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# From Walt to Waldo: Whitman's Welsh Admirers

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## **Abstract**

Considers “the way in which Whitman’s influence became operative within Welsh-language culture” by examining his influence on Welsh authors including Niclas y Glais, Waldo Williams and Emyr Humphreys.

## FROM WALT TO WALDO: WHITMAN'S WELSH ADMIRERS

M. WYNN THOMAS

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REGRETTABLY, BUT NOT SURPRISINGLY, studies of Whitman's influence on the cultures of the countries of the British Isles have tended to concentrate very heavily on England.<sup>1</sup> No one, for instance, has yet explored the intriguing fact that both members of the Anglo-Irish, Ascendancy, culture in Ireland (represented by Edward Dowden) and cultural nationalists (e.g., Yeats) were attracted to Whitman. That in the late nineteenth century more books on him were published in Scotland than in any other country has been noted by scholars, but no sustained attempt has ever been made to explore the cultural ramifications of this remarkable phenomenon.<sup>2</sup> As for Wales, it has figured in Whitman studies only in connection with Ernest Rhys (an honorary, or part-time, Welshman at best) and the inevitable Dylan Thomas.<sup>3</sup> My aim in this essay will simply be to begin the work of filling out the picture by considering two related examples of the way in which Whitman's influence became operative within Welsh-language culture.

Whitman's death was reported in *Y Faner* (April 6, 1892), the paper that was at that time virtually the official organ of radical (i.e., Liberal), Nonconformist Wales. Of particular interest is the fact that the routine report was by T. Gwynn Jones, who was at that time a working journalist (largely self-educated, like Whitman), but who ten years later scandalized traditional Nonconformity when his controversial *awdl* "Ymadawiad Arthur" (the departure of Arthur) won the premier award for poetry (the chair) at the National Eisteddfod. This event is generally regarded as having initiated the great twentieth century renaissance of Welsh-language literature, a cultural revival in which Jones became a dominating figure. Nothing further is known of his interest in Whitman—his own poetry, written for the most part in the traditional Welsh strict meters, could scarcely be more unlike that of the American—but two additional facts about him are worth noticing. He was an early convert to the Labor movement; and through his mature work he challenged the cultural hegemony of orthodox Welsh Nonconformity. As we shall see, it was to religious and political dissenters of Jones's type—individuals who had become disaffected with late nineteenth century Liberalism and with the Nonconformity which had wedded itself to it—that Whitman's work was principally to appeal in Wales.

The clearest example of this can be found in the extraordinary life and work of T. E. Nicholas (1878-1971), affectionately remembered as Niclas y Glais, and a word about his colorful career is necessary before we can understand the nature of his interest in Whitman.<sup>4</sup> Of west Wales farming stock, Niclas was prepared for the Congregational ministry at a Nonconformist Academy before serving as minister in several places, including Dodgeville (USA) and Glais (lower Swansea valley). South Wales was at that time one of the greatest industrial regions in the world, the veritable power-house of the mighty British Empire, and the experience of living in the working-class village of Glais—surrounded as it was by coal mines and steel and tin plate works, and horribly subject to the poisonous by-products of the metallurgical industry—was an educational experience for Niclas.<sup>5</sup> He identified totally with the workers in their struggle against Capital, joined the Independent Labor Party (whose leader, Keir Hardie, became a close friend of his), and began to preach a fervent social gospel, not only from the pulpit but also through political journalism and popular crusading verses. Appalled not only by the First World War, but also by the way in which establishment Nonconformity responded to it by spearheading a recruitment drive throughout Wales, he fiercely voiced his objections and was in consequence persecuted by religious, military and political bodies.<sup>6</sup> This effectively drove him out of the recognized ministry and so he retrained as a dentist, while continuing to preach. In the meantime, he had converted to communism, following the Bolshevik Revolution of October, 1917, and became a founding member of the Communist Party of Great Britain, remaining a Christian communist for the remainder of his long life. Since the Second World War seemed to him essentially a repeat of the first, involving further exploitation of a working class that had borne the brunt of the Depression, he again forcefully registered his objections and was imprisoned for two months on trumped-up charges. Although he was a fiery campaigner, his underlying good nature and undeniable moral integrity made him a favorite with people of many political persuasions in Wales, and twenty years after his death his career continues to be recalled with affection.

