making a rare visit to the works, the obvious analogy is to Dante: 'he went away through that same low black arch through which the general current of collier life had gone before him, and which reminded Griffith of the famous line from Dante – "Abandon hope, all ye who enter here!"' (p. 115). As for the uninitiated David, the mines appear to the visiting spectator to be squalid and dirty; the colliers themselves irredeemably damned. For the colliers themselves, however, who made their daily living in the mines, the more appropriate biblical reference is to the 'Valley of the Shadow of Death' in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. The colliers joke:

'Ah, well! if a man's hard up for a job at other places, he can always get a berth at the "Valley o' the Shadow!"' meaning Israel's mine, and likening it to John Bunyan's Valley of the Shadow of Death – the 'Pilgrim's Progress' being one of the few works of fiction a Welshman will read. (p. 254)

A recurring reference throughout *Israel Mort, Overman*, the use of *Pilgrim's Progress* by the colliers reflects their literary interests, but also hints at a more fundamental ideological difference. While in Dante's

*Inferno* the traveller sees the toiling men around him as being irredeemably and eternally damned, Bunyan's pilgrim passes but is not detained within 'the mouth of the burning pit' of hell.<sup>19</sup> Although 'every whit dreadful' the Valley of the Shadow of Death did not represent eternal punishment for the sinner but rather a demonstration of faith by the Christian pilgrim who 'must needs go through it, because the way to the Celestial City lay through the midst of it'.<sup>20</sup> Bunyan provided a very different view of suffering from that offered by Dante. In choosing *Pilgrim's Progress* as the source of the religious imagery of the colliers themselves, Saunders shows that for the inhabitants of the Welsh mining villages the hardship of their lives is regarded as a temporary stage on the path to salvation.

As the novel continues, Saunders demonstrates David's realisation that the 'great trial' (p. 271) of the mine is not simply arbitrary suffering; as with the trials of Bunyan's pilgrim, the hardships faced by miners may be used to strengthen their faith. Given the dangerous and dirty nature of the collieries it is unsurprising that for many nineteenth-century writers the natural comparison for the mines was found in biblical descriptions of hell. As Williams recognises, a recurring image in travelogues was of the elevated, middle-class, English traveller looking down upon the inferno of heat, noise and squalor that constituted the Welsh industrial valleys. In a famous scene in his travel guide *Wild Wales* the Englishman George Borrow described the Cefn Mawr colliery as a landscape of 'hellish buildings' populated by 'demoniac figures': 'just such a scene as one of those described by Ellis Wynn in his Vision of Hell'.<sup>21</sup> Williams explains the proliferation of images of hell in English travelogues as a reflection on the startling squalidness of industrial society, and as 'the mediation of this shock through received conventional images'.<sup>22</sup> In *Israel Mort, Overman* Saunders exposes such clichéd imagery as both dehumanising and unrepresentative. As in *Pilgrim's Progress*, the miners are described as living and working in 'a veritable valley, not of the shadow of death, but of death itself' (p. 174). But rather than offering only damnation upon earth Saunders emphasises that, by submitting patiently to the trials of his life as a collier, the mine offers David the opportunity of an 'initiation into a holy brotherhood' (p. 101). Greeted upon his first entrance to the mines by a collier made 'startlingly ugly' by a previous pit explosion, both David and the reader are forced to confront their preconceptions of industrial devastation and damnation. Although 'a



more unangelic-looking messenger from the skies it would be hard to conceive', the man is in fact David's 'guardian angel' in the sense that he acts as a sympathetic and kindly guide to the mine (p. 13).

*Israel Mort, Overman* is not a political novel in the sense that twentieth-century Welsh novelists would understand: the miners do not agitate for better working conditions but rather for the right to hold prayer meetings in the mine. Like the 'human insects' of *Germinal*, the colliers are presented by Saunders as being innumerable and as vulnerable as a 'hive' (p. xvi), but in the Welsh mining novels of the 1870s there is none of the atheism, despair or political radicalism of Zola's work.<sup>23</sup> '[I]n the space of a breath – a spasm, without even time for a single cry or prayer,' Saunders writes, 'the whole of the busy workers in that black hive may be plunged into eternity, leaving not even one solitary survivor to narrate how the ghastly tragedy happened' (p. xvi). The passage emphasises the violence of the mines, but also the importance of narrating the resultant bravery and piety that would otherwise go unreported. Whereas Zola saw the miners as the brutalised products of an increasingly violent industrial society, *Israel Mort, Overman* shows the colliers using religion as a communal expression of their own worth and humanity in the face of this threat. Many nineteenth-century novels get written off, or have been ignored or neglected, because they do not agitate for political change in the way modern readers might want them to. *Israel Mort, Overman* has suffered a similar fate, but what seems to be conventional piety and acceptance of one's lot might actually be a form of politically active response to dangerous working conditions. Although limited by his reliance on divine providence to provide justice, Saunders shows that religion was able to unite the miners. This unity might be regarded as a prelude to political organisation among the miners; challenging preconceptions of squalor and damnation and allowing them to reclaim a sense of class pride.

When the novel ends in a pit flooding, Saunders demonstrates the ability of religion to provide a guide to the physical realities of working-class experience – but the drawbacks of Saunders's reliance on providence to provide justice for the miners also become apparent. The emotional climax of the novel occurs in a remarkable scene in which the trapped miners, including David, write the words of Psalm 88 in chalk upon the walls, both as a reminder of faith for themselves and as consolation for their relatives left behind. Christened 'The Miner's

Psalm' by the colliers, the psalm muses on the cruelty of being condemned to the 'pit' of death without the possibility of eternal life. Rather than representing hell or depression, however, in *Israel Mort, Overman* the 'pit' takes on the meaning of the 'coal-pit' (p. 364): the 'terrors [that] came round about me daily like water' (p. 365) are reinterpreted as the literal flooding of the mine. This literal reinterpretation adds a new level of poignancy for the miners' difficult worldly position. In replacing and negating the message of spiritual desolation present even in the original psalm, however, Saunders risks underestimating the need for changes in working conditions in mines. Saunders references several contemporary safety problems in *Israel Mort, Overman*: the employment of children in the mines (p. 46); the practise of ignoring dangerous conditions in order to keep up output (p. 80); and the neglect of the process of boring holes to check for water (p. 322). The flooding is a direct result of the latter oversight, but rather than representing a systematic failing of the mine-owning class it is interpreted by Saunders as a divine punishment visited upon Israel for his ambition. The climax of the novel is not a message of social or political reform but rather of religious conversion.

