

Dorian Llywelyn  
The value of the specific

the third of three essays

Three Landscapes Project  
Stanford 2000 –

## I

As you enter the grounds of Hafod from the north, the road laid out by Thomas Johnes takes you towards a large outcrop of rock. It would have been easier by far for Johnes' engineers and laborers to have skirted the rock, but characteristically he had them pick their way - we do not know whether he used controlled explosives - through the outcrop. The effect of this path through the rock was to frame perfectly a prospect of Hafod itself, the dark walls at the edge of one's vision functioning almost as a birth canal, leading the gaze of the visitor into an illuminated middle ground in which stood Hafod, framed in the distance by wooded hills. It is a picturesque vision, in both generic and technical senses of the word. Benjamin Malkin, one of Hafod's many visitors, in his *Tour of South Wales* of 1802, described this approach to Hafod as a

"sudden turn, most judiciously managed, (which) brings the stranger unprepared, almost before the very portico of an elegant mansion... the situation of the house is admirably chosen, commanding the river.... immediately behind it rises a most beautifully wooded hill, as if formed for the purpose of giving shelter and an art of repose to a classic residence. Majestic woods... at once protect and adorn the chosen spot... with the sheep walks on the other side of the Ystwith, interrupted by rocks that thrust their projections amongst the very clouds, remind us by what a style of nature we are surrounded, in the midst of an artificial paradise."

Indeed, the tour guides to Wales - both the books and the people - made much of ensuring that places such as Hafod were approached from the best possible angle, so that the picturesque journey itself would be an experience of rapidly changing, contrasting viewpoints, providing a roller-coaster ride of aesthetic sensation. As Malkin describes it, "it is a characteristic of Hafod that it does not unfold itself at first. There is no approach by which the stranger's admiration is arrested at the gate."

The curious thing about Picturesque theory is its mix of generalized abstraction and its interest in detail. Literary description of land - Grey's great cliffs on which the last Bard stood - brings together detailed description of place which is also somehow generic, in that the mountain floods of Conwy could also be the mountain floods of the headwaters of the Po or the Rhone. In order to describe the unknown, the unmapped, of course, we can only work with pre-existent models. Since the landscape of Grey's Bard exists in the imagination, then the poet has the freedom to edit and embroider what he sees, to mentally alter the landscape to fit in with his own pre-existent needs.

The interaction between word and land is internal, both of them being mental constructs. The sublime, which lies in the family tree of the Picturesque, is a curious concatenation of landscape and description, oscillating between awe and the need to say something about that awe. In the case of the sublime, which lionizes the ineffable, a lot of words are used to say that something is beyond description! But in the activity of appreciation of landscape, there is a sense that the visitor needs to be told what something is (sublime, pastoral, picturesque...) in order to be able to see it from the correct perspective: this is land

viewed through the filter of literary culture which alters, defines and nuances the (cultured) viewer's internal reaction to a place.

In the field of landscape representation in art, something similar yet different is at work. William Gilpin's *Tours of the Wye Valley* and his strictures on the representation of landscape in painting brought together pre-existent opinions about what was worthy of representation, and the encounter with real places which might, or might not, conform with those aesthetic tenets. When the real and specific places met the idealized locations of Gilpin's imagination, and were found wanting in the balance, then a number of possible reactions were possible: dismissal of places as being unworthy of consideration, portrayal, or description; alteration of the physical perspective of the artist so as to best realize the aesthetic potential of a scene; the exaggeration of the omission of desirable or undesirable elements; or the wholesale importation of elements into a picture which are not there in reality - peasants, cows, architectural elements such as churches, mills, bridges, or ruins, and natural features such as trees or hills. The picture produced therefore is something of a chimera, a combination of images of what is there and what is not there.

In the case of Thomas Johnes' Hafod, something yet again similar and yet different is at work. Not only perception or representation but also the materiality of land itself are altered, literally engineered into conforming with a pre-existent ideal, so that the eye of the visitor is inexorably led into seeing as Johnes wished him to see, almost cinematically. The effect of this is that in some way, land and perception and verbal description all merge, for the Picturesque experience is an encounter with materiality of land through a cultural filter consisting of literary references: journey and guidebook inform each other. Malkin devotes some three pages of his *Guide to South Wales* to the walk at Hafod the high point of which is the sudden 'discovery' of a waterfall. The path takes the visitor through another of the rock-paths cut by Johnes in order to frame the view of the waterfall. Malkin's description takes in a sensory data - visual, sonic, tactile - and describe the emotions and thoughts which such perceptions should invoke: interest, romance, suspense, discovery, gloom, 'a sort of picturesque feeling', wonder, admiration, hesitation.

Johnes belonged to a circle of sophisticated theoreticians of the aesthetic, and the laying out of the grounds at Hafod made of that "artificial paradise" the field of experiment, the practical and detailed working out of an aesthetic ideal. Prime among Johnes' colleagues in this circle of forward-looking, educated squires was Uvedale Price, whose "Essay on the Picturesque, as compared with the sublime and the beautiful, and, on the use of studying pictures, for the purpose of improving real landscape" was published in 1784, the exact year that Johnes inherited Hafod. Price's Essay is a detailed description of the concepts and practices of the Picturesque. In 266 pages and twelve chapters the Hereford squire Price details the 'improving' nature of the picturesque, discussing the paintings of Claude, Rubens and Caravaggio, Titian and the Venetian school. and the gardening techniques of Capability Brown; methods for improving a lane. The meaning of the picturesque, Price holds, make it distinct from Burkean sublimity or mere beauty. Almost a whole chapter is devoted to a taxonomy of different types of

picturesque: in buildings, trees, animals, people, in painting, flowers and shrubs. An interesting chapter specifies desirable qualities to be found in the clump, the belt and the avenue of trees; a whole chapter is devoted to dendrology and lawns.

An interest in the specifics of texture and detail might well be considered to be hallmarks of the picturesque. Certainly, Johnes' nurturing and improving of the land at Hafod was a mass of detail, making of the landscape an extension of the house, full of interesting man-made and man-adapted features. But there is also a sense in which the ideal of the Picturesque involves seeing what is not there. In order to discover or reveal those potential, the capacity of land, a complex operation of negotiation is underway at Hafod, between on the one hand, the pre-existent, the idealized, universal, and on the other the raw material of what is already there. The Picturesque interest in specific, 'picturesque' details paradoxically militates against attention being paid to other specifics - the human aspect of landscape, the temporal, the moral - and as such, reveals itself to be an aesthetic equivalent of heresy: *haeresis* is a separating out and over-emphasizing of one valid aspect of reality, to the exclusion of others, a disequilibrium.

## II

One of the reasons why today's Hafod calls forth in me a sense of unease is precisely because it embodies a tension - between the universal and the specific, between what is not there in any material sense, and what actually is there. In "universal", I am including a number of things and associations: first among these is a universalizing understanding of land which tends toward holding that all things are the same at all time in all places, and are therefore endlessly translatable from one place to another, particularly when those places are perceived as *tabulae rasae*.

You might argue as did Uvedale Price, that 'improvement' of nature, follows the same general principles as painting and drawing - in which the land is a blank canvas, and ideals may be presented according to the wish of the artist, informed by the particular tradition she represents. There is a substantive, material difference however between on the one hand, presenting land through the medium of paint on canvas, and on the other, making the ideal physically present through the medium of manipulation and engineering of land in order to make it better conform to a pre-existent and generalized definition of what constitutes the natural, rejecting the 'monotony and baldness of improved places' in favor of a nature which either is already intricate and varied, or which can be made to become more intricate or varied than it already is.

"Nature," in this context, is apparently co-extensive with 'rural,' or possibly, 'uncultivated,' and therefore set at a distance from 'culture,' which is located in the metropolis. And yet at the same time it is perception of nature prescribed by the tastes and dictates of the metropolis (which is itself, of course, self-defined by its distance from the countryside). This is nature considered as desert - i.e. uninhabited by humanity, and calling forth a number of responses, which include a jaded city-dwellers' delight in an

apparently unadorned, undiscovered and untouched world, and the Genesis-style challenge to cultivate and have dominion over.

Now the particular aesthetic appearance of that 'nature' which was tweaked and primed, coaxed and manipulated into existence at Hafod - and which is, at least still there today, in the material traces of Johnes' and others' landscaping - is one which is the least natural of natures, for was imported into Wales from other places. In other words, it is a curious plasmation of one place on top of another. As such, it is a manifestation of cultural assimilation (which involves ignoring what is already there). And it perfectly illustrates and embodies one prime imperialist strategy: to ignore the specifics of what is there, in favor of the implantation of what is not.

Hafod itself is, as I have noted, a fluid term. It refers to a whole field of things, which encompasses, variously: a geographical location on the Ordnance Survey map, in the central Cambrian range of mountains of mid-Wales; the landed estate which Johnes owned and directed; the various houses, all called Hafod, which existed on the site and which were all incorporated into each other, in a convoluted text of history; the land which is there today and which simultaneously both is and is not, Johnes' Hafod; Johnes' own aesthetic project and the aesthetic and political project of today's Hafod enthusiasts.

Such temporal slippage and conceptual slippage between those various aspects of "Hafod" enables a number of things, including a seductive opportunity for romantic projections into the past. It also fosters a sense of history which has no living connection with the present, by appropriating the specificities of the now of the beholder into a time which is apparently far from her and for which she has no responsibility: the spirit of Romanticism which circles around Hafod survives 200 years after the blaze which burnt up Johnes' dream.

The ambiguity of reference evoked by the name "Hafod" facilitates a genericizing attitude towards location. As such it continues the 18th century picturesque gaze which assimilates the local and the particular into a vaguer, middle-distance world, in which detail and immediacy do not unsettle the calm, unengaged view of the aesthete. I regard this apparently benign eirenicism as a subtly aggressive form of imperialism.