True to his proselytizing beliefs, Niclas was a prolific versifier throughout his life, invariably addressing his “psalms” (as he liked to call them) to “the people.”<sup>7</sup> The main burden of his message was the international brotherhood of man, which he expected to be realized in history once the masses joined together to overthrow their oppressors. Although Niclas employed Marxist forms of analysis after his conversion to communism, his beliefs never entirely lost the marks of their origins in a Christian socialism very much colored by the writings of authors like Tolstoy and Whitman. Niclas’s Whitman was the Whitman of the late-nineteenth century labor movement and of the Independent

Labor Party.<sup>8</sup> He was the forerunner of socialism; the prophet of a new, people's age of social cooperation; the hater of all forms of tyranny, including the tyranny of capitalism. He was, in short, that redeemer of the industrial age which the young Horace Traubel had tried, with conspicuous lack of success, to persuade the old ailing Whitman to become during his final years at Camden. What he was *not*, however, was Whitman the great poet. His socialist supporters quarried his poetry for ideas, sentiments, uplifting phrases, but were rarely comfortable with the unconventional style of *Leaves of Grass*. Niclas's early poetry was written almost exclusively in popular Victorian verse forms, while his later poetry consisted mainly of sonnets.

There was, however, one notable exception which makes his an interesting case. In 1920 Niclas closed his collection subtitled *Cerddi Rhyddid* (Songs of Freedom) with a thirty-three page poem in free verse entitled "Gweriniaeth a Rhyfel" (Republicanism and War).<sup>9</sup> It opens as follows:

I shall sink my own personality in the republic of the people.  
I shall escape from narrow limits; in me shall the people's democracy live.  
I shall spread myself over continents, I shall learn the language of the toys and the lambs  
and the flowers,  
Like the sea's tides entering narrow straits, I shall invite true democracy into my life.  
Hills and estuaries, springs and deeps, the heather of the mountain and the shells of the  
seashore, come and speak through me.  
It is I who own the earth—I claim it;  
It is I who own hell—and when I go there, Love shall drag itself thither too.  
It is I who own heaven—and both men and demons shall be allowed to enter it.  
From now on it is I who am the republic of the people.

The word used repeatedly here—"Gweriniaeth"—nowadays simply means "Republic" or "Democracy," but it is derived from the potent word "gwerin," meaning the mass of ordinary working people—always a key term in Niclas's political rhetoric—and there's no doubt that in this poem he wants to reactivate the original meaning, just as Whitman wanted to put the "demos" back into "democracy."<sup>10</sup>

"Gweriniaeth a Rhyfel" was written during the First World War, and is Niclas's response to the carnage, a response that is mostly turgidly rhetorical, but is occasionally powerful. "Gweriniaeth" speaks in the first three sections of the poem, identifying its enemy as the instruments of established social order in all their panoply of ruthless power: throne and bar, press, pulpit and parliament. These are represented as the oppressors, corruptors and manipulators of the people and the proletariat, as Niclas attempts to answer his own poignant question: "pwy ddeffrodd y bwystfil yn y bechgyn?" ("who awakened the monster in the lads?"). "Rhyfel" ("War") is heard in the fourth section, speaking with the voices of both Mars and Mammon, but Niclas fore-

sees that the death-dealing world of inverted values over which these evil powers preside will be destroyed when Christ returns to establish his kingdom on earth. (This is, in part, Niclas's answer to the jingoistic myth of the Angel of Mons, a newspaper invention which caught the public imagination and about which he wrote some splendidly acerbic verses.)