Using strikingly similar imagery to the short, uncompromising religious tracts of the period,<sup>24</sup> the conclusion of *Israel Mort, Overman* emphasises religious conversion and worldly self-denial: 'I have lived all my life not in one kind of mine, as I fancied,' Israel admits, 'but in two kinds; and that by far the darkest, deepest, most dangerous mine is not that which you are about again to penetrate, but that other one – of the spirit – which you have penetrated' (pp. 342–3). The physical dangers of the mine may provide an analogy to spiritual dangers, but for writers such as Saunders the dangers and hardships of worldly existence are insignificant compared to the dangers of spiritual negligence. Having realised that his son David is trapped, Israel repents his sins and pledges to give up his holdings in the ownership of the mine as a form of penance. It is fitting that *Israel Mort, Overman* ends in its final lines with a return to the allegory of *Pilgrim's Progress*, as Israel pledges his intent 'to try if there be any path open to one like me out of the darkness and the slough of despond in which I stand' (p. 405). For Saunders, life in the Welsh collieries was, and should be, navigated through trust in God's protection.

## Towards social assertion: Harry Lindsay's *Rhoda Roberts*

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While Saunders's emphasis on moral integrity was continued into later literature, his focus on religious rather than social or political justice started to be increasingly challenged as the nineteenth century progressed. In his survey of Welsh history in the years 1750–1898, Prys Morgan describes the period as one of transition 'from pastoralism to industrialism'.<sup>25</sup> The coal-mining industry's peak would not be reached until 1927, but even 'by the 1880s Wales was exporting about 25% of the world's coal, at a time when the economies of the world ran on coal, so that South Wales was a kind of Victorian Saudi-Arabia of the pre-petroleum age'.<sup>26</sup> Given the huge economic upheaval in Wales, it is unsurprising that the religious and social culture of the Welsh mining districts underwent a similarly significant transformation. While Kenneth O. Morgan argues that by the 1880s '[p]olitical nonconformity and industrial paternalism were still the most important factors in the political structure of the valleys', the old structures of religious belief, and of Nonconformity in particular, were increasingly being challenged by new political, cultural and scientific advances.<sup>27</sup> A series called 'Welsh Character Sketches' published in *The Red Dragon* in 1882 described how towards the end of the nineteenth century the 'transitions of life' had changed the character of the miner:

The old leaven of the superstitious and the God fearing, patient under suffering and meek under trial, is passing away. The one coming to the front is a different being. The type of the better trained is keen-eyed, resolute, discusses sliding scales, believes he has a distinct position in society, and has rights and privileges.<sup>28</sup>

Used in Wales from 1875 to 1902, the sliding scale was an agreement between miners and employers that linked wages to the selling price of coal. It was hugely influential in determining living standards: in focusing on the promise of the world to come, the passage implies, Welsh Nonconformity risked neglecting the real-world problems of its followers. The result was that by the end of the nineteenth century 'the breach between Welsh Nonconformity and the working classes was beginning to show itself'.<sup>29</sup> While *Israel Mort, Overman* ends with a reaffirmation of its protagonist's belief in providence and in divine justice, in the later novels set in Welsh colliery communities there was

increasing doubt about the efficacy of an unquestioning and literal belief that '[t]hough I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil, for thou art with me'.<sup>30</sup>

Published in 1888, Lindsay's *Rhoda Roberts* demonstrates the increasingly nuanced response to religion that was being developed as the century continued.<sup>31</sup> Lindsay was a devout Methodist. While most of his novels were based in his native England, like Saunders Lindsay uses the strong religious tradition of the Welsh colliers to explore faith at its extremes. At the heart of *Rhoda Roberts* are the competing romantic and religious claims of the colliers Dick Fowler and George Ford: the first representing traditional apolitical Methodism, and the latter a new and politicised Methodism. The first of three possible love interests for Rhoda (a wealthy squire is soon dispensed with due to his Church of England faith), it seems at the beginning of the novel that the reader is meant to sympathise with the 'strapping young' (p. 2) collier Dick. A 'religious enthusiast', for whom 'every act and motive of his life [was] saturated and directed by religious feeling and belief' (p. 4), Dick's fervent religion builds upon the imagery in *Israel Mort, Overman* of 'gleams' of faith being able to 'penetrate' the 'gloom' of the mine (p. 343):

To his faithful mind God was actually present with him in the dark mine, and his very stall became to him the audience-chamber of the King of kings, and though no ray of sunshine had ever illumined that subterranean stall, yet Dick Fowler's face was lit up with unwonted sunshine, which surely must have glinted on his upturned face from that invisible and bright world which, though unseen and unknown by too many of earth's denizens, yet surrounds and envelopes us continually. (p. 5)

For Dick – as for David in *Israel Mort, Overman* – the promise of his faith is able to transform the darkness and terrors of the mine into an exciting vision of the world to come. Dick prays as he works; Lindsay describes how 'with almost every stroke of the pick he cried unto God' (p. 4). Yet despite being transported to 'rapture' and 'tears' (p. 5) in the mine, Dick is also careful to work overtime to ensure that his religious ecstasies cannot be seen to have interfered with his output. Able to transform the mine into heaven in his head, Dick does not need to challenge the economic reality of his earthly condition.