Since the aesthete can always claim to be engaged with some other aspect of Hafod, what the vagueness of the term Hafod actively disables is a historically-engaged sense of the present. It allows the spectator who is present at today's Hafod to shrug off an awareness of the effects his presence in and on the landscape he surveys. Morally-speaking, such portmanteau, internally-incohesive terms as "Hafod," allow precisely that engagement-with-distance which is the mark of aestheticism and tourism, stepchildren children of the imperium. Common to aestheticism, tourism and imperialism is the misguided idea that it is possible for us to be non-specific, non-located in our actions and perceptions. Such cultural vagueness is generally espoused by those of people who are actively enfranchised by the

supposed existence of universal values - generally those of the dominant group. I have described this as willful unknowing: the hallmarks of this are a preference for the generic. Such 'universal' values as beauty, peace, common sense, tolerance, universal brotherhood, are in fact likely to enfranchise their own hegemony. Those empowered by genericity will stress commonality between groups: those actively disempowered by that relationship will seek to stress their constitutive differences. The technique of assimilation by embrace exists in many different ideological versions - Marxist, imperialist, feminist, religious, to name a few.. Those groups who are actively disenfranchised by such "universal" values are far more likely to be interested in what constitutes difference.

At this point, in all equity, I should make clear my own cultural specificities, as for "Hafod," I am reading Wales as it has been co-opted into two generalities - Britain and the Celtic. The very slipperiness of the term Britain (meaning variously a province of the Roman Empire, the Arthurian mythic world, the political unity created by the assimilation by the Kingdom of England of the various components of what later became known as Wales over a period of some 500 years, the Protestant state created by the Union of Scotland and England), has historically acted to make the Welsh a subset of a larger whole. The place of the Welsh as "British" has historically varied according to the national needs of both Wales and England - from an early self-identification by the Welsh as "British" (i.e. as cultural and linguistic descendants of the Celtic speaking Ancient British), to the drive to assimilate the Welsh into the embrace of the 18th-20th century British Empire. Gwyn Alf Williams's *When was Wales* chronicles the change from "British Welsh" to "Welsh British:" the colonial and post-colonial nature of Wales means that the boundaries between what is Wales and Britain are complex and shifting.

The story is one of varied perception, according to need rather than to objective fact: as Clifford McLucas points out: "The Welsh never confuse Wales and Britain in their speech. The English always confuse England and Britain. To them, the two are the same. The British culture is the English culture. The British language is the English language. Wales' identity is constantly debated within Wales, and problematized, and negotiated. There is no similar debate regarding Englishness in England." (1)

British imperialism, at least in its overseas variety, is espoused overtly and taken seriously by no-one, the British Conservative Party and sections of the London media apart. Yet its philosophical and cultural children are thriving, nourished on the vagueness which is one of the hallmarks of the interest in the Celtic. I have noted that Classical references to Keltoi or Celtae are geographically and culturally vague - designating people who are 'not one of us,' namely not of the center. Malcolm Chapman's "The Celts: the Construction of a Myth" points out the dynamic relationship between culture and periphery: a process of desirability driven by scarcity means that specific cultural differences present in assimilated areas are initially regarded as undesirable by the imperium, until such point when they no longer threaten its

---

<sup>1</sup> From "The Pointing Finger and Wales: some approaches to cultural specificity in the works of Brith Gof" - a multimedia presentation made to the Pacific Coast Conference on British Studies at Stanford University, April 3, 2001.

unity, at which point, vitiated and scarce, they become valued as exhibits in a cultural museum. The category of 'the Celts' continues to exercise its appeal, an identity more attractive than Britishness - one which apparently alternative (in the 1970's use of the word) but which is in fact constructed from the centre.

Two related processes are at work within modern Celticism. The first is the lionizing, curatorial or dilettante attitude of that cultural center (for which read "Britain") towards the Celtic nations and the artistic and religious aspects of their histories. Generally, this involves a highly selective reading which ignores the historical complexities of these societies. The second, related process is a cultural and historical elision, which creates the very portmanteau concept "Celtic". This vague, associative and generalized pastness is in fact an expression of contemporary desires: whatever one perceives oneself or one's world not to be but which one aspires to. And the result of this generalizing approach is the eradication of the more uncomfortable details in the field - those paradoxical aspects of Welsh, Irish, Scottish and Breton experiences which do not fit into the grand Celtic narrative. Such enthusiasm is essentially a-historical and anti-intellectual in its thrust, an aestheticist escape from the urban and the modern: the modern expression of the search for the Picturesque.

Such generalities as I have been discussing - Hafod, Britishness, the Celtic - as I have argued, tend to be held on to most virulently by specific power groups. To stress difference rather than commonality would be to de-mask the pretensions and the limitations of these universalizing cultural readings. So the strategy of genericizing serves the purposes of imperialism. But I believe that in a post-imperial world there also exists an uncomfortable sense of guilt. And with equal efficacy, subsuming difference into larger commonalities works to prevent, mask, or assuage such guilt or discomfort. Plus ça change... despite its enthusiastic good will, the modern enthusiasm for the Celtic continues to destroy that which it apparently celebrates, by remaining with superficialities alone.

If vagueness facilitates non-engagement and non-responsibility, then its polar opposite is the specific, which involves attention to the untidy realities of here-and-now. This makes for a less easy Romantic projection of desires on to the inanimate. For where there is specificity, there is historicity - the sphere of human conflict, problematcity, contestation, the flux of cultural fragmentation, hybridity and encounter. Where we pay attention to the complexities of the here and now, response and responsibilities are called for. True encounter with landscape - if we take interpersonal encounter, mutatis mutandis, as originary paradigm, both arises from and causes a sharpening of one's awareness of one's own locatedness in time and cultural particularities - personal, collective. Encounter is the enemy of ideologizing genericism, since it can only be engaged in with the specific.

To talk of encounter with landscape is not to attribute a hypostatic, quasi-personal essence to land. It is to recognize the social value of landscape, and to consider the questions of rights and responsibilities towards it. That is one of the values of the specific.

## III

To disparage the generic simply because it is generic might easily look like a juvenile act of capricious and ill-informed ideology. The generic and the universal, after all, have their uses. If we could imagine a world in which each individual concept and object had no commonality whatsoever with other objects, in which universal, genus, species, and sub-species, set and sub-set, were all totally separated from each other, then no communication at all would be possible. The act of communication, after all, demands the presence and recognition, of elements of commonality and difference. And these elements of commonality must therefore, at least in an abstract manner, have some sort of nominal existence.

But what makes possible this preference for the universal or the generic over the local and the specific, the assumption that the international is necessarily of greater value than the national, quantity more important than quality? Political and economic theory certainly have their explanations to give. But to reduce this preference to the political or economic would be a crude materialistic reductionism, for the political and the economic form part of an associative universe of values. And in this universe, philosophical and religious considerations play a key role.

At this point, I must confess to painting with a trowel, and in child's bright primary colors, rather than with detailed, subtle nuances created with the finest of academician's brushes. But I think it is fair to say that the relationships between the generic and the specific, between abstract theory and concrete practice, between the macrocosm and the microcosm, are all expressions of one of the great topoi of Western thought. Within this field of relationships, it is possible to travel in two different and opposing directions: to begin with the generic, the international, the pre-existent, universal theory and then descend to the level of detail and locale which may or irritatingly, may not - fit into a neat topiary of genus, species and sub-species. When the pre-existent Welsh landscape of Hafod Uchtryd was found not to be in harmony with the aesthetic theories of the Picturesque, it was shifted, materially, into conformity. Such is the nature of gardening one's property.

The opposite journey takes as its starting point the specific, the local then seeking to discover points of unity between particular diversities. I am not advocating that either starting point is preferable: in fact both are complimentary and necessary, but the origin, direction, and goal of both of these thought patterns will end up with rather different, and potentially irreconcilable, mental universes.

The background to what I am writing here is my work as a former pastor of a West Wales parish, many of whose members could said to be tinged with hafodism, and as a theologian. The movements from the large picture to the small details, or vice versa are not dissimilar to two dominant trends in the theological discussions concerning Christ: respectively, descending and ascending Christologies. The former takes as its starting point Christ's divinity and asking how it is that the nonmaterial, the universal, the spiritual can also be, or become, located, incarnated and humanized? An ascending Christology takes as its starting point and asks how the local, the specific, the human, the intra-temporal and conditioned,



can also be or become universal, divine, eternal and radically non-contingent and free? The practical implications of these two movements are immense, for they define how Christians approach any given reality. They also foster and define two differing psychologies - and probably the choice for one or the other approach by any one individual or school of theology (or ideology, in the secular analogues of these approaches) is affected by a pre-existent, semi-conscious set of psychological and existential preferences.

The preference for the universal over the specific is an old one: although 'ascending' in its direction, Platonism moves distinctly out of the messy, detailed, world of details and things, into a changeless world of disembodied ideas and forms. Plato's epistemology begins with the observance of the fragmentary, problematic and the contested, but seeks to arrive the contemplation of a world not subject to passion or change. Even if we may live in or even enjoy the world of things, the world of ideas is ontologically superior. The things of this world are important to the degree to which they correspond to a ideal .

Aristotle, it could be argued, also employs a ascending categorization, starting with things, and universal and moving up through the levels of classes, to the level of overarching concept and commonality, to the point when the overall concept then frames our perception and experience of the world around us. Only by positive observance and comparison of the material world around us can we begin to apprehend it. For him, the role of the senses (which apprehend the contingent, the detailed) is a valid way of knowing, since the way of the senses brings together disparate things, by means of defining them in relation to one one total concept. Such universals are immovable and constant - and in the hierarchy of study, the examination of immovability (the realm of the divine) stands at the summit. Universals are the only perfect goals of Aristotelian knowledge.

The cultural cradle of Aristotelian and Platonic epistemologies are Ancient Greece: aristocratic societies in which knowing and defining relative status was of great import. The act of classification aimed at helping the individual know not only the value of objects in a universe whose prime essence and values are immutable ones, but also his and others' place in society.

The mediaeval appropriation of Aristotle in particular, into Western theology and philosophy - attributed to St. Thomas Aquinas - had seismic effects. Jean-François Lyotard equates universals with metanarratives, and describes postmodernity incredulity towards metanarratives. To jump from Aristotle to postmodernity requires either a detailed knowledge of intervening development of philosophy, or perhaps, a leap of faith. In fact, in the Thomist schema, there are universals and universals - direct, material and formal universals, a universale logicum, a universale directum - , all related in a typically highly nuanced and detailed series of postulations.