Section 5 becomes Niclas's own recruitment song, as he calls upon the workers to enter the struggle against those who enslave them alike in war and in peace: "On the continent hills are destroyed in order to smash men; in Wales men are smashed in order to destroy hills." He apostrophizes the miners as the warriors of the deeps, the heroes of the struggle against darkness, the avatars of ethical power and the chosen instruments of a peaceful revolution. Capitalism and militarism were, for Niclas as they were for Shelley, the creatures and servants of autocratic monarchism, and in Section 6 the king, in whose name hundreds of thousands were at that time dying, is savagely anathematized. Throughout the poem Niclas strives to turn this apocalyptic war into an occasion for millenarian vision, and Section 7 includes passages in which despair and hope are beautifully blended:

Pleasant, pleasant it was to search for birds' nests on spring mornings, and to count the eggs every day; this year there is no charm for children in birds' nests, nor in the song of the cuckoo;

The cruel god of war came by, and damned the world.

His shadow fell upon the play of children and on the hard labor of workers;  
Will the song return?

A new greenness flows over hedgerow and hedge; the leaves tremble in the breezes from heaven; the trees and forests are arrayed in blue and green garments; away over the wave the green and the blue are red with blood.

The trees are stripped of their bark by the fireballs; it is the god of war who accomplished this. . . .

Who will dare to kill his fellow while the birds are singing? Who will dare thrust a bayonet into a brother's heart while the hedges are bright with life?

Mars is pitiless: he knows not what gentleness is. I believe in the spring and the primroses, in the nests and the birds and the trees—

For this reason I cannot believe in war.

Rejecting the warlike god of the loyalist Nonconformist chapels and the established church as a false god, Niclas places his faith instead in the true god who is manifest in the selfless love and courage of humanity at its best. Then in the final section of the poem he sentimentalizes the mother, in good (or rather bad) Whitmanian fashion, constructing a tableau in which she is seen receiving news of her soldier son's death, and (again like Whitman) he insinuates himself into the picture: "I slip into the sad home. . . . / The mother shows a picture of her loved one; I stare into her face without blushing; I was not one of those who urged him to go off to battle." The work concludes with a visionary verse

paragraph in which Niclas hears the approach of a new age, and sees that a social revolution is at hand. The poem is dated 1916. Almost exactly a year later Russia was to experience the Bolshevik revolution.

The influence of Whitman on "Gweriniaeth a Rhyfel" is in one sense easy enough to see—although it may have been partly mediated through that other favorite of the labor movement, Edward Carpenter's *Towards Democracy*—but it is very difficult to isolate, so blended is it with influences from other sources. And it is precisely this difficulty, arising from such an intermixing, that makes the poem a very instructive example of the complexities of "influence," particularly when that involves "translation" from a foreign language and a foreign culture. Whitman's poetry has here been received and naturalized by a mind steeped in the rhythms, the images, and the values of the Welsh Bible, so that *Leaves of Grass* is, as it were, being read as an additional chapter in the Book of Revelation. Of course, Whitman himself owed a great deal, as poet, both to the Bible and to radical forms of protestantism, and Niclas anticipated the findings of later scholars when he unconsciously intuited this. But what is interesting is the way in which Whitman's poetry seems to have enabled Niclas, at one of the most critical points in his life, to discover in the Welsh Bible styles of writing that allowed him to develop radical new forms of expression for the radical socio-political ideas he had also partly derived from biblical sources. In other words, the foreignness of Whitman paradoxically helped make aspects of Niclas's own native Nonconformist culture newly visible to him, and available to him, as a poet. The result is a Welsh poem which has certain affinities with famous earlier examples in English of a poetry revolutionized, in style as well as in socio-political content, by radical protestantism—William Blake's *The French Revolution*, and Percy Shelley's *The Mask of Anarchy*.

Whereas Niclas was little more than a socially crusading versifier, the second example of Whitman's influence on Welsh-language culture is a very different case. The best poems of Waldo Williams (1904-1971) have a serious claim to greatness.<sup>11</sup> He was a product of the same region of rural west Wales as Niclas, an area noted for a religious and political radicalism which had several times found expression in militant direct action. And indeed, Niclas and Waldo were very much kindred spirits. In the last essay he ever wrote, Waldo recalled the thrill he experienced as a boy when he heard his father read Niclas's "Gweriniaeth a Rhyfel" aloud to his mother during the First World War.