As *Rhoda Roberts* continues Lindsay introduces an increasingly critical undertone into the reader's initially favourable perception of Dick. In what one critic called the 'superabundance of discussion on things spiritual' in the opening chapters,<sup>32</sup> the undoubted set piece is an antagonistic theological discussion between the Methodist Dick and the as-yet agnostic George:

'Can prayer hinder half a hundredweight of stone from fallin'?'  
'Yes,' said Dick, reverently, 'I believe it can.' (p. 3)

Dick's answer is at once humble and infuriatingly self-confident – a *reductio ad absurdum* extrapolation of the biblical order to trust in Christ that leaves no room for debate. When the dispute is cut short by a sudden rock fall, which comes 'crashing down from the roof upon the helpless figure of George Ford' (p. 7) but leaves his companions unscathed, it seems at first as if Dick's faith in providence could be justified. Lindsay's description of the stone as seeming 'fresh from the hands of the mason' invokes a message of divine intervention: in a string of adjectives the rock fall is described as 'unaccountable', 'mysterious', 'singular', 'strange' and 'marvellous' (p. 7). For both Dick and the villagers the event demonstrates the 'judgement of Heaven' (p. 8) – but already we can see Lindsay qualifying this religious explanation. In fact, the fall is 'a thing unaccountable, but unfortunately of too frequent occurrence in underground works where men toil all day long in imminent peril of their lives' (p. 7). Such apparently miraculous events, Lindsay hints, may not be as 'unaccountable' as is often presumed but rather the result of working conditions in which men were continually in 'imminent peril of their lives'.

While *Israel Mort, Overman* portrays its protagonist's spiritual journey to a 'promised land' (p. 48) that would be reached despite – even because of – the trials faced on the way, for later writers the hardships faced by colliers became harder to reconcile with a divine plan. Novels such as Daniel Owen's *Rhys Lewis* (1882), John Thomas's *To the Angel's Chair* (1897) and Allen Raine's *A Welsh Witch* (1902) all demonstrate the introduction of an increasing 'doubt and . . . darkness' into their portrayals of religion in the Welsh collieries.<sup>33</sup> In *A Welsh Witch* a mother's trust that 'God is faithful, and He has promised to help those who put their trust in Him' is repaid not only with the death of her young son in a mining accident but by the desecration of his corpse by

rats.<sup>34</sup> In *To the Angel's Chair* a newly married collier, one of the few survivors of a colliery explosion, is killed a month later in a freak accident by a pit-tram. 'The Bible is a lie!' his distraught widow cries:

His promises are a lie! and He is not love but – cruel, cruel – hard and cruel! . . . Why did He not take David two months ago with so many of the others in the pit? Why did He make such a show of saving Him from death, and of giving us our marriage joy, only to shatter it all immediately afterwards? It was because He wanted to delude and mock me, because He makes sport of our fleeting life.<sup>35</sup>

The widow's rhetorical questions appeal hopelessly for an answer she cannot be given – even the unwaveringly religious narrator is 'unable to say one word that could help this stricken woman.'<sup>36</sup> The notion of meaningful suffering presented in *Israel Mort, Overman* is eclipsed; death in the mines is presented as cruel, lonely and arbitrary.

While the wider public fed on sensationalist news articles with lurid headlines such as 'Buried Alive in a Mine: Story of the Welsh Disaster', novelists such as Lindsay recognised that for the Welsh colliers themselves death had become commonplace.<sup>37</sup> Major pit explosions and collapses had the greatest hold on the popular imagination, but they were in fact responsible only for a small proportion of the total deaths in the collieries: '80 per cent of fatal colliery accidents were the result of individual incidents.'<sup>38</sup> The rock collapse that injures George is not proof of God's intervention but rather of what John Benson calls a 'steady drip-drip of death [that] never rated more than a brief mention in the local paper.'<sup>39</sup> In his *Underground Life* (1869), Louis Simonin described miners as 'soldier[s] of the deep, against whom the powers of nature wage at times their utmost fury.'<sup>40</sup> In 1873 *Israel Mort, Overman* transferred Simonin's imagery of the 'battle-field'<sup>41</sup> to a religious vision of 'the brave soldier on the most hopeless of missions, ready either for death or victory, calm of heart and clear of brain' (p. 178). For later writers such as Lindsay, however, the deaths of colliers in the mines are neither heroic nor even momentous. 'It is as if life were a battlefield,' Lindsay writes, 'with the dead and dying lying all around us, to whom we can only pay a moment's rapid attention because the enemy fronts us, and we have to do battle with him' (p. 9).

Having set the scene for a theological discussion, the implications of Dick's reliance on providence are fully played out by Lindsay in his

description of a strike in the mining village. Although strikes would become a standard feature of later mining novels, *Rhoda Roberts* contains the first imagery of a strike in the Welsh collieries to occur since the anti-Chartist novel *Hidden Fire*. Markedly, for such an early depiction, Lindsay is firmly on the side of the strikers. Frustrated by Dick's unquestioning belief in providence and his condemnation of the strike, George not only challenges Dick but also castigates him:

'But why should we fret and strive?' queried Dick. '... When we get yonder, George, we will be amply compensated for all our trials here below.'

'I do not doubt it,' answered George, 'but that does not lessen in one degree our present duty, and I do not think it is our duty to calmly submit to the persecutions of the world, but to bear up against them, and, if possible, to overcome them.' (p. 181)

Dick represents for Lindsay what E. T. Davies calls 'the almost exclusively individualistic note of nineteenth-century Nonconformity' that was 'hostile to the early workers' unions and benefit societies which played an important part in industrial life in the last century.'<sup>42</sup> Although this hostility was partly for practical reasons – religious leaders condemned their oaths of secrecy and use of public houses as meeting places – it also betrayed a more fundamental predilection of the Nonconformist movement in Wales. Believing that body and soul were antithetical, for Dick the role of religion is not to challenge worldly inequalities but rather to fit the worker for the world to come. The result is an increasing alienation from the more politically active sections of the working-class community. As George castigates Dick:

I believe it is such opinions as yours that does Christianity so much harm, and makes it so unpopular with certain sections of the working classes. Christ's religion, Dick, is not cowardly, but noble; not a thing to be spurned and despised, but to be loved and cherished. (p. 181)

Instead of challenging the lack of safety precautions of the mine, Dick places his trust in divine providence and in his reassurance by the Methodist minister that 'Our work, you know, is full of hazard . . . But

our lives are in God's hands, Dick, and if we be his children He'll look arter us' (p. 2). When the novel concludes in a large mine explosion, however, the devastation caused by the disaster ends any ability to trust in providence. Having criticised the lack of safety measures in the mine – particularly through Lindsay's topical condemnation of the use of open lamps 'despite the many serious calamities which have occurred in the neighbourhood' (pp. 3–4) – the explosion is shown to be all too predictable; not the result of providence but of the failure of the colliers to win in the strike and the resulting cost cutting and deterioration of safety conditions. The reader's attention is called back to George's earlier accident, when a fellow Methodist was the first to question Dick's reliance on providence as an explanation:

Was the good God responsible for the Abercarn explosion which entombed 260 men, some of whose bodies are still lying there unrecoverable? That's a fearful way of looking at things. But I'll never believe God is so 'vengeful as some men make out – fendish I was a-going to say, if it were reverent, which it is not. (p. 8)

The 1878 Abercarn explosion was one of the worst in south Wales: 268 men and boys died, the vast majority of the 365 colliers who were underground at the time of the explosion. Since mining communities were traditionally small and isolated – as noted in *Israel Mort, Overman* the 'village *was* a world just then' (p. 32) – the explosion was devastating. In many cases proper Christian funerals were denied to the families of the dead: as described in *Rhoda Roberts*, many of the bodies of loved ones remain entombed. Lindsey goes further in making his point: in *Rhoda Roberts* there are no survivors. In her extended reading of this passage, Alexandra Jones argues that 'a clear distinction is made between large-scale disasters and this one-man accident', with the intention 'perhaps to emphasise the importance of the individual's experience and connection to God, a central tenet of Calvinism'.<sup>43</sup> I would invert this reading, however, to argue that the example of large-scale devastation is chosen by Lindsay to reflect its message of inexplicability and injustice back upon the individual accident. The death of all 178 men in the mine at the climax of *Rhoda Roberts* leaves no possibility for divine intervention in the fates of the unfortunate individuals. Neither individual accident nor large-scale disaster can be explained as the actions of a benevolent God.



By the end of the novel the intended readers' perception of Dick and of George, and of the approaches to religion that they represent, has undergone an inversion. When the final bodies are removed from the destroyed colliery Dick, our erstwhile protagonist, is found among the dead. From the wrecks of the mine, Lindsay writes, 'the body (the disfigured body) of poor Dick Fowler' (p. 333) is removed. Inserting a parenthesis to further elaborate on the state of the corpse, Lindsay deliberately calls attention to Dick's disfigurement. Having proclaimed the workings of providence in creating the 'mangled form' (p. 7) of George at the beginning of the novel, Dick's own body suffers a similar fate. Religion cannot exist separately from the world but must create its own providence; in Dick's death Lindsay endorses a new trust in politics, rather than the divine providence of *Israel Mort, Overman*. In marrying Rhoda to George, the working-class collier involved in strikes and only lately converted to Methodism, Lindsay encourages a rechannelling of religious faith into worldly action. There is no place in the conclusion of the novel for Dick, or for 'the old days that are going, almost gone'.<sup>44</sup>

### **Salvation through politics: Joseph Keating's *Maurice***

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By the beginning of the nineteenth century the changing belief systems prophesied and described by writers such as Harry Lindsay had become inescapable in all but the most isolated communities in Wales. Previously incontestable religious truths – and in particular the reliance on divine providence – continued to be questioned, as faith was redefined from a passive trust in God's plan to an active engagement in social justice. Joseph Keating's novels of the early 1900s, alongside Irene Saunderson's 1910 novel *A Welsh Heroine* and J. O. Francis's 1913 play *Change*, are typical of the literature of the period in portraying not only the introduction of new industry into the Welsh valleys, but also of new influences and ideas. With the conclusion of the long, drawn-out strike of 1898 and the end of the sliding scale agreement, the cautious truce between colliers and mine owners that had lasted for more than twenty years came to an abrupt end. Culminating in what Keating calls the '1906 wonder' of the election of twenty-nine Labour Party MPs to the House of Commons, working-class labour movements began to capture the zeal, popularity and influence previously enjoyed only by

religious organisations.<sup>45</sup> Many of the qualities previously associated with religion were transferred to the growing working-class political movement: hope, compassion, fervour and an unwavering sense of right and wrong. In 1909 Vyrnwy Morgan warned that, despite the short-lived impact of the 1904–5 Welsh Revival, ‘working men have recently reverted to the old belief that their salvation is not to come by the way of the pulpit or by the way of churches, but by way of the Labour Party and Westminster’.<sup>46</sup>

An analysis of Keating’s 1905 novel *Maurice* demonstrates that the transition from a trust in heavenly deliverance to political salvation was, although profound, not yet as antithetical as Morgan suggests, but rather a development of previous cultural, religious and literary influences. Born and raised in the Welsh mining village of Mountain Ash in the Cynon Valley, Keating worked in a colliery from the age of twelve, going down the pits at fourteen, before later becoming a journalist and author. He has traditionally been understood in the context of his position as the first working-class (ex-)collier to write about life in the Welsh coal-mining districts. Critics have focused their attention on Keating’s 1916 autobiography *My Struggle for Life*, seeing it as a precursor of later working-class realist writing such as B. L. Coombes’s *These Poor Hands*. In contrast, Keating’s novels have been criticised by Stephen Knight for their ‘clear sense that no publishing profit lies in anything tinged with Welsh realism’; while in his extended analysis of Keating’s writing Jonathan Evans claims that ‘[e]ven in his second, more accurately described, novel, *Maurice*, Keating’s descriptions of working life on the coal face lack . . . detail and vigour’.<sup>47</sup> Knight and Evans are right to differentiate Keating’s novels from later working-class realism. Framing him in relation to this later context, however, risks underestimating the radical potential of his religious imagery and symbolism. The dangers Keating faced as a miner permeate his fiction: the colliery apparatus is ‘a sombre scaffold’ and a ‘terrible scaffold’ in *Maurice*; ‘a hideous scaffold’ in *Son of Judith* (1900); and ‘a terrible scaffold upon which human lives were swung into the unknown’ in *The Flower of the Dark* (1917).<sup>48</sup> While *Son of Judith* is now Keating’s best known and most widely available novel, early readers saw in *Maurice* in particular a direct analogy to current political circumstances. First published in 1905, *Maurice* gained widespread recognition after it was republished in 1915 as a topical response to the first general coal strike of 1912. Exhibiting a newly assertive message of

social and political reform but retaining the moral fervour and religious imagery of earlier novels, *Maurice* connects the writers who came before Keating with the later Welsh working-class novelists of the twentieth century.