Yet I would not wish to disagree fundamentally with Lyotard's intuition , my own psychological pre-disposition towards skepticism about the unquestioned possibility and value of universals being partly an intellectual one, and partly condition of being a member of several minorities - Catholic and amongst

them. . The subaltern knows (and sometimes wallows in) the value of the specific. She also knows from first hand experience how the embrace of universalizing ideologies defines her essence as being marginal.

To follow the development and decay of the category of the universal is far beyond my knowledge or ability. I do wish to point out the long-lived cultural appeal and instrumentality of the world of universals in Western thought, including theological thought. Alois Pichler SJ in the Catholic Encyclopedia wrote in 1912:

Science is impossible without the recognition of the universals. Without such recognition, it is degraded into the description of successive individual impressions. In psychology, the existence of universals has led to the recognition of the intellect as a faculty fundamentally distinct from the senses. Metaphysics and logic would be an impossibility without universals. Without universals, ethics and aesthetics would be surrendered to a relativism ungoverned by principles, and thus to annihilation. Without universals, impressionism in art and individual autonomy in life must attain undisputed sway. To these tendencies correspond in religion the exclusive validity of religious experiences, the belief in the changing content of dogmas, and the complete displacement of dogmatic by historical modes of thought... A deviation from Aristotelianism and Thomistic moderate Realism leads on one side to...Skepticism and Agnosticism, or to barren Empiricism and materialism, and on the other side... to false Idealism and Pantheism."

Had he been writing today, whether Father Pischler would include other undesirables under his splendidly fierce list of the results of deviation from "Aristotelian Thomistic moderate Realism," I do not know. But if a late 20th century Western liberal, sensibility has apparently recoiled away from universals, then amongst the reasons for this repulsion is the historic experience of the cruelty of totalitarian systems, and the intellectual reflection upon historicity which have revealed ideologies dressed in universals' clothing.

Historians of philosophy trace a line backwards from post-modernism's mistrust of grand narrative schemes, through post-industrialism, the Enlightenment, empiricism, Luther and the Reformation, back to the Franciscan friar, William of Ockham (1285-1347). Reacting against the real existence of universals (regarded as an expression of God's ideas which since they are God's exist beyond all time and contingency,) Ockham reduces universal ideas to something near the modern sense of idea - something existing verbally or notionally, but not essentially or disconnected from the thinker. For him, categories of quantity and relation are not things in themselves, merely verbal descriptions of the ways in which substances act or interact - a fictum or mental image whose essence is verbal or psychic alone.

Ockham's epistemology is radical. In answer to the question, "How do we know what we know?" he answers that individual specific things are known as individual things, in their individuality. Thus, he says, it is possible for humans to know particulars not by means of comparing them to a pre-existent ideal, but directly and immediately. What we know therefore is what is present to our senses: there is

no need to clutter up our understanding of what it is to know or understand with assumed universals or common knowledge. Cognition of things by our minds is simple, unconfused - and fully dependable. From this direct, experiential apprehension, comes a second type of knowing, one which is based on experience and extrapolated from it.

Ockham's insistence on the value of direct encounter with the specific was part of a world-view which came to be defined as Nominalism. Prime among nominalistic ideas is the tenet that all speculation about the world must be tested by experience - to the extent that experienced reality becomes the focus for perceiving the world. Nominalistic arguments sought to distinguish between God's word and human reason. In matters of faith alone, God's word is absolute and solely foundational - reason and experience concerning human salvation confirm rather than prescribe, follow rather than precede. These are the classical postures of Reformation and Protestant theologies. Catholic teaching sought to integrate the relation between intellect and belief. The issue of universals is implicated in an important disjuncture in the history of Western civilization : the complex and frequently unreconciled relationships between intellect, faith, belief and experience. And the rock at Hafod is implicated in this lack of reconciliation: for it is possible to read the Picturesque as a sort of exiling of the intellect from the world of aesthetics, and aesthetics as an existential stance which transfers religious fervor into a passion for beauty. Aestheticism with regard to landscape does not involve ideas. The quasi-religious sensations sought after, indulged in and described in the Picturesque world are precisely that - quasi: a set of experiences whose model is the experience of the transcendent, and yet which are transferred to the material world. Father Pischler's strictures about the end result of the disappearance of universals being Pantheism make a certain sense.

At this point, before this essay begins to wander irredeemably down the tangled paths of theological nuance, I would like to return to the specifics of medieval metaphysics. A few years after the Italian Dominican Thomas Aquinas was working to integrate the teachings of Aristotle into Christian theology, a Scots Franciscan, John Duns Scotus (1266-1308) was challenging and nuancing Aquinas on certain basic issues.

A major point of difference concerned their views of perception. Aquinas had held that the intellect does not know the singularity of things in the material world: instead, we may only know the universal natures that are abstracted from the sense perceptions of those. Aquinas understood the process of understanding as beginning with the universal, the intellectual, the abstract, and descending to the level of detail. Scotus, on the other hand taught that intellectual cognition happens initially through sensation, through a process of abstraction. For Scotus, what moves the intellect is those things which are present to our sensation: from these, the mind forms an idea or concept, which exists only insofar as it is in our minds. And whereas for St Thomas, abstraction (i.e. arriving at the idea of a thing) has been an intellectual act which illuminates the data we have received from our senses, for Scotus, the idea of a thing is created by an encounter between its material, physical reality and the mind. Experience, encounter with, is given primacy - but not to the exclusion of the possibility of there being some

generality between different objects. The subtle differentiation of Scotus drives us towards a rather different universe from that of Aquinas. Unlike Aquinas, Scotus held that universals do not exist apart from the human mind. Unlike the more radical Ockham, however, Scotus taught that each particular thing possesses a formally distinct nature which it shares in common with things of the same kind - a fact, which he claims, makes possible for there to be objective truths which may be known.

In the Scotist system, to sense, is not a purely passive process: it involves action on the part of the perceiver and is in the nature of a dialogue, or encounter. Scotus' psychology of perception makes much more such difficult simplistic views which claim absolute objectivity as "What I see is what there is" : rather, the implication is that there is a mutuality between the perceiver and the perceived. Perception is an intra-historical, moral action involving freedom, choice and responsibility. The worldview of the Picturesque - precisely because it is a retreat into aestheticism - obviates any encounter with what it perceives beyond that of a surface reality. And, writ large, the same might be said of any encounter - between individuals, classes, groups, or nations - where perception by one party of another is an act of imposition of a set of pre-existent categories, rather than of mutual encounter.

Perhaps one of the greatest difference between Scotus and Aquinas concerns their different understandings of Aristotle. Both accept the principle that objects consist of matter and of form - matter being common to all things, form being that which makes a rock a rock, a horse. In a long and thorough filleting of Aquinas' arguments on the relationship between the universal and the specific, he notes that logically-speaking, in Aquinas's system individuality would be reduced to the level of an accident - i.e. a quality which was not essential to a thing. Thus it would be possible for there to be rockness, but no rock, horseness, but no horse. Scotus teaches that the ultimate step of the form (the 'idea' of a horse) is 'haecceitas' or thisness. The reality of the individual is the ultimate reality of the form. And the specific differences which constitute individuality are integral parts of being. In short, to be, in the fulness of the word, is to be specific: located, particular, detailed, and immediate.

The theological key to this philosophical speculation was the humanity of Christ. Scotus, followed on from earlier Franciscan and patristic theologians, in his belief that all materiality is modeled on and rooted in the cause of creation, which is Christ. Within this understanding, each specific detail of the material world not only tells us something about Christ (as a sort of moral exemplum), but also shares in that being which is the nature of God. Aquinas had taught that true being exists only in God, and that all other being was derivative of that, pointing towards God and saying something about God, but indirectly. Scotus believed otherwise, claiming that being is univocal: for him, each specific element of creation shares equally in being, as fully as does the creator. Consequently, haecceitas - being this and not being that - is what it is to be. Where Aquinas follows the Aristotelian understanding that things are composed of form (horseness) and matter (the physical attributes of size, shape, etc), Scotus adds a third component : being this horse, this chair, this place, this man. All of this derives as a corollary from the

Incarnation, in which the Divine, the Eternal Word, the Second Person of the Trinity, became uniquely incarnate as one Jewish man, born in one specific place, at one time. The Niceno-Constantinople creed which remains the summary of faith of Orthodox, Catholic and many Reformed Churches retains the clause "under Pontius Pilate" , in the words of Jarolaw Pelikan, "identifying him as a truly human person, and characterizing (his) suffering as a truly historical event that took place not in a mythical "once upon a time" but at a particular place on the map and time in the history of the Roman Empire." (2)

The 'thisness' of Scotus, is I believe, if not identical with, then at least akin to what I refer to as specificity, the unique identity and integrity of a being. Philosophically, specificity is connected to notions of difference and alterity - since identity is made partly by distinction from that which it is not. Important implications follow out of this, not the least of which concerns attitudes towards land, landscape and people. An approach towards land which does not respect the haecceitas of a place will tend towards ignoring its specificity - i.e. what is there - in favor of what is not there. And this, I maintain, is what happens in the case of Hafod: apparently celebrating its specialness, the cultured 18th and 19th century visitors to Hafod actually view it generically - through the filter of a culture and an aesthetics which is outside Hafod. And this, I believe, is also the mechanism by which powerful imperial and colonial enterprises work: ignoring the thisness of peoples and places, and subsuming their differences into a wider commonwealth.

Scotus' metaphysics is related intimately to his theory of knowledge, namely the claims that sense perception is not purely passive, and that the intellect can recognize the singular directly, not indirectly. This, taken together with his notion of haecceitas, give us a notion of perception as mutual engagement with the specific.

To perceive therefore is to be in relationship with. And after all, one can only even be in true relationship with a specific, detailed, embodiment of an idea. My experience of Wales, in which I am, at least by birth and language, an insider, is of being in relationship with it, "Wales" being for me largely a social reality, one which is both diachronic and synchronic, and which involves me in a complex web of responsibilities and right. My insider-epistemology perceives its landscape not so much surface as depth. Consequently, Wales for me can never be only trope or symbol or a stage for acting out desires, but thisness.