He had no doubt been unconsciously prepared for the experience by exposure from his earliest years to the writers that were his father's passion: Shelley, Ruskin, William Morris, Tolstoy—and Walt Whitman. As the fact that Waldo was probably named after Emerson suggests, the Williams family had close links with America, and the philos-

ophy of the Transcendentalists blended easily with the chapel radicalism that Waldo, like his father, assimilated partly through attendance at a Baptist Sunday-school. Although the father became a respected headmaster of a local primary-school, he very much remained a member of the group of largely self-educated workingmen of progressive views who provided this farming community with its intellectual leadership. Something of the high moral tone of their culture can be seen in the style and the sentiments of the English letter he addressed to his son Waldo when the latter decided to become a chapel member:

The Highest Religion I have had glimpses of is that which makes man a brother, Life a Sanctuary and the common deeds of life sacred by purity of motive. It makes a man sensible to the claims of justice upon himself and to all noble impulses; it also makes him lenient at heart to the feelings of his neighbour through weakness.

I fully believe that you are already of that invisible Church; whose each member is priest—composed of souls who love the light and turn to it, know the face of justice, honour, conscience and endeavour to make reason and will of God prevail and who make their hearts the home of human feelings and causes. . . . Remember that the Heavenly Jerusalem is all around us in all directions. Keep all the windows of soul and body open, let the vivifying words have access.<sup>12</sup>

The ethical, philanthropic socialism of the early Labor movement, with which Waldo came to sympathise, was infused with sentiments of this kind.

As a young man Waldo's father, Edwal, participated for many years in a local discussion group that used to meet in a convenient carthouse. Subjects covered included theology, politics and literature, and Whitman's work almost certainly figured in these informal sessions. The evidence comes from the writing of another member of the group, Edwal's brother William, an ardent socialist, who was, in 1892-93, the first writer to experiment, under the Whitman-Carpenter influence, with free verse in Welsh.<sup>13</sup> In an interview he gave in 1958, Waldo recalled that he, too, had produced Whitmanian poetry during his callow years as a poet.<sup>14</sup> As he matured, however, he seems to have taken a more objective and mixed view of Whitman's achievement. When he mentioned him in an English lecture he gave in 1952, it was to remark that "when a mere cry, as in Whitman sometimes, gets us on the raw we feel that it is not poetry but a protoplasm from which poetry might be organised."<sup>15</sup>

Such reservations were understandable. After all, Waldo developed as a poet under the twin influences of English Romantic poetry of the first, great period, and the traditional, epigrammatic poetry of Welsh poetry in the strict meters, with a third influence—namely that of the revisionary work done by several outstanding Welsh-language poets who were his near contemporaries—in the end proving particularly

decisive. But friends have testified that he never lost his enthusiasm for Whitman and that he could quote admiringly from his work. This was largely due to the close spiritual affinity he had with Whitman, and to similarities in their social vision.

Throughout his life, Waldo based his vision of the brotherhood of man upon a belief in the inborn divinity, and goodness, of every individual. Persuaded early of the truth of the inner light, he eventually, in middle age, joined the Quakers, discovering in their socially active faith the kind of mystical attraction Whitman had also felt towards the teachings of the controversial Quaker, Elias Hicks.<sup>16</sup> But for Waldo, as for Whitman, the corollary of spiritual immanence was what, with his genius for succinctness, he called "Awen adnabod." Unlike English, Welsh distinguishes between the act of knowing a thing ("gwybod") and that of knowing a person ("adnabod"). "Awen" can mean muse, or spirit, or genius, or gift. Hence "Awen adnabod" means the spiritual gift of human recognition, involving an existential gesture of generous "fellow feeling" that goes as deep as a profound understanding of our fellow men—a humanly comprehensive act of "knowing" which was for Waldo, as it was for Whitman, the very essence of writing poetry. To "know" in this way was to know oneself to be inextricably part of what in Welsh is epigrammatically called "cwlwm cymdeithas," literally "the knot of community/society." And again like Whitman he tended to see his own society—the actual rural society of west Wales—as instinct with the potential for visionary community. In this he saw the hope for a redeemed Wales and a redeemed world, just as Whitman extrapolated a future co-operative American democracy and a transfigured world order from his visions of contemporary New York.

