

Lewis Jones's Fiction

In the last chapter, I suggested that, in *The Land of the Leal* especially, James Barke attempted to write a novel in which the history of the Scottish working class and the anti-fascist struggle were inextricably connected. This chapter considers Lewis Jones's novels *Cwmardy* (1937) and its sequel *We Live* (1939), which bear a number of important similarities to *The Land of Leal*. Like Barke, Jones charts the development of political consciousness within a particular class and national fraction: in his case, the workers of the fictional Rhondda mining community of Cwmardy. Like Barke, too, Jones adopts a generational structure to trace this development: the novels follow the development of the young miner Len Roberts from childhood to labouring adulthood and prolonged unemployment; and, finally like Barke's Andy Ramsay, to death on the battlefield in Spain. In Jones's and Barke's work, there is a similar deep investment in the popular life of a provincial, proletarian community both as the symbol of what was at stake in the struggle against fascism and as a reserve of strength and resistance. An important distinction between the texts, however, is that in Jones's work the historical experience of migration is largely – though not completely – marginalised in favour of a portrayal of the community as a relatively stable social entity continually attempting to resist or absorb pressures originating from without. The central family in Barke's *The Land of the Leal* experience alienation as an unresolvable sense of homelessness stemming from the dispossession that uproots them from the stability of rural life and displaces them into the unsettled spatial and temporal regime of increasingly urbanised space. Jones's novels by contrast consider development within a settled community whose way of life, based on its sense of itself as an essentially closed social entity, is radically undermined by the threat, from within and from without, of boundless capitalism that transforms its experience of space, time and the objective world. As the community faces and endures the historical crises of the early twentieth century – the Cambrian Combine dispute of 1910/11, the First World War, the General Strike, the Depression and the rise of fascism – it is over the definition of 'home', over where the interests of the community really lie, and to what authority it is answerable, that its conflicts are played out. In a particular version of the Bildungsroman, Len comes to represent his 'people', but while the intimacy and intelligibility of the settled community initially seem to offer a vital counterweight to the abstracting, anonymising and atomising dynamics of capitalism, ultimately it is not in

the confines of the valley but on the battlefield of Spain that Len finds meaning. But Len's development is also stalled and incomplete in ways that raise questions about the relationship between class, nation and modernity in the Popular Front formation.

Lewis Jones (1897–1939) actively strove to be seen as a representative of his class and community, and this position underwrites his novels' attempts to represent the radical popular consciousness of the community in which he lived, worked and fought.¹ Jones regularly contributed journalism to the *Daily Worker* through the thirties detailing the desperate conditions in the Rhondda, demonstrating a flair for the effective combination of documentary evidence and telling anecdote.² When, in 1937, he was tried for threatening to bring a demonstration to an unemployment office, the *Daily Worker* covered the trial under the headline, 'A Whole People in the Dock', quoting Jones's lawyer as saying that, '[i]t is not Lewis Jones, an individual, who is in the dock, but a whole people and their constitutional rights'.³ The project of writing novels was, Jones reported, inspired by the Communist miners' leader Arthur Horner, who suggested that 'the full meaning of life in the Welsh mining areas could be expressed for the general reader more truthfully and vividly if treated imaginatively'.⁴ Jones attended the Comintern's Seventh Congress at which Dimitrov announced the national, popular and historical emphases of Popular Front ideological struggle; in this light, the relationships between Jones's popular prestige and the novel-writing project he began late in 1935 is of particular, even unique interest.⁵ Jones's sense of the relationship between his personal prestige and his novels' significance is clear in his letters to Douglas Garman, who worked extensively with him on the manuscript of *Cwmardy*, to the extent that Jones told Garman that 'it is misleading to name myself

1 Some of Jones's notable activities included industrial activism in South Wales and Nottinghamshire during the 1920s, resulting in three months' imprisonment during the General Strike; leading hunger marches from South Wales in 1932, 1934 and 1936; winning a seat on Glamorgan council as a Communist Party candidate in 1936; and energetic leadership of the unemployed throughout the thirties. The most detailed available account of his short but intense career is Dai Smith 1992.