One of the most famous of twentieth-century Welsh poems, T.H.Parry-Williams' "Hon" examines his own relationship with Welsh landscape, moving from indifference to a recognition that the landscape vehicles values which are essential to his identity, and that he is not only a figure in a landscape (therefore separate from it) but a figure of a landscape, and deeply involved in it. Not insignificantly, Wales is referred to by the epithet 'hon' = "this."

---

<sup>2</sup>J. Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries*, p.50.

. Certain typically Scotist ideas appear to be attractively modern, and act as useful correctives to a dry scholastic, over-intellectualized Thomism which characterized much Catholic teaching for centuries (and which is still with us: the gay Catholic theologian Mark Brian notes that Thomas Aquinas is not so much quoted as brandished by theological conservatives). The later history and development of Scotism, its interestingly subterranean persistence in theological trends in Western theology, is well beyond the purview of this essay. Yet we should be wary of making a Scotus in our own image and likeness: in the history of Catholicism, political differences led to Aquinas' scholasticism becoming the standard theology for some seven hundred years, yet it would be quite legitimate to see Aquinas as innovator and Scotus as a conservative spokesman for an older theological tradition.

Yet there are many other typically Scotist ideals which have survived the preferential treatment given to Aquinas and which might help us construct an alternative theological tradition. Prime among the Scotist tenets which found a central place is the dominance of the will - not in a Nietzschean sense, but in that the will was identified as the seat of love, seeing love of God to be identical with knowledge of God. Applying this primacy to God, Scotus' theology of the incarnation stresses that God would have become human, even if Adam and Eve had not sinned.

Theological arguments - within the Catholic tradition - frequently precede backwards, starting with a conclusion of a syllogism and deducting its premises. If the Incarnation was provoked by sin - as an earlier theology had suggested - then the magnificence of the solution would have been out of proportion to the size of the problem. Scotus teaches that the incarnation is therefore not the result of sin, but of love. " I say that the incarnation of Christ was not foreseen as occasioned by sin, but was immediately foreseen from all eternity by God, as a good more proximate to the end." (3)

The reason for the Incarnation - in which the universal, the disembodied, the generic, becomes located in the contingent, the historical and the specific haecceitas of a human - is the love which is the inner identity of God. The end is the sharing in eternity of God's existence, the entry to which is through the specific humanity of Christ.

The theology of matter deriving from this is a positive one, the material world seen not as place of sin, but of encounter with the divine. Scotus' typically Franciscan emphasis on creation (rather than redemption) finds an echo in the theology of Eastern Christianity which likewise sees the whole of material creation as having been transformed by the Incarnation.

As such they are correctives to those anti-cosmic attitudes found in certain forms of Christianity which simultaneously give primacy of interest to sin and see material, earthly realities as being irrelevant to

---

<sup>3</sup> William Short, *Poverty and Joy*, p.53

Christian identity, or even as inimical to it. At the same time as Johnes was created his earthly paradise at Hafod, the Methodist preachers who addressed the crowds at Llangeitho nearby saw the afterlife as a welcome escape from the oppression and difficulties of subsistence farming at a time of failed harvest and social unrest. The hymns of the Methodists who gathered at Llangeitho near Hafod rarely mention the world of nature: their interest in specificity is limited to the specificity of the human soul. Material creation does not find a place within their theology. Ann Griffiths (1776- 1804), hymn writer and mystic, converted to Methodism as a young woman. Her letters are full of her conviction of herself as a deeply sinful woman, and her hymns refer to the 'trifles' of her material surroundings in rural Wales as being irrelevant to her relationship with her Savior. The world to come takes precedence over this world of time, not only relativizing it, but denying any inherent validity to its materiality.

Nor is this doubt concerning the details of the world limited to Protestant pietism. Gerard Manley Hopkins (4) as a scrupulous young Jesuit, trained in the 19th Scholasticism deriving from Aquinas, felt himself to be morally compromised by his fascination with the specific details of nature. Whilst studying theology in the Jesuit college of St Beuno's, North Wales, he discovered the works of Scotus, finding there a theologically positive treatment of the specific and the individual. Not for nothing does Hopkins' poetry attend to the minutiae specifics of creation, and revel in detail. For Hopkins, the act of perceiving the infinite variety of nature becomes identified with the contemplation of God: the task is that of observing closely, attentive to what things are by themselves, rather than bringing to bear upon them preconceived ideas. Because the grain of sand is not only a symbol of Christ but also participates in Christ's being, the specific, the detailed, in its haecceitas, is the locus of the divine, the greater being contained within the smaller. And not for nothing did Hopkins refer to the picturesque beauties of the Vale of Clwyd, overlooked by St Beuno's College, as "this world of Wales".

#### IV

The relationship between the macro and micro worlds, the generic and the specific - is one which has concerned me for a long time. Hopkins' "this world of Wales" is precisely that - a whole world contained in a comparatively small geographic area. I write from within the discipline of theology, with the function of examining human realities from the standpoint of Christian doctrine: this means that all truth claims have to be justified within a Christian (and in my case, specifically Catholic) belief system and intellectual tradition, and to be found to be consonant with that system and tradition if they are to be considered to be valid. I am also as a convinced Welsh nationalist, yet my political convictions too have to be submitted to the claims of Scripture, the traditions and teachings of Christianity - my tools of discourse, my configuring systems - and to reason as well.

---

<sup>4</sup> for Hopkins, I depend largely on William Short.

Amongst the beliefs most vigorously defended by Scotus was that faith, rather than being opposed to reason, intellect, and learning, actually perfects them. And Catholic tradition consistently holds that grace (the action of God within human history) builds on nature. The world of human sciences and enterprise is therefore the basis of theological reflection, and theology is constantly enriched by them.

I also believe that the ideal relationship between the religious and the secular is a dynamic one. I make no hubristic claim for theology as the "Queen of the Sciences," the summit of learning, but I do believe that it has tools, concepts, language which are of use and interest in a wide range of humanistic disciplines. The argument I make for the value of the local, the specific, the national, in Sacred Place, Chosen People, is that such admirable ethical values as international solidarity and humanitarianism, will tend to remain at the level of abstract universalism, unless they are concretized in the specific: the local, the national, the distinct and the particular, rather than being in opposition to these large values, are in fact the guarantee, the practical working out of these. So, following vaguely in the line now possibly out-dated slogans such as "think globally, act locally," and 'small is beautiful,' I have made a case for the transcendent importance for humanity as a whole of such small, culturally-imperiled nations as my own.

In my book on Welsh spirituality, Sacred Place, Chosen People, I made a number of claims regarding national territory and its relationship towards identity, amongst which was that each nation has the value of a whole world in itself, irrespective of size. Following the arguments of the Welsh philosopher J R Jones, I argued that each individual human existence is a single separate existence of the world, each person having the value of the whole world, and therefore worthy of infinite respect. Jones argues that the microcosmos-macrocosmos relationship is also present in the nation:

The world is presented to the experience of man...there within his own experience, not in its global universality, but rather through the medium of the circles or microcosms which are instilled in him by natural forms of distinctiveness - the distinctiveness of place and origin and neighborhood, as the cradle or background to these national distinctiveness. The fundamental value of the nation as microcosm lies not in that it is a part of the world in the sense of being a part of the face of the earth, but rather in its being a whole summary or crystallization of the world, in one people.i

In the same way as every individual person is a unique, created vision of the whole world, so is every nation a world in itself:

A nation, tied together by its language, its land, its traditions and its history forms a world, an incomparable microcosm which, if you lose it through violence or through letting it die, cannot be restored by anything on earth. Only once does God create a nation. ii

Jones uses 'microcosm' and 'macrocosm' to describe the specific and the universal. The relationship between the two is sometimes described as synecdoche. Synecdoche, the part standing in for an representing the whole, proposes a stronger contiguity between the specific and the universal than, say, as



simile, but the fact remains that synecdoche derives from a linguistic use. As such, it remains at the level of notional reality, and leaves in abeyance the need for an ontological relationship between the part and the whole. Theology needs a stronger explanation of that connection, one which will explain the contiguity between the microcosm and the macrocosm. The key is to be found in the mystery of the Incarnation.

The author of Ephesians presents Christ as *theios aner* (Eph 4:13), the macrocosm to the microcosm of each individual person. A Christian anthropology sees human identity, the significance of the individual person, as existing insofar as it is in relation to and as a participation in Christ, the 'human being in all its completeness and fulness.' Accepting Scotus' univocity of being: each part or fragment contains the value of the whole, and each person or each specific reality, is therefore equally as worthy of consideration as is the universal and the whole.

The book of Genesis describes humanity as being created as *eikon* - image and likeness - of God. New Testament theology describes Christ as being 'icon' of the Father, an idea which is more than of being a facsimile: the Christian theological traditions teaches that the persons of the Trinity have one, divine, nature, which expressed in three persons, each of whom is equally God. The effect of this that the whole of the Trinity is implicated in each of the persons which constitute it, in a contiguity of being.

I believe that this Trinitarian and Incarnational model provides an alternative to two philosophical and political tendencies. The first philosophical tendency corrected by incarnational thinking proposes a fragmentary universe, similar to Ockham's, so stressing the uniqueness and alterity that no unity is possible. In this universe, there is so much specificity that all is individual, and the moral translation of this is embodied in extreme individualism where, in the words of Margaret Thatcher, 'there is no such thing as society.'

The second tendency is an unmitigated universalism, which gives so much ontological primacy to its own grand narratives that all other realities disappear: this is an intellectual narcissism which gives rise to and derives from other cultural narcissisms. Translated into a secular vein, and into the local conditions of Hafod and the picturesque, the Incarnation acts as a critique on those intellectual, philosophical tendencies which import a pre-existent model of perception and representation to already existent landscape, for it posits an approach to landscape which engages with its specifics - its history, its multileveled meanings, its social reality, its material reality, since the interpretive moment may only happen by engagement with the specific.

I have stated above a belief that not only does the world of secular intellectual endeavour has much to say to theology, but that theology has a wealth of concepts, discourses, theories and knowledges which can enrich academic discussion. I have talked in other places about place as icon, a concept with a precise meaning when used in a theological context. Basing their theories on the idea that Christ, as image of the Father, also contains his being, later Christian theologians developed a theory of icons which see these

sacred objects as participating in the nature of that which they portray, the whole being at some level, in the part. If landscape itself is considered under the species of icon, this is more than an arbitrary metaphor or a loose synonym for representation, symbol, or likeness. The Orthodox icon is considered to share in the reality of that which it portrays. Applying the concept of univocity of being, specific place, may be considered under the species of icon, to be a localization of something larger, a manifestation in itself of the whole of the world, in J.R.Jones' words, "being a whole summary or crystallization of the world, in one people."

