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Ekphrastic Insets in Welsh-Language Fiction 1992–2016: An Overview

ABSTRACT

Compared with Anglophone literatures, Welsh-language fiction has to date received little attention in the context of the rapidly developing intermedial and interart studies. The purpose of this article is to provide a preliminary mapping of pictorial insets in Welsh-language fiction in the period 1992–2016. The novels considered in this article include some of the milestones in the development of Welsh fiction and provide a representative sample of the literary production from the period in question. This article identifies and lists the sources of ekphrastic insets scattered throughout the texts, grouping them into descriptive ekphrases, references, pictorial models and spatio-contextual ekphrases.

Keywords: Welsh-language fiction, ekphrasis, interart studies, intermedial studies, Welsh literature

Sidney Curnow Vosper's painting *Salem* from 1908 is widely considered "the most celebrated image ever created of the common people of Wales" (Lord, 2017, p. 222). It shows an old lady wearing a characteristic stovepipe hat, in the chapel at Pentre Gwynfryn, North Wales. The woman has been identified as Siân Owen, a native of the area. The legend attached to the painting is that in the folds of Mrs Owen's shawl one can discern the countenance of the Devil. Although denied by Vosper himself, the "devil" has been interpreted as "a cunning caricature of Welsh piety and hypocrisy" (Williams, 1991, p. 15). Perhaps a more sensible reading of the painting is offered by Lord (1991), who writes of *Salem* that it "is redolent of the virtues of Nonconformism ... built around the centrality of the Word, symbolised, however, unintentionally, by the hymn book in Siân Owen's hand" (p. 19). Thus, the inscribing of the devil into the iconic representation of Welsh Nonconformity could be also seen as a reflection, equally unintentional, of the Nonconformist culture's ambiguous attitude towards pictorial representation in general. Any attempt to identify in Welsh culture the symptoms of the alleged iconoclasm motivated by Nonconformism, however, would be a formidable task, far beyond the scope of this article, all the more so as the role of visual culture in Wales has

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recently been considerably reassessed (Harvey, 1995; Lord, 2000; Lord, 2017). Yet the undeniable fact is that Welsh culture has been largely a word-dominated one, its creative impetus channeled mostly into literature. As opposed to the poetic tradition going back to at least the 6th century AD, the modern Welsh-language novel evolved largely in the 19th-century. The Nonconformist milieu, which at the same time contributed to its stunted growth and history, was, to a considerable extent, defined by attitudes towards the decline of Nonconformity (Price, 2002, pp. 124–125; Rowlands, 1998, pp. 159–160; Lynch, 2007, p. 124). In this context, Welsh-language fiction seems an interesting testing ground for examining the interactions between word and image, especially when considered against the background of the *ut pictura poesis* tradition and the pictorial turn in modern culture announced by W. J. T. Mitchell in the early 1990s¹.

While recent decades have seen an increasing interest in interart and intermedial studies, the problems of word-image relationships remain virtually absent from Welsh literary criticism (either Welsh-language or Anglophone). The increasing saturation of the contemporary world with images transmitted by different media is, however, a phenomenon that cannot be ignored in relation to any contemporary literary production. The status of Welsh-language fiction, originally growing out of Nonconformist culture and developing in the shadow of a vigorous poetic tradition on the one hand, and its Anglophone counterpart on the other, provokes a number of questions. How and to what degree is Welsh fiction affected by global visual culture? What types of visual elements are absorbed by it? How is visual culture related to the issues that Welsh literature is engaged with, e.g., the relationship with the Welsh-language poetic tradition, the (post)colonial predicament, devolution (and more recently Brexit), the problems of language preservation or the issues of cross-pollination between Welsh-language and English-language Welsh writing? Last but not least, what, if any, are the quantitative and qualitative differences between the rendering of visual elements in Welsh- and English-language literatures?

Bearing in mind that interart/intermedial issues have, to date, received virtually no attention in the context of Welsh-language fiction, answering the questions listed above is hardly possible without a prior mapping of the territory. The task this paper sets itself is therefore a modest one and is limited to presenting a preliminary overview of visual elements in selected Welsh-language novels. The selection is further narrowed down to verbally-mediated references to visual arts and non-artistic pictures, including photography. Again, the limitations of the length of this essay mean that any comprehensive analysis of the multifaceted functions that the visual references perform must be reserved for another discussion, and that it can only hope to offer tentative interpretations of the most representative examples.