Waldo's visionary communitarianism was an amalgam of many different sources, including his radical Nonconformist background, his family involvement in the early socialist and Welsh nationalist movements, his wide reading in Welsh literature, in English literature, in anthropology and in Eastern religions, his interest in the philosophy of international figures such as Gandhi and of international thinkers such as Buber and Berdyaev. But although it would not do, in the face of all of this, to overemphasize the influence of Whitman on his thinking, it is important to remember Waldo's very early and enduring affection for him. He had absorbed Whitman's poetry, one suspects, to a point where he was no longer fully conscious of its presence within him, or of its contributions to the color and movement of his own highly distinctive imagination.

In 1956 Waldo published his one and only collection of poems, entitled *Dail Pren* ("The Leaves of a Tree"). In a letter to a friend he explained the title by referring both to Keats's famous remark about poetry, and to a passage from the Book of Revelation which perfectly

captures the spiritual climate of much of Waldo's best work: "In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bore twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations" (22:2). However, encouraged by Waldo's own acknowledged fascination with the iridescent play of meanings in images, one may just wonder whether, contributing to his choice of title, there might not also have been a subliminal memory of another title that offered an organic metaphor for universal harmony—Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*. *Dail Pren* includes an incomparably greater variety of genres and styles than Whitman's collection—it ranges from light occasional verse to intense lyrical meditations, and employs many different verse forms, including the classical strict meters—but some of the very finest poems are those that, admittedly at several removes, recall the spirit of Whitman. Of these, perhaps the very best is "Mewn Dau Cae," but before it can be intelligently read something needs to be said about the circumstances which gave rise to it.

In 1946 the British government requisitioned large areas of land in Waldo's native Pembrokeshire in order to establish several military bases. In 1950 the Americans, along with their allies, became embroiled in a war in Korea. Waldo, who had been a pacifist throughout the Second World War,<sup>17</sup> was appalled by both events—indeed so disturbed was he by the latter, so racked and prostrated by personal guilt, that for some time he felt unable to walk the streets of his small town because he shrank from the ordeal of having to face his neighbors. Eventually he decided, in his own words, "to turn guilt into conscience, and conscience into responsibility" by refusing to pay his taxes while a part of them went towards equipping the military machine. Consequently, his goods were first seized and then he was imprisoned. During this grim period in his life, he virtually gave up writing poetry, and his imagination was troubled by hideous childhood memories of reports from the front he had read during the First World War. In particular he recalled 1916—the very year in which Niclas wrote "Gweriniaeth a Rhyfel." It was, Waldo remembered, a terrible year, when the allies seemed literally hell bent on capturing a certain "Hill 60," and he specifically associated the horror of it all with Niclas's apocalyptic poem. But he also remembered that Niclas had managed to find grounds for visionary hope even in Armageddon. It was a feat of transmutation which Waldo was to repeat, at an infinitely deeper spiritual level, when he returned to poetry in 1956 to write "Mewn Dau Cae":

In Two Fields<sup>18</sup>

Where was it from, the sea of light that came rolling  
Its deep upon Weun Parc y Blawd and Parc y Blawd?