Engagement with the specifics of the micro-cosmos, when it is considered as being a whole world in itself - rather than as an exotic or minor corner of a larger whole - set up a set of very different relationships than those which traditionally characterize. If to be is to be specific, located, then a relationship of equality pertains between center and periphery, metropolis and countryside. And of course, Wales and Britain. In a truly iconic model of land, the art and the practice of the Picturesque is impossible.

The other, related model which I have also imported into a secular academic discourse on land, is that of sacrament. Technically, a sacrament, a conjunction of ritual action and word, brings together both human action (temporal, contingent, conditioned) and divine action (eternal, unconditioned, free), material (specific, and located, perishable) and spirit (unlimited by space and time), in a way which makes the material the location and agent of the spiritual. In the case of the Eucharist, limited materiality paradoxically vehicles that inner reality which is the limitless, spiritual, nature of God. In Catholic understanding, the Eucharistic bread becomes, the Body of Christ. Here, the "real presence" of God is that of a different order of materiality: when it is broken, each fragment continues to contain the whole - clearly different to what happens when, for example, one breaks a glass or a plate. Eucharistic theology teaches that divine is present not in the bread, but as the bread, in the same way as God was present not in the historical man Jesus, but as him.

An ancient religious concept talks of 'consecration by contact', the holy being conceived of almost as being contagious, things which have come into contact with the holy being themselves rendered holy: the places where gods and angels show themselves on earth become holy places, the commonplace objects once owned by saints become holy relics. It is this concept which underlies the thinking concerning the meaning of materiality following the Incarnation and the Resurrection. Because it has been used by God to become incarnate, the nature and identity of materiality has been changed by the event of the Incarnation, taken up into the sphere of the holy. The Resurrection then becomes seen to be the first expression of the ultimate destiny of materiality.

In this worldview, the specificities of the world can be seen not as an obstacle but as a way towards encountering God (and therefore encountering an authentic humanity). Every single element of the world in that they are the extension in the here-and-now, of the incarnation in matter, becomes at one level, a sacrament, a presence in time and place of the timeless and the limitless.

The theology of Christ of the Letters to the Ephesians and Colossians presents him in not only in human, but also cosmic terms. Christ is considered as exemplar and model of creation: ultimately all creation is modeled on and reflects God, and the man Jesus Christ is the expression of God and of perfected humanity. Ultimately, every part of creation - land included - has as its model the incarnated God. In this way, creation itself can be seen to be not only as an image of God - but as a participation in God. The body of Christ (which is at once, and inseparably, the physical body of Jesus following the resurrection, the Body of Christ present in the sacrament of the Eucharist, and the corporate Body of Christ which is the church) is the cause and the model of God's creating of everything. As such, each unique element of creation is simultaneously partaking in the ongoing act of its own creation - each particular, specific and individual thing having its own particular, specific and individual part to play: thisness, being, and active creation are all inseparably connected with each other.

Deriving from the Prologue to the Gospel of John ("In the beginning was the Word..."), one of the core classical summations of the theology of the Incarnation is that God became human in order that humans might become divine: Christ is the meeting point of the divine and the human, and humanity is divinized, at least potentially, by this union, Christ acting metonymically, or microcosmically, for the whole of humanity. Expanding this pattern of 'amazing interchange' as the medieval theologians called it, we could argue a number of associated patterns: the spiritual becomes material, so that materiality may become spiritual, the eternal becomes temporal so that the temporal might become eternal. The Incarnation represents a unity - rather than an opposition - of the universal and the specific: God becomes a specific human, at a specific location and time in history. The 'consecration by contact' theory. The theology of the Incarnation makes of human history sacred time. Logically speaking, since the Incarnation only happened within specificity, this makes of specificity a theological category. Much liberal humanistic thought stresses alterity: the Incarnation provides us with a theology of cultural variation, one which is not only harmony with many of these humanistic values, but which is also based in Scripture and in tradition.

The implications of this - theological, psychological, political, inter alia - are so widespread as to be almost ineffable. A theology of specificity needs necessarily to be embodied in a praxis of specificity. It advocates a unity balanced with pluriformity, and an active opposition, on religious grounds, to all attempts to erase the specific. An incarnational theology stresses the value of encounter rather than domination, the local, the unique rather than the sweeping power of global and the generic. It also militates against those essentializing tendencies which objectify cultures, groups of people and concepts. An incarnational hermeneutic takes into account the the specifics of each act of interpretation, prime amongst which is the specificity of the interpreter. The figure who views and describes also part of she sees and describes.

At this point, we may have appeared to have traveled considerably from the wooded slopes of Ceredigion, and the late 1790's. Yet the Picturesque - which I hold stands as a symbol of a whole set of attitudes towards Wales - involves these very questions of specificity. The Picturesque, whilst ostensibly about

descriptive attention being paid to the minutest of detail is so often not about that here-and-now (which I regard as being the hallmark of incarnational theology). The act of picturesque gazing is one not of encounter with the specificities of place, but of inspection of landscape.

Likewise I have stated my belief that Celticism is a generic projection on to Wales, of a static, essentialist view - one which has had mostly negative impact upon Wales over the last 200 years. The generic tends towards the broad strokes - a cruder encounter which does not deal with the untidy, the difficult, the jarring and the incongruous. Specificity, on the other hand, involves historicity, detailed examination of context, and a close attention to texture and minutiae.

And what I am now beginning to wonder is whether landscape itself is at heart an essentialist concept, one which only with difficulty reconciles itself with the value of the specific which derives from the Incarnation.

#### IV

One of the reasons for my reserves and doubts over the concept of landscape is that it so often - at least in the Welsh experience - veers towards a reductionism. The representation of land in painting, as "landscape" even though it may well contain references to a historical past, and to the social nature of a place, tends towards evacuating history, silencing and disenfranchising certain experiences and certain groups of people. At the same time, the art of landscape representation innocently celebrates the "natural" world, from a point of view of apparent distance, and does not take into consideration the effect of viewing or representation itself.

A series of abstract categories in binary opposition is constellated around the issue of landscape and specificity: surface vs. depth; distance vs. engagement; aesthetic vs. ethical; ahistoric vs. historic; outsider vs. insider; ecological vs. consumerist. In all of these binaries, 'landscape,' appears to favor the first of the terms. Yet each landscape situation is never as simple as the abstract categories. Landscape, after all, is a complex term covering a myriad of activities, ideas, and manifestations.

One of the main impressions I have gained from the writings of travelers to Hafod is that the thrill of the Picturesque journey is that of the desire for a partial engagement with place, a selection of certain elements to the exclusion of others - something I have referred to as a heresy of aesthetics, a reductionism. Other such reductionisms concerning land might include positivist, scientific ones regarding land as a purely physical reality, ignoring the perceiver's involvement in the act of surveying, mapping, and quantifying, and commercial ones (land as commodity to be bought and sold without taking into concern its values).

I am perhaps most ill at ease with the epistemological narcissism of the Picturesque, namely its thinking that its perception of land is the true, essential one, and its inability or unwillingness to penetrate much

beyond the surface: the limited dimensionality is what I suspect defines landscape as such. Although I am equally wary of the Romanticism which underlies such terms as 'spirit of place,' I am happier by far with the term 'place': place tends to evoke a whole series of complex interpenetrative realities: not only the aesthetic and the historical, the natural, the material, but also the social, the historic, the political, and the cultural. The unique encounter and union of these different vectors of meaning and association constitute the specificity of a place.

The bringing together of potentially irreconcilable orders of being in a unity is what occurs in the Incarnation - the qualities analogous to the divine (disembodied, atemporal, universal, self-sustaining, essential, whole, universal and non-contingent) together with the qualities of the human (embodied and located, temporal, specific, contingent and fragile). As I have indicated, the theology of specificity deriving from the Incarnation implicates Christians in a certain set of attitudes towards land. But for a wider, secular use, the dogma of the Incarnation provide a most useful tool for describing the apparently impossible encounter between different orders of reality that occur in the concept of place

I have mentioned that the main intellectual concern of Western, Latin Christology was to understand how the human Jesus could also be the divine Son of God. Greek-speaking Christians of the Eastern Mediterranean, however, came from a cultural and philosophical background which gave ontological primacy to the disembodied, with the result that the tendency of Greek theology was to ask how the pre-existent Logos could also be a 1st century Jew. Both emphases gave to different heresies which overstressed over certain aspects of the divine-human equation to the exclusion of others. And since theoretical reductionisms affect attitudes to the material and social world, these heresies in their turn had practical ramifications. Following the appearance over several centuries of several heresies - with the inevitable political tensions born out of these -, the bishops and theologians gathered at Chalcedon in 451 made a definitive, dogmatic definition:

We teach with one voice that the Son [of God] and our Lord Jesus Christ is to be acknowledged as one and the same [Person], perfect in Godhead and perfect in manhood, very God and very man, of a rational soul and [human] body consisting, consubstantial with the Father in his divinity, and consubstantial with us in his humanity; made in all things like us, sin only excepted; begotten of his Father before time, in his divinity; but in these last days for us and for our salvation born [into the world] of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God in his humanity. This one and the same Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son [of God] is to be acknowledged to be in two natures, unconfusedly, immutably, indivisibly inseparably [united], without the distinction of natures being taken away by such union, but rather the specific property of each nature being preserved and being united in one Person and substance, not separated or divided into two persons, but as one and the same Son and only-begotten, God the Word, our Lord Jesus Christ, as the ancient prophets of old time spoke about and as the Lord Jesus Christ has us, and as the Creed of the Fathers has been handed down to us."

These four adverbs - *inconfuse*, *immutabiliter*, *indivise*, *inseparabiliter* (unconfusedly, immutably, indivisibly, inseparably) - provide us with a more detailed description of a union of potentially incommunicable, irreconcilable or even inimical, discrete realities, in which X and Y meet and are united. Taken together, they are a guard against four potential reductionisms.