¹ The article “Pictorial Turn” was published in *ArtForum* in 1992 and reprinted in his *Picture Theory* in 1994.

In what follows, I examine seven Welsh-language novels from the period 1992–2016. 1992 is the date of the publication of Robin Llywelyn’s novel *Seren Wen a’r Gefndir Gwyn* (translated by the author as *White Star*), which in terms of both content and form was a major milestone in Welsh-language prose, and played a role in stimulating a renaissance in Welsh fiction (cf. Price, 2000, p. 58). The choice of the other novels aims to provide a diachronic selection of texts which are, at the same time, representative of Welsh-language writing. Most of the novels discussed won the Eisteddfod Prose Medal, a prestigious award given to the best novel during the Eisteddfod, the annual festival of Welsh-language literature and culture.

As already mentioned, the visual elements identified in the novels are limited to verbally-mediated ones. In interart and intermedial studies, these are categorised as covert (Wolf, 1999, p. 41) or unimedial (Lund, 1992, p. 9), as opposed to overt/bimedial, which involve illustrations or reproductions *in praesentia*. Covert relationships are, in turn, generally divided into ekphrasis – a description or interpretation of a real or fictitious picture, and imitation – an attempt to emulate in language a spatial work of art or to present the fictional reality *qua* picture (Lund, 1992, p. 16). The present paper focuses on examples classified as ekphrasis.

As a literary device, ekphrasis is also defined in various ways. Since the revival of interest in the problem in the mid-20th century, its understanding has evolved from the very narrow (e.g., a type of prosopopoeia in J. H. Hagstrum’s *The Sister Arts*, 1958) to the very broad (Clüver’s verbalisation of any non-verbal texts). In this paper, by ekphrasis I understand references to, or descriptions of, real or fictitious pictures and other types of visual representation (including, among other things, sculpture, film or comics): fictional ones are commonly conceptualised as “notional ekphrasis” (Hollander, 1988, p. 209). It needs to be stressed, however, that brief references to pictures (e.g., in the form of titles, or even names of artists or artistic styles) are not necessarily devoid of wider significance for the text and may well be meaning-constitutional. As demonstrated by Yacobi (1995), the “ekphrastic model” – a reference to an artistic or pictorial style, theme, or topos (e.g., a Turner seascape) – can activate a wide spectrum of associations and have considerable impact on the text’s production of meaning (p. 632). For the purpose of this paper, I also coin the term “mute ekphrasis” to refer to fictional pictures present and referenced in the diegetic reality, but whose content is not revealed or remains concealed from the reader or the narrator.

It was also Yacobi (1995, pp. 601–602) who drew attention to the fact that the relationships between the visual source and the verbal target do not always have a one-to-one relationship (as in, for example, Keats’s “Ode on a Grecian Urn”) but may involve multiple items scattered throughout the whole text, a phenomenon common to narrative fiction. Instances where a text refers to multiple pictorial items are conceptualised by Lund (1998) as “ekphrastic linkage” – it is the reader

or a character within the fictional world whose task it is to link the “images to each other through a time sequence by filling in the intervening moments between the pictures” (p. 177) in the mode of panels in a comic strip or stations on a journey. Following Hagstrum, Lund (1998) sees such texts in terms of “a picture gallery form” or a series of tableaux (p. 177). Lund (1992, p. 177) further distinguishes between time-contextual ekphrasis (images linked by the reader) and spatio-contextual ekphrasis, where the pictures are collected in a definable spatial environment and contemplated on by the viewer within that space. By determining the provenance of pictures exhibited in such a textual “gallery” (either time- or spatio-contextual), their type (real or fictional, belonging to a specific artistic trend or not, etc.) and the way they are “exhibited” (described or merely mentioned in passing), we are thus able to map the areas of the text’s inspiration, the degree of its pictorial saturation and (at least tentatively) the significance of the pictorial elements. This, in turn, may serve as material for comparison with other texts.