Continuing the process begun in *Rhoda Roberts* and *To the Angel's Chair*, in *Maurice* Keating makes the reader aware from the beginning of the novel of the arbitrary and cruel nature of death in the mines – deaths that were not due to individual sin but due to structural social callousness. As in *Israel Mort, Overman*, *Maurice* describes the entrance of a young boy into the mines: the eponymous Maurice, whose character and experiences were based on Keating's younger brother. Whereas in *Israel Mort, Overman* David is presented as being scared of the mines, Keating had personal experience of how exciting the appeal of adult work could be to a young child brought up in a Welsh mining community. For Maurice as for Keating himself the introduction to the mines is a dangerous but exciting 'adventure' (p. 184). Although he later came to bitterly regret his early enthusiasm for colliery work, Keating could not forget that on his first day in the mine 'I was delighted to be in the pit'.<sup>49</sup> 'Fortunately,' Keating writes in a sobering retrospective analysis of his youthful experiences in the Welsh collieries, 'I am still alive':

My head is not smashed by falling roof-stones; my back is not broken by the flight of a cage down a shaft when the winding rope snaps; my legs and arms are not torn from their sockets by tram wheels or machinery; my body is not shattered into fragments by an explosion.

Some of the boys and youths who were my colleagues did not escape as I did. Their lost limbs, twisted spines, gashed faces, or simple, white tombstones on the hillside, are their testimony to our young days of danger.<sup>50</sup>

In his repeated use of negatives ('My head is not smashed', 'my back is not broken'), Keating emphasises the dangers and deformities faced by his fellow colliers even as he reflects on his own survival. Thus when Maurice is passed by a funeral bier on his way to the mines the experience is dulled by the familiarity of the scene, so that what might appear to the reader as sensationalism is relegated to something 'not new in these parts, but interesting' (p. 28). Like George in *Rhoda Roberts*,

Keating cannot believe that his individual survival is the result of an act of benign providence. For Keating hardship and death in the mines was 'life in reality' – the 'escape' from death or deformity a lucky aberration.<sup>51</sup>

The scale of the religious revolution that occurred in the fiction set in the Welsh mining valleys becomes clear in a comparison of *Israel Mort*, *Overman* and *Maurice*. Published thirty-five years apart, there are many similarities between the two novels: both include the entrance of a child into the mine, both display the hard conditions of colliery life and both end with a terrible pit collapse. Both novels navigate the dangerous collieries using the received symbolism and terminology of religion, to the extent that adaptations of Psalm 130 – 'Out of the depths I have cried unto you, O LORD. / Lord, hear my voice: Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications' – occur in both novels. In *Israel Mort*, *Overman* Saunders subtly but significantly modifies the psalm's wording to remove any trace of despair:

Out of the depths to Thee we cry.  
Our voice, Lord, do Thou hear? (p. 375)

Replacing the first person singular narration of the original psalm with the first person plural, Saunders implies that the miner is not alone but is supported by shared trials and shared religion. Where the religious message of *Israel Mort*, *Overman* aims at renouncing the world and fitting the miner for heaven, in *Maurice* there is a greater emphasis on inspiring the working-class man to challenge the material and social inequalities of the world. Although Keating's novel is named after Maurice, the eponymous child mainly acts as a foil to the enigmatic Jethro, an older collier who is the true protagonist of the novel. While Maurice survives his experience in the mines – just as Keating and his brother did – Jethro's death is presented as being ordained from the beginning of the novel. He cries out involuntarily when he sees that Maurice has started work in the mines in language again drawing on Psalm 130:

'Poor, poor Maurice!' he murmured. 'What in Heaven's name sent you down among the condemned?'

Jethro spoke with the sadness and hopelessness one would expect from a soul in purgatory; it had all the tragedy of the psalm of

sorrow, 'Out of the depths I have cried to Thee, O Lord! Lord, hear my voice!' (p. 231)

When spoken by the self-sacrificial Jethro the psalm becomes reminiscent of Christ's last words on the cross. Although the Gospel of Luke claims that Jesus's last words were 'Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit' (Luke 23:46), Keating draws instead on the more despairing tone of Matthew: 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' (Matthew 27:46). The colliers are not able to rely upon an unquestioning faith in the world to come, but must question received truths and make difficult moral and religious decisions for themselves; weighing up social and religious obligations in the search for righteousness within the context of a changing faith.

When the mine is blown up by an anarchist who 'personified solid modernity' (p. 358) and is strikingly similar to the character of Souvarine in *Germinal*, Keating's identification of Jethro with Christ is made explicit. 'No pit-haulier's religious knowledge may be described as plenteous,' Keating writes when Jethro dies saving Maurice and preventing a further explosion, 'yet even a pit-haulier could not help recalling the Divine example of Calvary' (p. 336). Yet, unlike earlier novels such as *Israel Mort*, *Overman*, Keating does not only praise the self-sacrifice of the colliers but also uses the same religious language to criticise and challenge the unequal society that made such a sacrifice necessary. Keating writes in his autobiography:

There is something Christ-like in the poor: obeying an inscrutable Will they humbly bear their cross of cruelty, permit, in effect, their bleeding hands and feet to be nailed to it, and, though in numbers and strength possessing power to destroy the world, do not murder their crucifiers.<sup>52</sup>

Keating's imagery is provocative, for while it places the poor in the self-sacrificing role of earlier novels, it also emphasises the position of the rich. 'I saw that landowners, employers, and all rich men and women were social criminals,' Keating continued: 'They were like the High Priests of the Jews, and were every day occupied in the crucifixion of the poor.'<sup>53</sup> In his depiction of Jethro's death in *Maurice* Keating likewise aims to show the systematic failings of the social system, turning tragedy from an individual religious experience into a

class-based travesty. Religious imagery is not, however, discarded, but rather transformed and rechannelled for a social purpose. In death Jethro is canonised, in imagery that remains connected to the physicality – to the dust, dirt and darkness – of the mines. ‘The halo of light’ Keating writes, ‘shed by his little lamp around his noble head as he lay in the sable dust, was saintly and pure. His eyelids drooped and closed, and they never rose again’ (p. 349).