*Inconfuse* argues against the heresy of union which considered Christ to be a mixture of the human and the divine element, a third reality which was neither fully divine nor fully human. Extrapolating this into a secular world, this heresy holds that X and Y when brought together, melt into one essence, and lose their inherent integrity.

Contemporary analogues of this might include those ideologies which stress an apparently non-specific, internationalist values - the melting-pot notion of culture. Within this world, there is no room for specificity and plural alterity, in that these are regarded as being inferior, a more primitive stage which precedes the development of a larger, more desirable universality. To my ears, such ideas sound uncomfortably close to those voices which argue that nationalism is by its very essence dangerous and divisive. These of course, are the voices of those - be they those of the socialist internationale or multinational corporations - whose apparent neutrality is unmasked by the call for specificity. Politically, the United Kingdom in which the national distinctivities of England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland have been required to be merged into a greater commonwealth of Britishness, has exemplified this sort of heretical union.

*Immutabiliter* is a stricture against the heresy which taught that Christ was born as a normal human being, but later became divinized to the point that his humanity disappeared. Essential this heresy translates into secular terms as one involving power. Many forms of imperialism and colonialism appear cloaked as benign protectionism, but in fact work to assume and erase cultural distinctivity: the Act of Union of England and Wales of 1536 actually sought to include Wales as part of England, and legislated to abolish its statutory and cultural distinctiveness, prime among them the Welsh language. Similarly, status quo discourses - those which confuse convention with authenticity - are intellectual and power systems whose hegemony may well be totally invisible to those who practice it.

In the world of this heresy, larger, more powerful discourse embrace and digest minority voices. Unshakeable and absolute cultural confidence shines out in the accounts of the visitors to Hafod: and yet the definition of the Picturesque as a holding operation by the squirearchy at a time when the foundations of their world were being shaken reveals that their self-appointed centrality was an act of will, less confident than might first appear. The obverse side of this practical heresy is the tragic psychology of imperialism, the collusion with aggression which condemns the marginalized to consider themselves, in an essential way, as peripheral to the mainstream. Amongst the sad side-effects of Britishness, as a stereotypical internal colonialism, has been widespread fatalism as to the impossibility of any other form of political existence other than that of remaining within the Union.

The adverb *indivise* corrected against a number of heresies which attributed to Christ a human body but a divine mind, or a human mind and a divine soul - in which case the union of the divine and the human would be partial or piebald: only certain aspects and elements of both X and Y, rather than the totalities of their beings are included in such union. Essentially, this heresy involves issues of partiality and insufficiency. When the hermeneutical moment falls into easy categorizations, prejudging the outcome of interpretation according to pre-existent schemata, rushing to simplifications which do not do justice to complexity, this heresy is at work.

It is this deviation, above all, that I believe to be present in so many representations of Wales, in which the part does not contain the whole, and separating out elements of national identity into partial representations. Druidism of the Welsh and English versions, culturally conservative notions of essential Welshness, the representation in landscape-art representations of Wales as being empty and beautiful are all secular analogues of this heresy.

As I write, I have come across a website entitled "Wild West Wales" - a linear descendent of George Borrow's "Wild Wales," in which 'wildness', which might just about be an epithet of parts of the landscape, is calqued upon the whole of the complex reality of an area, the part being taken for the whole. I doubt whether many of the Welsh-speaking inhabitants of Dyffryn Aeron would consider that they live in anywhere 'wild.' Notably, the website is in English only, English personal names predominate; the local activities advertised are ones most likely to be participated in by recent settlers alone.

The heresy of the Picturesque continues to thrive in such partialism. The gaze of the Picturesque, and indeed of contemporary hafodism, are not adequately categorized as wrong, but as insufficient. The heresy which *indivise* seeks to combat is a failure of rigor or of courage. It is this insufficiency which causes my unease around the notion of "landscape", for in the case of my own country, I experience myself not as a figure in a landscape, but as a person in a country - in relationship with it at all levels of my being, not merely the aesthetic.

The last of the Chalcedonian adjectives, *inseparabiliter*, addresses the heresies which saw the union of the divine and natural in Jesus Christ as one which was dissolved by time - either at the time of the Crucifixion (which would obviate the problem of understanding how God might undergo the assault of physical suffering and death), or at the Ascension (which would solve the problem of how the physical body of the resurrected Christ could ascend into a non-material heaven). Fundamentally, this heresy is about permanency of relationship, and the parameters placed around such mutually irreconcilable realities which are typified by 'divine' and 'human'.

The central problem of reconciling the problem of uniting universality and specificity is tackled by Chalcedon. Its dogmatic definition seeks to hold in balance the two trajectories, which respectively descend from the universal, the noncontingent to arrive at the specific and particular, or which rise from

consideration of the particular to arrive at the universal. The Incarnation is understood as place of encounter between the world of the human, the saeculum, and the sphere of the divine, the sacrum. The clause "the same Jesus Christ, must be known to be in two natures and that without the distinction of natures being taken away by such union, but rather the specific property of each nature being preserved and being united in.. substance, not separated or divided into two persons, but one and the same" enables one to access the divine through the medium of the human, the universal through the specific.

The Incarnation may be considered as an encounter between two realities. In Christian terms, it is also, internally, a paradigm for all interpersonal encounter. The adverbs can be exported to describe ideal balanced and healthy interpenetrative encounter - between persons and between groups, between interpreter and interpreted, subject and object. In a relationship which functions inconfuse the partners do not lose their separate identities; rather their sense of identity is strengthened by their union, and vice versa. In unions which are immutabilis one element or partner does not dominate the other to the extent that the distinct sense of self of the dominated partner is extinguished. Indivise describes a relationality in which every single aspect of the identities of both partners or elements are included in their union. Inseparabiliter witnesses to the fact that unconditional commitment is an essential part of mature relationality.

If the Picturesque is a failure of engagement with place, then Chalcedon offers a more complete model of encounter. It also corrects positivist attitudes which deny the impact of the interpreter upon the material interpreted - for the viewer or painter of the landscape is not separate from but part of it, implicated in all her own specificity in a dynamic relationship with it. The landscape is part of the viewer's own reality, impacting on her equally as much as she impacts on it. Instead of distanced quasi-objectivity, or individualist subjectivism, we have intersubjectivity.

## V

In the history of Western theology, Scotus is probably remembered best as a defender of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, the theological dogma which states that

The most blessed Virgin Mary, in the first instant of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege granted by Almighty God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the human race, was preserved free from all stain of original sin (5).

Scotus' teaching on the relationship between Mary and Jesus marked a great medieval turning point: previous writers had struggled with the question of the uniqueness of Mary's role as Mother of God, and the universality of Christ's redemption. Scotus' teaching is argued with his characteristic thoroughness

---

<sup>5</sup> Dogmatic definition of the Papal Bull, *Ineffabilis Deus*, December 8, 1854. A common misunderstanding of the Immaculate Conception confuses it with the Virgin Birth, whereas it is a definition of the conception of Mary.



and subtlety, taking as its starting point Christ, upon whom all creation and each individual person is modeled and whom they reflect. God's intention from the beginning, even before the Fall, was to become incarnate; for this, the Trinitarian God chose from the beginning the woman who would contribute her own humanity to the Incarnation. (6) Here is not the place to enter into a discussion of the notion of original sin, apart from to clarify that Mary represents a humanity which is uniquely unalienated from God, and whose being, body and soul, is entirely Christ-oriented. A type of Byzantine icon, known as the Virgin of the Sign, shows Mary with Christ contained within her: both are portrayed in the same gesture of prayer, Mary's of intercession, the Christ-child's of blessing. An associated liturgical text refers to Mary as "she who contains within her he whom the whole universe cannot contain." The part contains the whole, the temporal contains the universal.

The structure of Western theology is organic, and geodesic. Logically, each element of doctrine reflects the whole doctrine, and is related to it. Changes in understanding or emphasis in any specific part of the theology will inevitably affect the whole, in a concatenation of reaction. The teaching of the Immaculate Conception, ostensibly specifically concerned with the Virgin Mary, is in fact a Christological one, a logical support to and result of the claims of Christ's own humanity. Mary therefore acts as a guarantor of the Incarnation, in that as a fully human being, she gives birth to a fully human Christ.

The dogmatic definition of the Immaculate Conception contains two elements which make of Mary a significant source not only of theological reflection but also of philosophical speculation and cultural manifestation, for it combines singularity and universality - Mary's unique role in the economy of salvation, but the universal import of Christ's incarnation. And if, as I have suggested, specificity is an essential part of the Incarnation (making specificity not only a theological category but also an ethical imperative), and if Mary is guarantor of Christ's humanity, then it is not pushing things too far to suggest that Mary is also a guarantor and an embodiment of the value of the particular. Since the operative terrain of the Incarnation and the values deriving from it are here and now, this argues for the value of attention to immediacies, to what is at hand, what is material and temporal.

This essay cannot detail the development of thought around the debated question of Mary's Immaculate Conception. What is significant within that history is the theological instinct of the lay people and the poetics of liturgical feast and text preceded by several centuries the theological definitions. Marian devotion above all other elements of church life has made greatest use of art and poetry, liturgical and extra-liturgical, as a source, rather than a reflection, of theological reflection: as such, the role of human experience (so mistrusted by Father Pischler) is stronger in Marian doctrine than in many other fields of theological speculation. This is theology done from the earth upwards. The geographical and cultural

---

<sup>6</sup> One of the hallmarks of Calvinism, which has so influenced Wales, is its departure from the ancient tradition of the Church in the matter of Christ's humanity: early Calvinism held that Christ's humanity, his 'flesh and blood' was not derived from the Virgin Mary but brought directly to Mary's womb from heaven.

ground of Marian devotion is the Eastern Mediterranean, and it is not insignificant that she was declared to be Theotokos, the Bearer of God, at Ephesus - seat of the cult to Diana. A large literature exists on the relationship between Near Eastern goddesses and the Virgin Mary. What I wish to state here is that Mary is, as Marina Warner points out in *Alone of all her sex*, "the focus of a vigorous grassroots piety that knows nothing of Duns Scotus' casuistry (sic) or Pius XII's ratiocinations."