For reasons of clarity, the procedure assumed in this paper is a diachronic one: the selected novels will be examined chronologically for the presence of ekphrastic insets. The present paper takes into consideration whether the insets are real or notional, whether they are mere references or involve a more or less detailed description or represent an ekphrastic model and whether they form a spatio-contextual ekphrasis. Particular attention is given to the typology of visual elements used, (artistic or non-artistic) and the art-historical context of the former, as well as the medium used (oil painting, sculpture, photography, etc.). It has to be stressed that the borderlines between descriptive ekphrasis and the ekphrastic model, or between notional and real ekphrasis in many cases are blurred. An overview of each novel will be followed by a tentative assessment of the overall character of the time-contextual ekphrasis – a collection of pictures referred to in the given text.

The overview opens with *White Star*, which won the Eisteddfod Prose Medal in 1992 and which generated much interest and controversy in the Welsh literary world due to its novel (for Welsh-language fiction) mixture of diverse genres and literary modes: fantasy, alternative reality and dystopian elements inscribed in Welsh language literary history and mythology. Pictorial insets in the novel are scarce but varied, and present much interpretative potential as, being exclusively notional, they employ symbolism and iconography that belongs solely to the fictional reality. These include vexillological and heraldic images in the form of the references to flags: the eponymous white star on a white background (Llywelyn, 2004, p. 129) or the pre-World War II German jack with cross – the symbol of the Exile States roughly modelled on Nazi Germany (p. 110). The White Star flag also features on the mural contemplated by the main character, Gwern. Apart from the flag, the painting represents a battle scene between the Heartless Bodies and Small Country warriors, although the style, technique and other details are not described

(p. 20). However, the major example of an untypical ekphrasis is the description of the screen used by one of the characters, the clerk Zählappell, to display the text of the files he accidentally takes from the archive he works in. The text, flowing down the screen in Zählappell's living room, turns out to be the main body of the novel, so the scene can be read as an interesting case of a hybrid framing device combining ekphrasis and what Lund calls "iconic projection" (Lund, 1992, p. 16). Apart from constituting a compositional frame, the device can be interpreted as a mechanism providing the narrative with the qualities of arrested temporality often attributed to visual representation. The visual packaging of the narrative considered in relation to other features of the novel, like the dream vision of an alternative or future version of Wales, the innovative use of spoken language and the fantastic re-invention of Welsh history and mythology, all of these running counter to the conventions of Welsh-language fiction, allows us to see Llywelyn's novel in terms of a literary *capriccio* – the term originally applied to paintings featuring familiar landmarks in an unfamiliar, imaginary setting or/and "in a future ruined state" (Mayernik, 2013, p. 12)².

Rhys's *Cysgodion* [Shadows], 1993 is the story of Lois Daniel, a Welsh journalist researching the work of Welsh painter Gwen John, the sister of the better-known Welsh painter Augustus John (also mentioned in the novel). Gwen John had long been known for her relationship with Auguste Rodin, and only recently has her own artistic output been appreciated (Lord, 2000, p. 381, note 58). Many of Rodin's pieces are referenced in Lois's diary and come from the real photo album *Rodin: Eros and Creativity* from 1992 (Crone & Salzmann, 1992). They include *Iris, Messenger of the Gods* (1895)³, *Le Baiser* [The Kiss], ca. 1882, *L'Éternel Printemps* [Eternal Springtime], ca. 1884, *L'Éternelle Idole* [Eternal Idol], 1890–1893, *Je suis belle* [I Am Beautiful], 1882, *La Méditation* [Meditation], 1885, *La Danaïde* [Danaid], 1889, *L'Avarice et la Luxure* [Avarice and Lust], before 1887, *Couple Saphique* [Sapphic Couple], drawing ca. 1900 and *Coquille* [probably *La Coquille et la perle*], 1899–1900. Apart from Rodin's sculptures, the novel has a liberal sprinkling of references to other continental artists and their works: Sandro Botticelli (Rhys, 1993, p. 22), Michelangelo (p. 147), Peter Rubens (p. 22), Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec (p. 12) and Raoul Dufy (and his *Sleeping Nude with Butterflies* [pp. 122, 127]). Welsh and British artists, apart from Gwen John and her brother, include John Elwyn (1916–1997), Gwilym Prichard (1931–2015) and Eric Gill (1882–1940), although none of their works are

² The identification of *Seren Wen* as a form of *capriccio* is a way of sidetracking the problems voiced by Welsh criticism in the context of Llywelyn's work (cf. Price, 2000), as it opens up new interpretative possibilities. A preliminary study of Llywelyn's two first novels as caprices was delivered at the Third Lublin Celtic Colloquium held at the Celtic Department of the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, 19 September 2019.