2 See, for example, Jones 1934a and Jones 1934b.

3 *Daily Worker* 1937b, p. 5. Jones includes in *We Live* an incident in which the women of the valley invade the unemployment office at the conclusion of the mass demonstration, pp. 756–7.

4 Jones qtd. in H. Francis 2006, p. xii. Horner was President of the South Wales Miners' Federation, the origins and development of which are fictionalised in the novels.

5 Jones's attendance at the Seventh Congress is referred to in H. Francis 2006, p. x, and Croft 1990, p. 86. Dai Smith dates the beginning of Jones's work on *Cwmardy* to late 1935; Dai Smith 1992, p. 35.

as the author because yourself and the other comrade have at least as much responsibility as I for it'.⁶ Garman suggested that it was Jones's connection to popular life that gave the novel its 'epic quality', and which set him apart from other writers.⁷ Lawrence & Wishart's advert for *Cwmardy* in the *Daily Worker* certainly sold it on the terms Jones proposes here: the advert sought to convince readers that the novel showed the way forward to a 'creation of a new literature, written of the people and by the people – for the people of Britain'.⁸

The reception of *Cwmardy* was, however, rather more muted in the left-wing press. Ralph Wright in the *Daily Worker* felt the need to reassure readers who might expect 'a certain narrowness, a certain lack of proportion, an inability to see the wood for the trees, and above all a certain weakness in the creation of individual characters' that the story in fact 'carries you along because you are interested in and, indeed, deeply moved by the characters who live it'.⁹ Wright also praised the 'reality of living, turbulent, warm-hearted humanity'.¹⁰ Meanwhile in *Left Review*, under the title 'A Working Class Epic', W.H. Williams praised the way Jones 'writes of an intimate experience, that is part of the fibre of his very being', in contrast to Orwell's account of mining in *The Road to Wigan Pier*.¹¹ Jones however professed himself disappointed with the reception of the novel:

Even now I can't understand why so many really good comrades have missed the underlying political motive of the first book. Some of the genuine appreciations are really discouraging and sometimes I wonder if we haven't failed in what we set out to do with *Cwmardy*.¹²

6 Jones, undated facsimile letter to Garman, DG 6/4, Douglas Garman Papers, Department of Manuscripts and Special Collections, University of Nottingham. No date, but the same section refers to Harry Pollitt's review of *The Road to Wigan Pier*, published in the *Daily Worker* on 17 March 1937. Garman refers briefly to his work on the first novel in his notes for a talk on Jones: Garman, TS, 'A Working Class Writer. Lewis Jones', 24 February 1939, DG 3/1, Douglas Garman Papers, Department of Manuscripts and Special Collections, University of Nottingham.

7 Garman, TS, 'A Working Class Writer. Lewis Jones', 24 February 1939, DG 3/1, Douglas Garman Papers, Department of Manuscripts and Special Collections, University of Nottingham.

8 Lawrence & Wishart 1937.

9 Wright 1937, p. 7.

10 Ibid.

11 W.H. Williams 1937, pp. 428–9.

12 Jones, undated facsimile letter to Garman, DG 6/4, Douglas Garman Papers, Department of Manuscripts and Special Collections, University of Nottingham.

Jones is no more specific about what the 'underlying political motive' actually was, but a later letter expressing his concerns over the possible reception of *We Live* sheds some light on his ambition for the novels. He was worried that 'bourgeois' critics would not understand, or would not 'be permitted to explain' that it was 'definitely a *class* book in the fullest sense of the word'.¹³ My readings of Jones's novels explore what this categorisation means, and, although I do not wish to suggest Jones was writing with a conscious theoretical sense of the novel's formal or ideological problems, I nonetheless argue that the task did require engagement with the relationship between politics and form. A further complaint of Jones's is also significant:

The book also helps to prove that communists are essentially regenerative and creative. It gives our Party in s.w. a new intellectual status in the eyes of the masses here, precisely because I have been regarded as a leader of the party, a good chap and all that, but necessarily limited. We have not taught the workers that communists are concerned with and understand *every* phase of human existence, and all its 'cultural' aspects as well as the political. In other words we have not shown that communism is not a creed but that it is a *life*.¹⁴

The association between Communism and 'life' is a fundamental one in the scheme of both novels. The ambition to represent a whole way of life from a Communist point of view certainly seemed to resonate with Randall Swingler, who suggested in his *Daily Worker* review of *We Live* that Jones's first novel 'fitted more obviously perhaps than any other novel published in our time into what Ralph Fox called the epical tradition', and that the two novels should be read together as 'a sort of parable of the whole development of the working-class in England'.¹⁵ Aside from Swingler's elision of 'England' and 'Britain', which misses the historical specificity of the novels' setting, he nonetheless identifies the novels' epic ambitions in their investment in popular life, and also, more saliently, in their identification of what is 'characteristic' to create 'a glorious affirmation of the people who made this book'.¹⁶ The quality of affirmation inheres in Jones's shaping of his historical material to show that

13 Jones, undated facsimile letter to Garman, DG 6/4, Douglas Garman Papers, Department of Manuscripts and Special Collections, University of Nottingham. Emphasis in original.

14 Jones, undated facsimile letter to Garman, DG 6/4, Douglas Garman Papers, Department of Manuscripts and Special Collections, University of Nottingham. Emphasis in original.

15 Swingler 1939, p. 7.

16 Ibid.

even at moments of internal conflict and defeat, the utopian possibilities immanent in the class community's way of life are preserved.

As Hywel Francis has argued, the intensity of the pressures faced by the coalfield societies in industrial Wales was acute and distinctive. A particular developmental formation arose in localities rapidly and intensely industrialised in which the social forms of capitalist modernity existed alongside residual, pre-industrial social and cultural practices. Poverty and unemployment alienated large sections of the working class not just from wider society but 'to some extent from the traditional form of political activity of seeking greater working-class parliamentary representation'; instead, energy was regularly channelled into 'extra-parliamentary and extra-legal actions', generating an image, from within and from without, of an 'alternative society'.¹⁷ The development of this alternative society, characterised by exercises of popular justice and direct action, is at the heart of Jones's novels. Francis notes furthermore that this culture of 'collective direct action' made it 'seemingly inevitable' that some would volunteer for Spain.¹⁸ Over the course of the novels, the community's close-knit, defensive culture transforms into a powerful anti-fascist front through the emerging recognition of the identity of its interests with European communities threatened by fascism. Jones, indeed, was keen even before the official instantiation of the Popular Front line to project the Rhondda as a model of mass, united action: 'Sceptics regarding the possibilities of developing an all-embracing mass action on the basis of the united front', he wrote on the eve of a mass demonstration in 1935, 'should come to Red Rhondda to have their delusions shattered'.¹⁹ 'Red Rhondda', he concluded, 'has laid a basis for the development of a Red Britain in the period confronting us'.²⁰ That the Valleys' communities, with their distinctive culture of unofficial, popular political action, which, Hywel Francis reports, 'tended to transcend political parties', could exemplify the emerging Communist vision of a culture of popular activism is a central message of Jones's work and the principle underlying his strategy of typification.²¹

Jones constructs the community's distinctive culture – its particular configuration of interconnecting ways of feeling and interacting – through antithetical discursive formations. The discursive formation that might be described as 'proletarian', associated with Len and his family, is marked by the routine