After I had questioned long in the dark land,  
 Where did he come from, the one who has always been?  
 Or who, who was the archer, the sudden enlightener?  
 The field's life-giving hunter was the roller of the sea.  
 From on high, above the clear-piping curlews, the prudent darting of the lapwings,  
 He brought me the tremendous stillness.  
 He stirred me to the depths where all that stirred  
 Was the sun's thought measuring the haze,  
 The ripe gorse on the hummocks clacking,  
 The host of rushes dreaming the blue sky.  
 Who is calling when the imagination wakens?  
 Rise, walk, dance, behold the universe.  
 Who is hiding himself in the heart of the words?  
 All this on Weun Parc y Blawd and Parc y Blawd.  
 And when the great fugitive and pilgrim clouds  
 Were red with the evening twilight of a November storm  
 Down in the ashtrees and the sycamores that separated the fields  
 There was the song of the wind and a depth like the depth of silence.  
 Who is there, amid the pomp and the pageantry?  
 Who is standing there, comprehending all?  
 Witness of every witness, memory of every memory, life of every life,  
 Tranquil soother of a troubled self.  
 Till at last the whole world came to the stillness  
 And on the two fields his people walked,  
 And through them, among them, about them spread  
 A spirit rising from hiding, conjoining all,  
 As it was with the few of us once, in the plying of pitchforks  
 Or the tedious tugging of thatch out on the heavy moor.  
 How close to each other we came—  
 The silent hunter was casting his net about us.  
 O through ages of the blood on the grass and through the light the lamenting,  
 What whistling heart alone heard? O, who was it?  
 Deluder of all arrogance, tracker of all trails,  
 Heigh! the eluder of armies  
 Whistling recognition, recognition until there is recognition.  
 There were fountains bursting towards the heavens  
 And falling back, their tears like the leaves of the tree.  
 On this the day ponders under sun and cloud  
 And the night through the cells of its thickly-twigg'd brain.  
 Over Weun Parc y Blawd and Parc y Blawd unhindered,  
 Holding fast to the object, the fields full of folk.<sup>19</sup>  
 Surely the coming of what must will come, and in that hour  
 The outlaw come, the hunter come, the claimant come to the gap,  
 The Exiled King come, and the rushes part.

In an excellent recent study Ned Thomas has shown how Waldo is here reappropriating and regenerating several of the great seminal images of European Romanticism, as he works to bring an experience of illumination he had as a boy (probably around the terrible year of 1916) into a saving relationship with his traumatic adult experiences of human cruelty and aggression.<sup>20</sup> Knowing of Waldo's longstanding interest in Whitman, one no doubt could, if one chose, hesitantly identify specific

parallels between this poem and *Leaves of Grass*. For example, Waldo's ecstatic affirmations seem, both in spirit and in the terms in which they are expressed, to be consonant with Whitman's. Both poets are fascinated by the relationship between the one and the many; both conceive not only the cosmos but also human society in these terms; both see the presence of the whole as informing each part of life, magnifying its rich singularity of individual being; both regard the creative imagination as in essence a religious power through which the visionary unity of all existence is revealed. And so on and so forth.

This kind of analysis is, however, clearly as superficial as it is beside the point, since Waldo has absorbed aspects of Whitman's poetry so completely that they have become flesh of his imagination's flesh and soul. Or, to use an entirely different metaphor, "In Two Fields" offers us a fine example of the way in which a creative writer's imagination is authentically a Celtic cauldron of rebirth, in which past writers are constantly being brought back to life, only insofar as it is first a crucible of meanings, that operates by smelting everything down to produce the molten materials of new creation. Consequently, when the works of other writers re-emerge from this crucible-cauldron, it is frequently in a form in which their own author fathers and mothers would not recognize them. Rather, therefore, than search for identifiable parallels, it would be better to re-view Whitman in the light of Waldo's achievement, allowing the Welsh poem to suggest to us new contexts in which Whitman's poetry could be read. So, for instance, we are led by Waldo to see Whitman as a kind of latter-day Langland, and to see sections of *Leaves of Grass* as resembling passages from *Piers Ploughman*, since these are connections that seem to have been made unconsciously by Waldo's imagination. We are encouraged to see in Whitman's democratic vistas the millenarianism of a secular society whose utopian faith is in historical progress.<sup>21</sup> And we are also, I feel, moved to reinvestigate the sources of Whitman's affirmations—to see his poetry at its best as surging up, like Waldo's, from a wellhead of suffering, until the falling tears are turned, before our very eyes, into the joyous leaves of a healing tree.