Keating does not simply exhort the reader to be individually pious or self-sacrificial, but uses the religious tropes of previous writers to inspire social change. In a subtle but consistent allegory, Keating’s novel does not end with the sacrifice at Calvary but rather shows that, like Christ, Jethro’s sacrifice allows for the salvation of the ‘condemned’ (p. 236). The explosion takes place with ‘a tearing, Titanic roar – like the Doomsday cracking of the walls of hell to set free all the souls of the damned!’ (p. 320). Just as Jesus died and descended into hell to free the sinners within, so Jethro’s death is able to physically free his fellow miners from the hell of the collieries, allowing them time to escape. In figuring Jethro as a Christ who is not only a sacrificial vessel but also the means of a worldly salvation, Keating imbues the working collier with a new sense of agency. In *Israel Mort, Overman* two miners escaping an explosion are described as appearing ‘like some new Lazarus risen from the grave’ (p. 187). Alexandra Jones notes that the simile is an example of how the ‘use of resurrection imagery is fairly widespread in coalfields literature.’<sup>54</sup> While this language of resurrection has a significant history, I would extend her reading to argue that it is reconfigured in later novels so that the miners become active participants in their own salvation. In J. O. Francis’s play *Change*, a young socialist firebrand, Lewis, is shown arguing with the older, more conservative Price:

*PRICE (seriously).* Now listen to me, Lewis. If you and the like of you go on talking like this, and the temper of the men rising every day, sooner or later there’ll be Hell upon Earth here in Aberpandy.

*LEWIS.* There’s never been anything but Hell upon Earth here in Aberpandy; but it shan’t be Hell for ever.<sup>55</sup>

Although Francis’s play ends with tragedy, and with Lewis’s penance and regret, the dispute encapsulates the growing challenge to the

danger and degradation faced by Welsh colliers. While previous imagery of the mines as hell (such as the mine owner's references to Dante's *Inferno* in *Israel Mort*, *Overman*) implied an unchanging and unchangeable suffering, Francis and Keating both recognise that the misery and anguish present within the collieries entails the necessity of future change.

Raymond Williams described in twentieth-century Welsh mining novels 'a movement towards describing what it is like to live in hell, and slowly, as the disorder becomes an habitual order, what it is like to get used to it, to grow up in it, to see it as home.'<sup>56</sup> Both Francis's *Change* and Keating's *Maurice* challenge the continued existence of such awful and degrading working conditions in the first decades of the twentieth century. Williams implies that imagery of the mines as a hell experienced from the inside, as opposed to being looked down upon from an outsider's perspective, only gained extended usage in the twentieth century. An analysis of the literature shows that descriptions from a collier's perspective of the mines as hell were used pervasively and insistently much earlier than Williams implies. Over thirty years earlier *Israel Mort*, *Overman* had first challenged the flippant clichés used in travelogues. While outsiders saw toiling miners as part of the landscape of hell, Saunders separated the colliers from their surroundings. For the colliers themselves, Saunders demonstrated, their suffering was seen as leading to salvation rather than damnation. *Maurice* transfers this message from the afterlife to the physical reality of political salvation. In *Maurice* the colliers are described as 'demon[s]', 'imp[s]' (p. 228), 'shades' (p. 221), and, in language superficially similar to that of George Borrow, 'like Botticelli's figures in the "Inferno"' (p. 220). The 'miniature inferno' caused by the furnaces of the colliery is portrayed as having 'tinted the dark sky above a blood-red' (p. 101); just as in his autobiography *My Struggle for Life* Keating described how in his childhood the 'burning' and 'flames' from furnaces and escaping gas meant that it seemed 'that all the country was ablaze'.<sup>57</sup> Yet Jethro's death is important not in securing his individual redemption but because of the effect his self-sacrifice can have on the lives of others. While in entering the mines Jethro enters 'Hell on Earth', for Keating as for Francis there remains the possibility and even the necessity that it 'shan't be Hell for ever'.

Although Keating's work has often been seen in isolation, or as a starting point for an analysis of future writers, *Maurice* illustrates a

continued transition away from reliance upon providence and towards participation in politics. In 1923 Keating became a Labour councillor for his hometown of Mountain Ash, and remained a prominent member of the Labour movement. Upon Keating's death newspapers pronounced the 'Death of Joseph Keating; Labour Leader and Novelist' – the paired nouns no longer antithetical but reinforcing each other.<sup>58</sup> In Daniel Owen's 1888 Welsh-language novel *Hunangofiant Rhys Lewis, Gweinidog Bethel* (*Rhys Lewis, Minister of Bethel: An Autobiography*), made accessible to an English-speaking audience by the editor of the Anglo-Welsh periodical *The Red Dragon*, a mother's dispute with her son over his neglect of religious texts including *Pilgrim's Progress* is portrayed as being symptomatic of a broader change that was beginning to transform the religious life of mining communities:

No one who set store by his soul ever thought of reading anything but the Bible, Bunyan's 'Pilgrim's Progress', Charles' 'Bible Dictionary', and Gurnal's book. But now, forsooth, everybody must have his newspaper, and his English book, of which no one understands the contents. And what is the result? Why, a generation of people who have not the fear of God before their eyes . . . knowing more of every thief than the thief on the Cross, and of every death than of the Death which was life unto the world.<sup>59</sup>

In *Maurice* Keating challenges this analysis, demonstrating not ignorance of religious history but its adaptation. By figuring Jethro as Christ Keating shows that the death of this individual collier could, indeed, be made analogous to 'the Death which was life unto the world' – and that such comparison was necessary. Whereas *Israel Mort, Overman* used the allegory of *Pilgrim's Progress* to encourage trust in providence, Keating uses the allegory of Christ's sacrifice in order to argue the need for active worldly change. Keating, as the first working-class Welsh writer to describe the mines, does not reject religious imagery, but rather reclaims and revises it for a more political present.