³ All dates of Rodin's works are taken from the online catalogue of Musée Rodin.

mentioned. The novel also evokes tourist attractions associated with art: Musée Rodin, the Sacré-Cœur Basilica and the Louvre with “old Mona Lisa” [hen Fona Lisa] (p. 139). Real ekphrasis (Mona Lisa) is combined with notional ekphrasis in the scene in which Lois’s daughter, Nia, sits for a portrait executed by a Paris street artist. In Lois, as well as in the artist, Nia evokes associations that may be categorised as ekphrastic models: to her mother, the daughter’s smile resembles that of the Mona Lisa’s, while the artist recalls Madonna (the singer), who is in turn confused with the Virgin Mary (p. 147). The portrait is mediated by Nia’s reaction: she is appalled at the lack of likeness and claims that the portraitist makes her look like a whore (p. 151). *Cysgodion* is thus dominated by short ekphrastic references to real continental (mostly French) artists, and even the unique notional descriptive ekphrasis of Nia’s portrait is “contaminated” with real elements. This strategy anchors the text in European culture and raises questions about the role and reception of Welsh artists and the condition of Welsh visual arts in general.

Y Dylluan Wen [The White Owl], 1995 is a novel by Angharad Jones (1962–2010), also a S4C⁴ editor and film director. The novel, which won the Eisteddfod prose medal in 1995, tells the story of Myfanwy [Myfi] Jones, who returns to her hometown in North Wales to wreak vengeance on the local headmaster (Gruffydd) for caning her, years earlier, as punishment for spilling milk in the school canteen, an event that, in her opinion, triggered her father’s death. While staying in Gruffydd’s house, Myfi makes friends with his daughter Gwen, a budding artist for whom drawing is a means of escaping from everyday problems. Gwen’s pictures, most of them representing witches [gwrachod], are exhibited in her room, where they are contemplated by the girl herself (Jones, 2002, p. 144) and by Myfi (pp. 71–73) – an example of spatio-contextual ekphrasis. Later in the novel, Gwen offers Myfi one of her drawings representing Blodeuwedd,⁵ but the woman rejects it dispassionately. The disappointed girl drops the picture on the wet ground, where it is found by a teacher who becomes the focaliser, providing a brief description of Blodeuwedd’s face wet with rain that resembles tears (pp. 101–102). Another example of ekphrasis includes the photograph owned by Myfi which she keeps by her bedside. The photo is, at the same time, an example of “mute ekphrasis”: it remains undescribed and the reader is only allowed to guess that it represents Myfi and her father (p. 154). The ekphrases in the novel are thus exclusively notional and limited to short references, the only exception being the Blodeuwedd drawing. This can be explained by the fact that the novel’s symbolic framework rests largely on the correspondence between the woman made of flowers and Myfi. Thus, the sodden drawing could be seen as a symbol of the main

⁴ Sianel 4 Cymru [Channel Four Wales] – the Welsh-language television channel launched in 1982.

⁵ A woman conjured out of flowers who is later turned into an owl as punishment for adultery featuring in the collection of medieval Welsh tales called the Mabinogion.

character's tragic fate, and her reaction to it betrays her denial of that connection.

Wele'n Gwawrio [Behold it Dawns], 1997, is a novel by another important Welsh woman author. Angharad Tomos (born 1958) was one of the most dedicated Welsh language rights activists of the 1970s and early 1980s, a period in her life interspersed with terms of imprisonment in several English gaols. *Wele'n Gwawrio*, the winner of the Eisteddfod Prose Medal in 1997, is the story of Ennyd, a language activist and a decorative painter who, despite unexpectedly dying in the middle of the narrative, retains the ability to see and hear, and continues to report the events around her until she is buried.