From Walt to Waldo is a long way to travel, in cultural terms, but the history of Whitman's influence in Wales does not end finally in those two fields. An interesting further step can be taken by examining the following poem, which belongs this time not to the Welsh-language culture but to the English-language culture of twentieth-century Wales:

#### A Democratic Vista

Strange sanctuary this, perched on the rising cornstack,  
Like a desert saint on a broken pillar  
Staring, eyes unstirring until hill field sea are one

The procession of thought blurred  
 Into the regular rising and falling of a sinewy arm  
 And the dry rustle of sheaves.  
 Tom Williams, Guto, Dick Williams, Wil bach, Dafydd Dew and me,  
 We are the people; our conversation is smooth and superficial  
 Like a veneer of grained wood, curves leading nowhere  
 Which was where they started.  
 We are the people, for whom politicians shout and soldiers fight  
 We sow and reap, eat and sleep, copulate in secret, think  
 In circumferences of one dimension.  
 We are the sacred people, the secular mystery, the host,  
 Whitman's elastic deity, Marx's material, Rousseau's noble savage  
 Mayakovsky's beloved—  
 Tom, Guto, Dic, Wil, Dafie, and me—  
 Reasonably efficient between dawn and sunset,  
 God chewing tobacco, God drinking tea, digesting rice.  
 We are the people.  
 God is not mocked.

This is a poem from a sequence called *Ancestor Worship* by Emyr Humphreys, the leading English-language novelist of twentieth-century Wales.<sup>22</sup> One of the recurrent themes in the seventeen novels Humphreys has so far written is the eminently corruptible will of the Welsh people—a people whom he sees as comfortably succumbing to various temptations to desert their rich, ancient, indigenous culture. The Welsh language has, in his view, been left behind in his nation's self-destructive stampede towards the glamor, power and wealth obtainable only through the medium of English. The radical democratic politics for which late-nineteenth-century Wales was famous—a politics that at its best originated from and was sustained by the libertarian, humanitarian values of the Nonconformist chapels—has, in Humphreys' view, degenerated during the twentieth-century, first into a spuriously international socialism and then into the selfish consumerism of present-day Welsh society. Hence his democratic vista is seen from a politico-cultural perspective pointedly different both from that of Waldo (whom Humphreys admires) and from that of Whitman (who is here implicitly associated with the spiritually empty populist rhetoric of Anglo-American cultural hegemony). It is fascinating to see how between them these three Welsh authors—Niclas y Glais, Waldo Williams and Emyr Humphreys—uncover, in the features of Whitman's writing, the Janus-face of America's benign and baleful influence on the modern world.

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## NOTES

1 Harold Blodgett, *Walt Whitman in England* [sic] (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1934); Douglas Grant, "Walt Whitman and His English [sic] Admirers" (University of Leeds inaugural lecture: University of Leeds Press, 1962).

2 See R. H. Jellema, "Victorian critics and the orientation of American literature, with special reference to the reception of Walt Whitman and Henry James" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Edinburgh, 1962-1963).

3 M. Wynn Thomas, "Walt Whitman's Welsh Connection: Ernest Rhys," *Anglo-Welsh Review*, No. 82 (1986), 77-85; Stanley Friedman, "Whitman and Laugharne," *Anglo-Welsh Review* 18 (1969), 81-82; Paul J. Ferlazzo, "Dylan Thomas and Walt Whitman: Birth, Death and Time," *Walt Whitman Review* 23 (1977), 136-141; James E. Miller Jr., Karl Shapiro and Bernice Slote, *Start with the Sun* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1960).

4 See Meic Stephens, ed., *The Oxford Companion to the Literature of Wales* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986). I am very grateful to Mr. Brinley Rees and Professor R. M. (Bobi) Jones for the help they have given with the Welsh-language material in this essay.

5 "In the years from 1880 to 1914 [south Wales] was among the most buoyant growth centres in the world for industrial production, and for manufacturing and commerce. Only the Ruhr in Germany and the industrial sectors of the eastern United States rivalled south Wales as a centre of heavy industry." Kenneth O. Morgan, *The Rebirth of a Nation: Wales, 1880-1980* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 59.

6 Nonconformist opinion in Wales was swayed in particular by the exhortations of the Welsh Baptist David Lloyd George, who began the war as British Chancellor of the Exchequer and was then successively Minister of Munitions and Minister of War, before he finally became Prime Minister and represented Britain in the peace negotiations that resulted in the Treaty of Versailles. He was generally hailed as "the man who won the war."