## Implications for later Welsh fiction

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The changing approach to religion depicted by novelists such as Saunders, Lindsay and Keating would continue to inform the



working-class political and literary movements that flourished in Wales as the twentieth century continued. In his 1956 autobiography *From the Valley I Came*, Wil Jon Edwards recalled replacing a picture of the Liberal Prime Minister Gladstone with the Labour Party MP Keir Hardie after the death of his mother. The change was 'symbolic of, and reflected, the great political revolution happening in the valleys'.<sup>60</sup> When Edwards described replacing the Bible and *Taith Y Perenin* ('Pilgrim's Progress') with the *Communist Manifesto* and *Das Kapital*, the symbolism was equally profound – but the alteration perhaps less decisive.<sup>61</sup> Writing of Keir Hardie that 'the people flocked to hear him preach this new gospel', Edwards's language betrayed the continued influence of religious tradition upon the working-class movement.<sup>62</sup> In a famous 1910 speech Hardie claimed that his inspiration for joining the Labour movement 'derived more from the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, than from all other sources combined':

To the Socialist and Labour man in particular Christ's teaching should appeal with irresistible power . . . The Kingdom in Christ's mind did not refer to a heaven in the future: the Kingdom of God meant the establishment right here upon earth of a condition of things in which human life would be beautiful and free to develop along Godlike lines . . . The Labour movement in its very essence is essentially religious.<sup>63</sup>

Convinced of the possibility of a better world, the pioneers of the Welsh Labour movement transformed the passionate belief in the world to come into an equally passionate belief in the possibility of working-class salvation in this world. Hardie challenges the equation of religious belief with spiritual withdrawal from worldly concerns, and would agree instead with George in *Rhoda Roberts* that 'I do not think it is our duty to calmly submit to the persecutions of the world, but to bear up against them, and, if possible, to overcome them' (p. 181).

While Keating made a key contribution to literature set in the Welsh collieries, without understanding the history of nineteenth-century fiction set in the mining valleys it becomes impossible to place either Keating or the writers who followed him in their historical and literary contexts. Although M. Wynn Thomas describes Caradoc Evans's 1915 *My People* as 'a brilliantly extreme example of the animus against Nonconformity which animated both the best Welsh-language and the

best English-language literature of that period', in fact many of the twentieth-century novels set in the Welsh mining districts remained informed by the language and spirit of religious belief.<sup>64</sup> In his 1938 novel *Bidden to the Feast*, Jack Jones described how 'election campaign[s] became almost a religious revival',<sup>65</sup> writing in his autobiography *Unfinished Journey* (1937) that to his younger self Hardie seemed to take on the role of Christ: 'it seemed to me then that every word he spoke about the workers and their sufferings and struggles came from a bleeding heart, a heart that had always bled, would always bleed for the suffering of mankind.'<sup>66</sup> Even those novelists who became disillusioned with the Labour movement in Wales remained sensitive to the intensity of the convictions inspiring its creation. In his novel *Times Like These* (1936), Gwyn Jones described the Labour Party's participation in the 1931 Conservative-led National Government as 'the political crisis which cost the Labour Party what it can never regain – almost religious faith that had built up from its beginnings.'<sup>67</sup> 'I always felt,' explains the novel's disillusioned protagonist, 'that the Labour movement was like a sacred cause. I never looked upon it as politics.'<sup>68</sup> The transformation of the role of religion as depicted in nineteenth-century fiction did not simply end with the turn of the century; instead the continuing redefinition of 'faith' as demonstrated in *Israel Mort*, *Overman*, *Rhoda Roberts* and *Maurice* continued to inform later literature. By the beginning of the twentieth century there had been a movement away from the trust in divine providence displayed by *Israel Mort*, *Overman* – but the Christian belief in a better world to come was incorporated into a passionate and heartfelt faith in working-class political movements. As would be enunciated in Lewis Jones's *Cwmardy*: 'A principle is like God. It is something you can't see, but it is deep down in your heart all the same.'<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John Davies, *A History of Wales* (London: Penguin, 1993), p. 398.

<sup>2</sup> Stephen Knight, *A Hundred Years of Fiction* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2004), p. 9.

- <sup>3</sup> Raymond Williams, 'The Welsh Industrial Novel', in *Culture and Materialism: Selected Essays* (London and New York: Verso, 2005), pp. 213–33: p. 217.
- <sup>4</sup> Raymond Williams, 'Working-class, Proletarian, Socialist', in H. Gustav Klaus (ed.), *The Socialist Novel in Britain* (Brighton: Harvester, 1982), pp. 110–21: p. 113.
- <sup>5</sup> The date of publication for *Israel Mort, Overman* is usually given as 1876, based on the British Library Public Catalogue (BLPC), and this is the edition referenced in this essay as being most easily accessible. The novel was, however, first published in 1873 in London by Henry S. King.
- <sup>6</sup> Williams, 'The Welsh Industrial Novel', p. 218.
- <sup>7</sup> Williams, 'The Welsh Industrial Novel', p. 219.
- <sup>8</sup> M. Wynn Thomas, *In the Shadow of the Pulpit: Literature and Nonconformist Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2010), p. 14.
- <sup>9</sup> Lewis Jones, *Cwmardy & We Live* (Cardigan: Parthian Books, 2006), pp. 370, 411, 208.
- <sup>10</sup> It is worth noting that Keating's *Son of Judith: A Tale of the Welsh Mining Valleys* (London: George Allen, 1900) is the better known and more easily available of Keating's novels, and would make a good starting point for a reader interested in further exploring his works. This article focuses on *Maurice: A Romance of Light and Darkness* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1905) for its extended use of the religious imagery at stake, in contrast to *Son of Judith's* greater focus on the plotting of family dynamics.
- <sup>11</sup> Harry Lindsay, *Rhoda Roberts: A Welsh Mining Story* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1895), p. 28.
- <sup>12</sup> *Hidden Fire*, published six years prior to *Israel Mort, Overman: A Story of the Mine* (London: Hutchinson & Company, 1876), used the setting of the Welsh mining valleys largely as a backdrop to the anti-Chartist sentiment of local landed gentry. See Anon., *Hidden Fire: A Novel* (London: Tinsley Brothers, 1867).
- <sup>13</sup> Gerald le Grys Norgate, 'John Saunders', in *Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 50 (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1897), pp. 325–6.
- <sup>14</sup> Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, ed. Victor Kiernan (London: Penguin, 2009), p. 253.
- <sup>15</sup> Davies, *A History of Wales*, p. 472.
- <sup>16</sup> Knight, *A Hundred Years of Fiction*, p. 28.
- <sup>17</sup> See Alexandra Jones, 'Disability in coalfields literature c.1880–1948: a comparative study' (unpublished PhD thesis, Swansea University, 2016), 49–50, 68–9.
- <sup>18</sup> Saunders, *Israel Mort, Overman*, p. 2.
- <sup>19</sup> John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress* (London: Hurst, Robinson & Company, 1820), p. 71.
- <sup>20</sup> Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, pp. 69, 68.
- <sup>21</sup> George Borrow, *Wild Wales: Its People, Language, and Scenery* (London: John Murray, 1901), p. 423.
- <sup>22</sup> Williams, 'The Welsh Industrial Novel', p. 214.
- <sup>23</sup> Émile Zola, *Germinal*, trans. Roger Pearson (London: Penguin, 2004), p. 38.
- <sup>24</sup> See Anon., 'The Story of a Desolate Child', *The Sunday at Home: A Family Magazine for Sabbath Reading*, 17 March 1859, 174.
- <sup>25</sup> Prys Morgan, *The Tempus History of Wales: 25,000 B.C.–A.D. 2000* (Stroud: Tempus, 2001), p. 184.
- <sup>26</sup> Morgan, *The Tempus History of Wales*, p. 188.
- <sup>27</sup> Kenneth O. Morgan, *Wales in British Politics 1868–1922* (Cardiff: Cardiff University, 1963), p. 39.
- <sup>28</sup> 'Ap Adda', 'Welsh Character Sketches: The Collier', *The Red Dragon: The National Magazine of Wales*, vol. 1 (1882), 428.