An overview of popular Catholic piety over the centuries will probably suggest that it is essentially Mariocentric, rather than Christocentric or Theocentric: it is to the Virgin (and to the saints) that people have tended to turn for their daily concerns. If my theological speculation that specificity is part of Mary's role in the Incarnation is only that, a speculation, what cannot be denied is that cultural specificity and locatedness is very much part of people's lived experience of Mary. As Jaroslav Pelikan notes (p.67), 'one of the most profound and most persistent roles of the Virgin Mary in history has been her function as a bridge builder to other traditions, other cultures and other religions.'

The contiguity between Mary and the chthonic goddesses, the Mater Dea, of the East and elsewhere is fairly obvious, and no cause for theological scandal. The instinctive theological linkage of Mary and the earth has given us feminist and ecological readings of Mary, and the Magnificat has been probably the most quoted Biblical text in the writings of liberation theologians. But as this discussion on specificity begins in my own specific homeland, Wales, there is one, sui generis, 20th century Welsh poet who marvelously articulates the specificity attaining to Mary. David Jones' "To the Tutelar of the Place" is at once a prayer to the Earth Mother (initially conceived by Jones "as a monologue spoken by a Gaulish soldier on the wall of Hierosolyma telling his mate of the homeland in Celtica" (7)). The Tutelar is described as

---

<sup>7</sup> Selected works of David Jones, ed. John Matthias UWP 1992, p. 28. The reference to Jerusalem is interesting on a number of counts. First, the archaic form of the name suggests a particular time and cultural reference. Jerusalem is probably the most eminent example of palimpsestic place - in which each particular manifestation of the city is both unique, yet only fully understood in connection with preceding and successive forms of the city and name. This suggests that such places are best understood as being dynamic, rather than essential. An essay by Ronald Barthes on Alain Robbe-Grillet discusses the novelist's use of objects in his works, noting that "the classical concept of time has no other countenance than that of the Destroyer of perfection.. the classical object is nothing but the archetype of its own ruin. The mutability Robbe-Grillet affords his objects is of an altogether different kind - a mutability of which the process is invisible." Something similar might be said to be at work in the ever-changing cityscape of Jerusalem and other historically-inhabited places.

Jerusalem is also polysemic in both Judaic and Christian literature, in that the city is always the antetype of a heavenly, eschatological Jerusalem. St Gregory of Nyssa claims that following the Incarnation, 'all places are Jerusalem,' i.e. all space is potentially holy place. Orthodox theology in particular stress the role of liturgy in this: the prayers and sacraments of the church makes present in human time what is both a geographical reality (the Holy Land) and a spiritual one (the Heavenly Jerusalem?).

It is also noteworthy that Jones conceives of the poem as being spoken by Brythonic soldiers in exile: Yi Fu Tuan notes that an awareness of the psychological important of originary place is most often felt in exile.

She that loves time, place, demarcation, hearth, kin, enclosure, sits, differentiated cult, though she is but one mother of us all: one earth brings us all forth, one womb receives us all, yet to each she is other, named of some other...

A litany of titles for this figure concentrates on her singularity and here connection with and protection of the specific:

queen of the differentiated sites, administratrix of the demarcations...  
 mother of particular perfections  
     queen of otherness  
     mistress of asymmetry  
 patroness of things counter, parti, pied, several  
 protectress of things known and handled  
 help of things familiar and small  
     wardress of the secret crevices  
     of things wrapped and hidden  
 mediatrix of all the deposits  
     margravine of the troia  
 empress of the labyrinth  
 ...  
     arc of differences  
     tower of individuation  
     queen of the minivers  
 laughing in the mantle of variety

The Anglican theologian A. M. Allchin sees in this poem a paean to the 'eternal dimension present within each moment,' quoting Jeremy Hooker's observations that David Jones 'celebrates the uniqueness of individual difference born of the marriage between people and place... To each place its own genius, deriving from the female creative principle, which (Jones) finds embodied in its highest form in the Mother of God. Christ orders .. personality, unique, individual things, which uniformity - military, technological, or impersonal - tries to destroy.'

My reactions to such evaluations are two-fold: one the one hand a methodological and hermeneutic suspicion against the sort of simple binary opposition which it posits, along with a detection of Romanticism evident in the idea of 'genius of place' - a totalizing idea which fits precisely and paradoxically into the sort of universal schemes which I believe Jones is reacting against. But on the other hand, there is something deeply attractive about this evocation of the universal present and accessible in the local and the particular.

A companion piece to this poem - one which shows that the alternative to a Romanticized localism is in

fact probably a worse prospect - is its dialectical opposite, "The Tribune's Visitation," in which the visit of the imperial Roman military officer to some Celtic troops is calqued upon Jones' own experience as a soldier in the First World War. Such calquing is of itself a recognition of the interpenetrative contingency of different temporalities. The Tribune articulates his task of creating uniformity out of diversity, by the levelling of the specific and the imposition of a pre-existent interpretive grid:

It's the world-bounds  
 We're detailed to beat  
     To discipline the world-floor  
 To a common level  
     Till everything presuming difference  
 And all the sweet remembered demarcations  
     Wither  
 To the touch of us  
     And know the fact of empire....  
 ...           Only the neurotic  
 look to their beginnings.

The assimilation and obliteration of cultural difference, is in the mind of Jones' Tribune, the realistic hardening of heart necessary to the imposition of order

Now we.. must think no more of our dear sites... lest, thinking of our own, our bowels turn when we are commanded to storm the palissades of others and the world-plan be undone by plebeian piety.

The cultural obsequies must be already sung before empire can masquerade a kind of life.

The imposition of totalizing reality both demands and creates a world where there is no room for specific locality: the absence of attachment to homeland is the necessary precondition of being an agent of those political processes in which land is dehumanized and its inhabitants treated as objects. The corollary to this is the vision expressed in "To The Tutelary of the Place," where the local is held to be the geographical location which anchors and guarantees the persistence of human and humanitarian values.

It is precisely the way in which particular locales are perceived, defined and portrayed which prevents Hafod and its associated cultural milieu of the Picturesque from being local. My initial instinct is to say, crudely, that Hafod and contemporary hafodism, is in Wales but not of Wales; in the same vein, I would like to claim that they represent, albeit in a more subtle manner, with a more suave velleity, the world of the Tribune, whose values either demand, or result in, the levelling of 'particular perfections.' But to make this statement would be to fall into precisely the same quality of unreflective essentialism which is reflected in the Picturesque - the attribution of an unchanging set of values to a landscape or a culture.

More accurate, I think, would be to say that Hafod and its world of imposition of a totalizing, perceptive grid upon a particular place, is not alien to Wales, but part of it. If we accept the value of the specific, then this must be an inclusive specificity which includes realities which are uncomfortable for all essentialist, a-historical understandings, be those insider or outsider perspectives. If there is a heretical Wales depicted in Picturesque art, then there is also a similarly heretical Wales, of timeless essence, to be found in Welsh literature. To be inclusive of all specificities is a demanding principle, requiring the unpalatable acceptance that what might appear to be comforting securities are historical, conditioned categories, subject to slow or rapid change. To deal with the specific means involving oneself in the Incarnational arena of mutability and transience. In another essay I wrote that "the comforting experience of contemplation and portrayal of the sublime sought to silence aesthetic disjunctures, smoothing away ambiguities and disharmonies. But it is precisely by honoring those jarring, incongruous, fractured and ugly aspects of places that we discover and define their specificity and locatedness."

## VI

The element of place - in its specific details, and in the universalist schemata which are involved in its perception - is central to the question of Malkin's interest in Hafod. Malkin is far from being the most uninformed and unperceptive diarist and traveler to late 18th and early 19th century Wales. Indeed, his books show an uncharacteristic awareness of Welsh history and psychology. He notes the poverty of contemporary Wales, along with the long-lived awareness of the Welsh of being a conquered, but once-sovereign people. Yet by dint of the very fact that he is a visitor, a member of a different and economically superior class means that inevitably, his interpretive schemes claim to be universal ones. The local is subsumed into the cultural values of the metropolis, no longer having an autonomous value but now at the service of an urban ruling class.

Implicit in the nostalgic gaze of the Picturesque are two, apparently conflicting but in fact complementary attitudes: a Rousseau-esque delight in the primitive, along with the Enlightenment belief in the desirability and the unstoppable train of progress. In Wales, the visitors found a charming reminder of who they once were, in a place whose essence is pastness itself. In Hafod, Johnes sought to create a *rus in urbe*, selecting those elements of both which were most attractive - the urban sophistication of books, art collecting, polite society, gardening and landscaping, with dramatic landscapes, the 'discovery' of the natural - a combination of elements of the specific (the particular location - or at least the surface reality of that location, its natural beauty, its distance from the metropolis, its potential as a laboratory for experiments in aesthetics and agriculture), with the universalizing haute-bourgeois culture of the late 18th century.

Now quite another engagement with place, involving both specificity and universality, constellates around the Virgin Mary. Catholic dogma and Orthodox tradition both hold that at the end of her life on

earth, the Virgin Mary was assumed, body and soul, into heaven – which means that female, purely human physicality, with all its notes of temporality, mutability, vulnerability and locatedness, is taken up into the world of the spiritual. (8) This is rather a different reality from that of the Ascension of Christ, since the post-Resurrection narratives make clear that the matter of the Resurrected Christ is of a different order to that of the pre-Crucifixion Christ, now no longer subject to ordinary laws of physics.

The Assumption of Mary takes up the world of matter and physicality, the realm of the specific, into the transcendent world signified by 'heaven; the new home of the physical, the specific, the embodied, is now that world of heaven – an idea which would have been nonsensical to Plato. And it is no surprise that Mary, rather than any other saint, or Jesus himself, who is most closely connected with specific geographies, such as wells, mountains, places of pilgrimages – and with specific groups of people, being the patroness of innumerable groups, and indeed of nations.

From an early point in the development of devotion to Mary, she was revered as 'Queen,' an ambiguous title. The Byzantine solidarity between Church and State laid down under Constantine made for a permeability of religious and political powers. The delicate balance which this demands, along with frequent overweightings one way or another, has continued to be a major feature of Christianity not only in its Byzantine mode, but in just about all of its manifestations. In this nexus of the secular and the sacred, the figure of the Virgin Mary has played an important role.