7 His output totalled about a dozen volumes of poetry. Some of his work is available in English, in *Prison Sonnets* (London: W. Griffiths, 1948).

8 For the interest in Whitman in these circles, see Blodgett's discussion of the Bolton group and Tony Brown, ed., *Edward Carpenter and Late Victorian Radicalism* (London: Frank Cass, 1990), *passim*.

9 D. Ernest Williams, ed., *Dros Eich Gwlad: Cerddi Heddwch* (Pontardawe: T. E. Nicholas, 1920), 95-128. The poem is accompanied by a fearsome engraving of the monster of Revelation opening its mouth to devour hundreds of corpses. The loose English translation which follows is my own.

10 The term "Gwerin" had, during the nineteenth century, been reserved primarily for the (idealized) *rural* population of Wales. In applying it to the industrial proletariat, Niclas was therefore claiming for the industrial workers a similar exalted status.

11 James Nicholas, *Waldo Williams* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1975). Glyn Jones and John Rowlands, *Profiles* (Llandysul: Gwasg Gomer, 1980). Also the entry on Waldo Williams in Stephens, *Oxford Companion*.

12 Printed in James Nicholas, ed., *Waldo* (Llandysul: Gwasg Gomer, 1977), 225-226.

13 Bobi Jones, "Ei Ewythr Gwiliamus," in Robert Rhys, ed., *Waldo Williams* (Aber-tawe: Gwasg Christopher Davies, 1981), 98-102.

14 "Sgwrs gyda Bobi Jones," in Rhys, *Waldo Williams*, 121.

15 "The Function of Literature," in Rhys, *Waldo Williams*, 254. Waldo may well have unconsciously been recalling Edmund Gosse's famous comment: "Whitman is . . .

literature in the condition of protoplasm—an intellectual organism so simple that it takes the instant impression of whatever mood approaches it” (*Critical Kit-Kats* [New York: Dodd, Mead, 1896], 96-111).

16 He explained why he joined the Society of Friends in “Paham yr wyf yn Grynwr,” Nicholas, *Waldo*, 261-265.

17 His immensely eloquent testimony, in English, before the Tribunal at Carmarthen is reprinted in Nicholas, *Waldo Williams*, 44-45. Tantamount to a credo, it includes the following statements: “I believe all men to be brothers and to be humble partakers of the Divine Imagination that brought forth the world, and that now enables us to be born again into its own richness, by doing unto others as we would others to do unto us. War to me, is the most monstrous violation of this Spirit that society can devise. . . . I believe Divine Sympathy to be the full self realization of the Imagination that brought forth the world. . . . I believe that the Spirit communes not with societies as such, but directly and singly with the souls of men and women, therefore enabling us to commune fully with each other, forming societies. I believe therefore that my first duty to the community to which I belong is to maintain the integrity of my own personality.”

18 I use the translation by Joseph P. Clancy, *Twentieth Century Welsh Poems* (Llandysul: Gomer Press, 1982), 135-136. Another fine translation can be found in Tony Conran, *Welsh Verse* (Bridgend: Poetry Wales Press, 1986), 289-290. “Weun Parc y Blawd” and “Parc y Blawd” are the names of two fields.

19 Clancy’s translation here has “field full of people,” but I prefer Conran’s phrase “field full of folk,” with the echoes of Langland that Waldo himself seems to have had in mind.

20 Ned Thomas, *Waldo* (Caenarfon: Gwasg Gwynedd, 1986). The study is in Welsh.

21 An interesting discussion in English of Waldo’s millenarianism can be found in Tony Bianchi, “Waldo and Apocalypse,” *Planet* 44 (August, 1978).

22 Emyr Humphreys, *Ancestor Worship* (Denbigh: Gwasg Gee, 1970). For his poetry, see M. Wynn Thomas, “The Poetry of Emyr Humphreys,” *Poetry Wales* 25.2 (Summer, 1989), 10-12. A useful introduction, in English, to his novels, is Ioan Williams, *Emyr Humphreys* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1980).