The novel contains several references to visual art, mostly notional, some of which contribute significantly to the overall symbolism of the work. Marginal ekphrases from the point of view of the plot include references to plates that Ennyd used to decorate, e.g., with doves, and which have the capacity of storing memories (Tomos, 1997, p. 35), or old protest posters she finds in the attic which could serve as excellent material for an exhibition (p. 61). The motif of the dove reappears in the description of the Welsh flag with which Ennyd's body is covered after her death (p. 146). Perhaps the most striking real ekphrasis that can be classified as an ekphrastic model is Ennyd's observation when she looks at her reflection in the mirror. Frustrated by the shape of her body, she thinks, "If I lived in the 17th century, I'd be in demand as a model for artists or I'd be a muse to poets" [translation mine] (p. 29)⁶. This remark has the potential to activate a wide range of associations depending on the reader's competence, the most stereotypical probably being "Rubenesque women," which, in turn, connotes a whole body of 17th century Dutch and Flemish painting. Another ekphrastic model can be found towards the end of the novel when Ennyd's body is carried by her friends to the summit of Yr Wyddfa [Snowdon]. The deceased narrator evokes memories of angels that she saw on postcards, in churches and films. The ekphrasis corresponds to the 1903 painting *The Wounded Angel* by the Finnish artist Hugo Simberg, which appears on the novel's cover. Thus, although Tomos's novel does not abound in ekphrases, the two models firmly anchor it in the continental artistic tradition and open up a wide range of possible questions like, for instance, the interrelations between the angel figure and the novel's paratext. The link between Ennyd's body and 17th century painting could be considered in terms of the gendered role of ekphrasis as a phenomenon that grants a voice to the mute or marginalised (female) agents, a perspective developed by Heffernan (1993) in his *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery*. The symbolic common denominator of the novel's pictorial insets is that most of them seem to project a reality beyond the storyworld: a world in which corpulence

⁶ Original text: "Taswn i'n byw yn yr ail ganrif ar bymtheg, mi fyddai galw mawr amdanaf fel model i artistiaid neu fel testun awen i feirdd" (Tomos, 1997, p. 29).

is a desirable aesthetic value or a spiritual, blissful otherworld represented by the dove and the angel.

Wyn's *Tri Mochyn Bach* [Three Little Pigs] from 2000 tells the story of Mair, a Welsh academic and an expert on folk tales and myths, who is commissioned by Prince Nwgeri of the fictional African country of Nacca Culaam, to write a biography of his prematurely deceased son. The novel is one of few examples in contemporary Welsh-language fiction that can be classified as multimodal. It is a dialogue of two alternating voices, one of them being a first-person narrator who could be identified as the main character's conscience or conscious self. The fragments narrated by the voice are printed in red which activates the semiotic potential of typography – "the basic element of the graphic surface that can convey visually meanings other than the verbal message it is a graphic signifier for" (Maziarczyk, 2013, p. 49). The red font, which alerts the reader to the tension between the two voices, belongs, in fact, to the protagonist's consciousness, while the main narrative line is later revealed to have been a dream-like, drug-induced reverie. The novel's ekphrastic insets echo the gap between the conscious and the unconscious, signalled by the difference in font colour. Mair's work as a myth analyst is reflected in the descriptive ekphrasis of a painting she sees in Nwgeri's library: it is a large canvas – a copy of an 11th-century French manuscript illumination (Wyn, 2000, p. 60) – representing a castle surrounded by an orchard/vineyard. In the foreground there is a herd of pigs and a sleeping man, presumably a swineherd, being woken by a magician with a wand. The group is complemented by three naked girls (p. 59). In this case, the notionality of the picture might be ambivalent for a more competent reader, as the picture may evoke real art-historical topoi or styles which would make the description a palimpsestic hybrid of notional ekphrasis and a real ekphrastic model. The blurred boundary between the two may be seen as yet another way of representing the porous borderline between the conscious and the unconscious. The novel also makes extensive use of descriptive ekphrases of photographs. These include pictures of Nwgeri's family and a series of polaroid photos of Mair's reflection in the mirror – an attempt to document the effects of her rape by her partner (p. 104–105). The woman hides the photos in the pendulum clock in the hope of forgetting about the traumatic event (p. 106). Later, however, the existence of the photographs is questioned by the "red voice", which undermines the reliability of Mair's narrative (p. 123).

Dafydd's novel *Y Llyfrgell* [The Library]⁷ from 2009 is a departure from ekphrasis traditionally conceived as a description or reference to a pictorial work of art. The novel, which won the Daniel Owen Memorial Prize at the 2009 National Eisteddfod, is set in the National Library of Wales in Aberystwyth. There, members of the library staff, the twins Ana and Nan, implement their plan to wreak revenge

⁷ In 2016 the novel was adapted as a feature film titled *The Library Suicides/Y Llyfrgell* (2016).

on Eben, whom they blame for the death of their mother, a renowned (fictional) Welsh-language author. The plan involves sealing off the library building from the outside world and taking everyone in the reading room hostage. By chance, on the same day the porter Dan, in order to mask his idleness, feeds the library CCTV software with old footage so that the monitors in the control room show what is in fact a simulacrum of reality. Thus, the story abounds with references and descriptions of characters seen on screen by other characters or even by the characters themselves, sometimes in the fast-forward mode (Dafydd, 2009, p. 114). Therefore, ekphrasis in the case of *Y Llyfrgell* requires a more capacious definition, like that of, for example, Claus Clüver's verbalisation of non-verbal texts which would allow the inclusion of video footage.