- <sup>29</sup> E. T. Davies, *Religion in the Industrial Revolution in South Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1965), p. 89.
- <sup>30</sup> Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, p. 71.
- <sup>31</sup> Lindsay's series of short stories set in the Welsh valleys, *More Methodist Idylls* (1899), presents a comparatively uncomplicated vision of religious piety. The more extended novel form of *Rhoda Roberts* allows Lindsay to complicate his approach to religion.
- <sup>32</sup> Anon., 'Rhoda Roberts: A Welsh Mining Story', *The Athenaeum*, 22 June 1895, 799.
- <sup>33</sup> Daniel Owen, *Rhys Lewis, Minister of Bethel: An Autobiography*, trans. James Harris (London: Simpkin, Marshall & Company, 1888), p. 191.
- <sup>34</sup> Allen Raine, *A Welsh Witch: A Romance of Rough Places* (London: Hutchinson & Company, 1902), p. 312.
- <sup>35</sup> John Thomas, *To the Angel's Chair: A Story of Ideals in a Welsh Village* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1897), pp. 205–6.
- <sup>36</sup> Thomas, *To the Angel's Chair*, p. 206.
- <sup>37</sup> Anon., 'Buried Alive in a Mine: Story of the Welsh Disaster', *New York Times*, 5 May 1877, 8.
- <sup>38</sup> Davies, *A History of Wales*, p. 472.
- <sup>39</sup> John Benson, *British Coal-Miners in the Nineteenth Century: A Social History* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1980), p. 39.
- <sup>40</sup> Louis Simonin, 'Author's Preface', in *Underground Life; Or, Mines and Miners*, trans. H. W. Bristow (London: Chapham & Hall, 1869), p. i.
- <sup>41</sup> Simonin, *Underground Life*, p. 124.
- <sup>42</sup> Davies, *Religion in the Industrial Revolution in South Wales*, p. 76.
- <sup>43</sup> Jones, 'Disability in coalfields literature', 128.
- <sup>44</sup> "Ap Adda", 'Welsh Character Sketches', 428.
- <sup>45</sup> Joseph Keating, *My Struggle for Life* (London: Simpkin, Marshall Hamilton, Kent and Company, 1916), p. 242.
- <sup>46</sup> J. Vyrnwy Morgan, *The Welsh Religious Revival 1904–5: A Retrospect and Criticism* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1909), p. 171.
- <sup>47</sup> Knight, *A Hundred Years of Fiction*, p. 29; Jonathan Evans, 'People, politics, and print: notes towards a history of the English-language book in industrial south Wales up to 1900' (unpublished PhD thesis, Cardiff University, 2010), 292.
- <sup>48</sup> Keating, *Maurice*, pp. 183, 168; Keating, *Son of Judith*, pp. 43–4; Joseph Keating, *Flower of the Dark* (London: Cassell and Company, 1917), p. 84.
- <sup>49</sup> Keating, *My Struggle for Life*, p. 42.
- <sup>50</sup> Keating, *My Struggle for Life*, p. vi.
- <sup>51</sup> Keating, *My Struggle for Life*, p. 312.
- <sup>52</sup> Keating, *My Struggle for Life*, p. 293.
- <sup>53</sup> Keating, *My Struggle for Life*, p. 293.
- <sup>54</sup> Jones, 'Disability in coalfields literature', 187.
- <sup>55</sup> J. O. Francis, *Change: A Glamorgan Play in Four Acts* (Aberystwyth: William Jones, 1913), p. 27.
- <sup>56</sup> Williams, 'The Welsh Industrial Novel', p. 214.
- <sup>57</sup> Keating, *My Struggle for Life*, p. 7.
- <sup>58</sup> Anon., 'Death of Joseph Keating: Labour Leader and Novelist', *The Scotsman*, 7 July 1934, 18.
- <sup>59</sup> Daniel Owen, *Rhys Lewis, Minister of Bethel: An Autobiography*, trans. James Harris (London: Simpkin, Marshall & Company, 1888), p. 59.
- <sup>60</sup> Wil Jon Edwards, *From the Valley I Came* (London: Angus & Robertson, 1956), p. 110.
- <sup>61</sup> Edwards, *From the Valley I Came*, pp. 227–8.

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- <sup>68</sup> Jones, *Times Like These*, p. 318.
- <sup>69</sup> Jones, *Cwmardy & We Live*, p. 514.