Sacred Place, Chosen People explored one possible way of associating religious and national identities, namely by a close identification between the ancient Israelites and a whole series of nations – the Welsh among them. Not only the Welsh, but a whole range of nationalities – including Armenians, the Boers, a series of Protestant movements, French Quebecans, have considered themselves to be a holy, and at some level, an elect nation, in which secular and sacred concerns and identities are co-extensive. *Grosso modo*, national election, or identification with Biblical Israel tends to be a Protestant strategy.

More popular amongst Catholic and Orthodox peoples is an association of their specific cultural identity with the world of the transcendent by means of the Virgin Mary, adopted as patroness or Queen. The Ottonians, the Norman Kings of Sicily, the inhabitants of Byzantium, innumerable principalities and dukedoms, the kingdom of pre-revolution and restoration France, English Catholic recusants, have all claimed a special relationship with Mary. In the feudal context of thirteenth and fourteenth century France, Mary gains the title of "Our Lady." The possessive adjective is not necessarily exclusive – and yet it has the power to privatize Mary's divine role, a privativity which easily lends itself to political ends.

---

<sup>8</sup> This is rather a different reality from that of the Ascension of Christ, since the post-Resurrection narratives strongly suggest that the physical of the Resurrected Christ is of a different order to that of the pre-Crucifixion Christ, now no longer subject to ordinary laws of physics.

And precisely because Mary is associated, theologically and in the devotional instincts, with the specific and the located, she is the most politicized of saints.

Mary's patronage has been adopted and praised more frequently in a poetical theology rather than in the dry tomes and lecturehalls of academic, scholastic theology. Amongst the places where she has been frequently evoked have been battlefields: the Crusades were fought generally against heathens. But at the Battle of the Whitemountain, in 1620 the Catholic army of the Holy Roman Emperor had "Saint Mary!" as their battle cry, defeated the Calvinist army. In the development of the "Holy Russia," evoked by Dostoyevsky, the icons the Virgin Mary take on local names - the Virgin of Vladimir, the Virgin of Kiev, etc etc - as political protectress of the locale. At a similar period, Mary begins to be evoked as "Queen of Poland," as well as "Queen of Heaven." During the two hundred years that the Polish people had no official existence, the image of Our Lady of Czestochowa became a potent focus not only for their prayer, but for their sense of nationality and of the integrity of national territory which appeared on no contemporary map.

A similar relationship may be posited between Mary and Ireland, in which nationalist priests of the 19th century began a self-conscious devotion to "Mary of the Gaels." But perhaps the most evident case of Catholic religio-cultural specificity is Our Lady of Guadalupe, the central image of Mexican - and indeed Latin-American - identity. The image of Mary which miraculously appeared on the cloak of the peasant indígeno Juan Diego in 1531 brings together elements of Christian marian and Aztec iconographies, in a perfect - and divinely-referred - emblem of what New Spain was called to be, a meeting point of Old and New Worlds. Guadalupe was originally "Mother of all the Indians" but rapidly became an emblem of Mexican national identity. Or rather, Guadalupe created Mexican national awareness. During the Mexican revolution the Royalists had fought under the protection of a Spanish Virgin Mary - La Virgen de los Remedios, whose origins were in Alcántara: the independistas chose Guadalupe as their patroness. Two versions of identity, two notions of place and nationality were invoked, both under the name of Mary: one in the name of empire, the other in the name of the local.

The curious permeation of the local with the divine pervades the cult of Mary, particularly in popular religiosity. To refer to Mary as "Our Lady of X..." creates a number of different realities: as I have suggested above, there is the privatizing notion, by which a special or exclusive relationship between a particular locale or group and the Mother of God is either claimed or implied. To claim Mary as patroness, lady or queen of X... is also to bring into close association the domain of the transcendent and the specific group or locale, somewhat numinizing it, to the extent that the locale or group begins to take on the air of sacredness. In the traditional "Litany of Loreto," Mary is invoked as queen of saints, martyrs, angels, virgins, etc, all of whom are generic groups, non-specific in class or nationality, belonging largely to the world of heaven. In popular religiosity, however she is invoked as protectress of specific locations and their inhabitants, realities which are much more contested and ambiguous. To refer to her as Queen of Poland might be regarded as religio-political enthusiasm. Were we to refer to Mary also as, say, Queen of Axe-Murderers or of Paedophiles - and the theology of the Catholic Church

refers to Mary as Mother of the Church - then the resultant shock demasks the complexities and pretensions of such national and local claims of patronage.

The relationship between the theologians' Blessed Virgin Mary, and the myriad Our Ladies of popular piety is not always clear, at least in the minds of those who pray to the local Virgin, and the relationship between the various local Virgins may be contested. Nor is the relationship between the Virgin Mary and the representations of her in icon and statuary always clear: in Mediterranean Catholicism, for example, certain statues are felt to be more appropriate or powerful than others as a recourse for certain problems; people are likely to have a devotion to one particular image or manifestation of Mary; and in the Holy Week processions of Seville, huge historic and political rivalries exist between the various brotherhoods which are responsible for particular images of the Virgin - images which tend to take on a distinct identity, and which lend that identity to different areas and social groups of the city.

The phenomenon of the interplay between the specific and the universal as it plays itself out in the experience of Marian piety, is susceptible to detailed analysis by historians, psychologists, sociologists and a host of other specialist academics. What I wish to stress is the fact that the ambiguity in popular Catholic and other religiosity concerning Mary and her relationship towards specific places or groups of people is that it expresses something of the nature of incarnationality: namely that the universal (the Virgin Mary, now in heaven, and who therefore transcends human categories of time and place) can only ever be experienced only locatedly - in the specific.

The concept of 'consecration by contact' applies particularly to the case of Guadalupe and other Marian apparitions. In the case of the Americas, the appearance of the Virgin Mary consecrates the materiality of the land, rendering it holy. The chthonic nature of the archtypal ancestry of Marian devotion is especially evident in such places as Lourdes and Fatima, where the Virgin Mary has appeared, the universal being perceived locally, at a specific time and place, to specific individuals - and, it should be argued, within a specific cultural and political context. The contested appearances of the Virgin Mary to a group of young visionaries in Medjugorje, in former Yugoslavia, took place in a climate of historical bad relations between the Franciscan clergy and the local bishops. Not insignificantly, the preferred title of Mary as "Queen of Peace" at Medjugorje had much to do with the Croatian (and Catholic) nationality of the visionaries, in a largely Serb and Orthodox area.

The appearance at the hospital dump of 'a lady' who addressed Bernadette Soubirous in peasant Occitan rather than educated French or clerical Latin, and who revealed that her name was 'Era Immaculada Concepcioun,' cannot be divorced from the formal declaration by Pius IX in 1854 of the Immaculate Conception as a dogma the theological foundations of which had been laid substantially by Scotus. Nor can this declaration be separated from the declaration of Papal Infallibility and the whole history of relations between church and state in France. Today, the official doctrine of Lourdes talks of penitence for sin, of spiritual healing, of care for the marginalized and sick of the world; its official liturgies are Biblically-inspired, theologically measured. Yet this experience of place at Lourdes coincides on the map



with another, rather more visceral one: the desire for miracle, the therapeutic action of the transcendent, invisible and immaterial God upon the fragile materiality of human bodies, the universal upon the specific.

It is perhaps this crude materiality that accounts for the ability of Lourdes and other Marian shrine to repel as well as to attract. The very corporality which the Virgin Mary enshrines (as container of the uncontainable, as female body now in heaven) is potentially offensive to a neat, cerebral faith. The specificity of time and place I believe to be problematic to the deep logic of Protestantism, which posits a homogeneity of time and of place following the Incarnation, there being little place in its psychology for specifically intense distillations of the sacred such as shrine or feast.

## VII

Some time ago, from motives which were interpenetratively religious and political, I began to refer to the Virgin Mary as "Our Lady of Wales." The question of specificity I regarded - and continue to regard - as being essential to Catholicism, and essential for Wales. In devotional vein, and highly aware of the register of my language, I wrote

She has as many names as there are places in the world, for each name belongs to a particular place and country, to show that there she is venerated and welcomed into homes and families. Only in the local and the particular, in the familiar and the small can Mary be recognized and loved. Out of his passion, her Son gave us his Mother to be a Mother to us all. If we are fully and wholly to be beloved disciples of Jesus, then we the Welsh must give back to Mary the place she once had in our country and our nation, and venerate her in our own language, making her welcome in our homes and loving her in our neighbourhoods and in our country, in the places where our roots are and in the land given to us, for she is the Mother of Our Saviour, and the Mother of our motherland. And the Catholics who live in Wales, whatever our place of origin, must learn to find her walking the roads of this country, speaking the language of the land, her name carved into its landscape. One of the earliest poems surviving in Welsh tells that "it is not too much to worship the Son of Mary." And it is not too much to praise the true Princess of Wales, mediatrix of all the rich deposits of faith.

My piece reads, now at a distance of several years and several thousand miles, like a piece of 1950's apologetic triumphalism. I was surprised not by the fact that several people - Catholic English immigrants to Wales, touched more than a little by hafodism - reacted to this piece, by the vehemence of their reaction. What it had revealed was the threat which cultural specificity - the located - makes towards a certain form of religiosity which separates out the secular and the sacred. Inseparabiliter - the interpenetration of the universal with the local - proves a difficult heresy to avoid.

My own reaction towards the imperialist viewpoint latent in Hafod is as religious as it is political. For my belief in the Incarnation means that I cannot accept as being sufficient a world view which reduces to

a single quantity - be it beautiful, picturesque, quaint - a complex of associations, placing them outside place, and outside time. "The isolated essence is to recur across time, like an Aristotelian species, never subject to evolution." (Mark Jordan, *The Invention of Sodomy*, p. 57). My reading of the Incarnation is that essence of something can only ever be encountered in its haecceitas, and that to respect such thisness is an act of participation in creation.

The rock at Hafod is a microcosm of a tyranny of generalization, a hubristic attempt to play God, by attempting to create a heaven on earth. I shall not be sorry to see the end of Hafod.

---

<sup>i</sup> Cristnogaeth a Chenedlaetholdeb, 7.

<sup>ii</sup> Ac Onide ,85.