The novel's "textual gallery" is not, however, limited to video material, but also features traditional works of art like the sizeable oil portrait of the twins' mother and the statue of Sir John Williams, the (real) first President of the National Library of Wales. Characteristically, the characters confronted with the figures represented by the statue and in the portrait feel they are followed by their gaze as if the figures were alive, which blurs the borderline between the first- and second-degree representation already made porous by the video simulacrum. The ontological oscillation of visual representations is also present in the case of the photograph manipulated by the librarian responsible for cataloguing photographic material, from which she removes the figure of D. J. Williams – a historical Welsh poet (Dafydd, 2009, p. 190). Thus the library building is a spatio-contextual ekphrasis sporting a diverse collection of different visual representations and where, at the same time, the distinction between notional and real ekphrasis is destabilised. The library may then be seen as a space where Welsh collective memory is stored but, at the same time, infiltrated by simulacra, threatened by manipulation, destabilisation and, potentially, obliteration.

In the case of Salisbury's *Cai* (2016), we may speak of the strongest degree of ekphrastic saturation among the novels discussed so far. The book tells the story of Cai Wynne, a student in Aberystwyth art school, who unsuccessfully applies for a research grant on the "grossly neglected" Welsh artist Aeres Vaughan (Salisbury, 2016, p. 18). Apart from thematising art in the context of the art trade, art grants and academia, the novel is replete with descriptive ekphrases of drawings, paintings and photographs. It opens with an ekphrastic description of pictures exhibited in a local gallery (a spatio-contextual ekphrasis *par excellence*) which represent different perspectives of Aberystwyth, including one by the main character. Unexpectedly, Cai is approached by a little-known foundation called Oriol [A Gallery], which wants to fund his work on Vaughan (pp. 26–27). While cataloguing the artist's paintings along with those of her niece Catrin, Cai uncovers clues encoded in some of the pictures that lead him to launch a private investigation into Catrin's death. Unlike most of the novels discussed above, *Cai*

includes a large body of descriptive notional ekphrases of paintings, but also of photographs. In some cases the borderline between notional and real ekphrasis is blurred: one of the photographs researched by Cai in the National Library shows the chapel in the village of Capel Celyn, which was flooded in 1965, and whether the photo refers to one existing in reality is difficult to determine.⁸ Notional ekphrases of some of the paintings are also linked to real artworks or ekphrastic models. For instance, one of Aeres's paintings evokes in Cai associations with Curnow Vosper's *Salem* (p. 74). Other historical Welsh painters who are evoked in *Cai* with reference to otherwise fictitious paintings are Thomas Jones (1742–1803) and Richard Wilson (1714–1782) (p. 99). Trying to locate the source of inspiration behind one of Catrin's canvases, Cai's friend Ffion remembers an illustration from a children's Bible showing the prophet Elijah and a crow bringing him food (p. 155). Whether the picture refers to a concrete edition of the Bible would perhaps be hard to establish, but it certainly does refer to a clichéd image of Elias found in many editions of the Old Testament, which makes it a typical example of Yacobi's ekphrastic model. Another example of what could be classified as a hybrid of notional ekphrasis and a real ekphrastic model are the titles of fictional art-history books that Cai studies: *The Dragon's Palette: Welsh Art 1979–99*, *Gathering Gems with the Eye: 15 Welsh Artists*, *A Garland of Six Portrait Painters & Y Ddelwedd a'r Ddalen*⁹. The books, albeit invented, evoke the history of Welsh visual arts. In contrast to Rhys's *Cysgodion*, however, where an attempt is made to reintroduce Gwen John to the canon of Welsh art without much reference to her actual work, *Cai* invents a notional, simulacrum-like body of art and art-related motifs that are provided with the illusion of verisimilitude.

Other ekphrases in the novel include Cai's own sketches of other characters, including a "mute ekphrasis" of his girlfriend's portrait: the painting is folded in white paper and upon seeing Ffion, Cai thinks "how alike she is to the portrait of her he had completed and framed this morning as a gift for her" [translation mine] (p. 189)¹⁰. As can then be seen, in Salisbury's novel ekphrastic linkage is particularly robust, as it employs both spatio-temporal and spatio-contextual ekphrasis (the Aberystwyth gallery, Vaughan's house, the National Library).

⁸ The flooding, more commonly associated with the name of the valley (Tryweryn), had considerable impact on the Welsh nationalist movement and the language rights campaigns. Carried out despite widespread protests, the creation of the reservoir, whose purpose was to supply water to the Wirral and Liverpool industry has become a symbol of imperial English dominance and the motto "Cofiwch Dryweryn" [Remember Tryweryn] expresses an urge to protect Welsh-speaking communities from Anglicisation.

⁹ As stated by the writer, the titles are fictitious, albeit inspired by real publications, mostly taken from Peter Lord's work on Welsh visual culture (Salisbury, 2020, January 13).

¹⁰ Original text: "pa mor debyg yr edrychai i'r braslun ohoni a gwblhaodd y bore hwnnw ac a fframiwyd yn anrheg iddi" (Salisbury, 2016, p. 189).

The tentative interpretation of this strategy that can be offered here is that the wide gamut of visual elements is used to construct a complex metaphor of the collective trauma that Tryweryn continues to connote in Welsh-language culture. The memory of the event is encoded in images (both paintings and photographs) stored in places like Aeres's house, the gallery and the library, which invites associations with the tradition of *Ars Memorativa*. In this tradition, memory was conceptualised as a spatio-visual construct: an enclosed space (a gallery, a palace or a library) where memories were stored in the form of images (Bolzoni, 2001, pp. xviii–xxiii)¹¹. The art of memory also involved ordering the visual material in *loci*, so that it could be retrieved when needed (p. xvii). Thus, remembering the past requires the process of investigating and decoding visual material – the procedure which constitutes the central theme of Salisbury's novel. The para-documentary world of Welsh art criticism portrayed in the novel may be seen as an apparatus enabling the ordering and securing of the visual repository of collective memory¹².

As we have seen, even such a cursory overview of Welsh-language novels from the period beginning roughly with Mitchell's announcement of the "pictorial turn" demonstrates that this minority literature originally growing from the Nonconformist tradition makes extensive use of the possibilities provided by diverse visual sources. The remarkable array of pictures featuring in the novels listed above includes some of the most prominent Welsh artists, canonical representatives of continental art, and a varied selection of notional images. An important part of the collection is taken up by photography, although other types of mechanical or digital images (screens, CCTV footage or polaroid pictures of mirror reflections) also occur. The examples also show a relatively wide scope of types of ekphrastic insets: traditional, long descriptions of pictures being less common, the list includes a multitude of short descriptions and brief references, ekphrastic models, spatio-contextual ekphrases and "mute ekphrases". In many cases, visual art, or artistic activity, is thematised and/or is meaning-constitutional. Attention should also be drawn to the tendency to anchor notional ekphrases in a real art-historical context.

It thus seems that contemporary Welsh-language fiction has been highly responsive to the proliferation of pictures in modern global culture, and any speculations about the alleged impact of the iconoclastic streak in Nonconformism on Welsh prose must be handled with extreme care (although the use of artwork as a potential counter-Nonconformist tendency also needs to be taken into

¹¹ It is not without significance that Cai's friend Ffion is a biochemistry student doing research on the effects of the rabies virus on the human brain, which results in a lack of communication between the neurons and, consequently, cell death (Salisbury, 2016, p. 55).

¹² The vulnerability and, simultaneously, the endurance of Tryweryn as a symbol have recently been illustrated by the daubing and then re-painting of the iconic "Cofiwch Dryweryn" graffiti near Aberystwyth.

consideration). By gesturing so extensively towards continental visual arts, Welsh fiction transgresses its minority status and taps into the wider waters of European culture. The outline of ekphrastic insets drawn above clearly indicates the existence of uncharted territory in the study of Welsh-language literature, but also in minority literatures elsewhere. It also requires a broadening of the area of research to include other manifestations of word-image relationships like imitation, multimodal elements or overt intermediality.

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