17 H. Francis 1984, p. 199.

18 H. Francis 1984, pp. 199–200.

19 Jones qtd. B. Francis 1935, p. 5.

20 Ibid.

21 H. Francis 1984, p. 200.

linkage of a series of associations: light, cleanliness, vision, honour, collectivity, change (development) and the comic are frequently evoked together in varying combinations. This associative grouping is set against an oppositional complex of associations which includes darkness, dirt, shame, blindness, objectification, stasis (frustrated development), fascism, tragedy and death. Cleanliness, for example, is associated with Len's sister Jane before her ultimately tragic sexual exploitation by the son of an official, but also with the strikes that attempt to 'clean' the pits of blackleg labour.²² These oppositions seem, of course, conventionally encoded, but their meaning is not fixed, and much of the political development in the novels turns on the modification or mediation of these elements, wresting them away from damaging significations and repositioning them in the discourse of anti-fascism that is articulated by the end of *We Live*. The most significant mediation of this kind is of the term 'home'; a mediation needs to take place between the operative concepts of 'home' as what is immediately experienced, on one side, and the 'foreign' as the unseen or unexperienced on the other. The completion of this process is announced when Len addresses a foreign country – Spain – as 'home' (876), articulating the coextension of the class struggle in Cwmardy and the struggle against fascism in Spain.

The community perceives itself to be a closed social entity bound by its own moral code. Power can only be legitimate if it is visible, consensual and directly encountered, and thus the power of a distant government does not belong in the valley. The episodes in *Cwmardy* dealing with the 1910/11 lockout, strike and unrest that have become known as the Tonypandy Riots demonstrate the political significance of the clash of conceptions of 'belonging' in Jones's work, as well as offering a vivid depiction of the alternative society of Cwmardy in action to enforce its values against alien authority. A number of critics have pointed out that Jones revises the historical facts of the crisis, especially in relation to the role of South Wales Miners' Federation and the internal disputes over organisation that culminated in the publication in 1912 of the celebrated pamphlet, *The Miners' Next Step*.²³ The events of 1910–11 in the Rhondda were distinctive, as Dai Smith argues, because the events raised questions about the development of communities like Tonypandy, and about who 'controlled them', that could only be read as political questions requiring answers that

22 Jones 2006, pp. 220–1. Page references to this combined edition of the novels are hereafter given in parentheses in the text.

23 See for example Snee 1979, p. 184, and Dai Smith 1992, p. 40. It should however be noted that a section of the 'Strikers are sent into the valley' chapter appeared in *Left Review* under the title 'Tonypandy', which suggests Jones was willing for the episodes to be interpreted as representations of that historical event (Jones 1937).

countenanced the possibility of a different social order rather than reform or compromise.²⁴ *The Miners' Next Step* itself proposed a strikingly new politics that sought to end the Liberal hegemony in industrial Wales; its principal proposal was that '[t]he old policy of identity of interest between employers and ourselves be abolished, and a policy of open hostility installed'.²⁵ The conflict with the police is figured as a fight for the community's integrity as represented in the Square, which 'as always on important occasions, became the centre of attraction' (224). It is a matter of 'honour to the people of the valley that the Square belonged to them and that no one could turn them from it' (236). While in Barke's *The Land of the Leal*, the dispossession of the Scottish peasantry deprives them of the land which they nonetheless feel should be theirs by natural right, in Jones's novel the public square acts as a vital common space in which authority can be contested.²⁶

At the dramatic centre of the conflict as Jones represents it is the looting of shops and the destruction of private property. It was this aspect of the events in Tonypanydy that most disturbed and incensed the authorities at the time, and was used as evidence for the 'lawlessness' of the Rhondda.²⁷ The community's refusal to accept the sanctity of property presents a direct challenge to the discipline of the state, and the state responds with the methods of colonial violence used to subjugate 'lawless' regions elsewhere. The commander of the police treats the situation as an imperialist war, and is clearly based on Lionel Lindsay, chief constable of Glamorganshire police, whom Will Paynter – prominent Welsh Communist and volunteer in Spain – described in his autobiography as 'part of the Coalmasters' army of occupation in South Wales'.²⁸ Honour and belonging form the affective basis of resistance against this 'occupation': 'Gradually the police were driven from the Square, which was left in the possession of the strikers' (240). The victory is expedited by Len's burning of the power-house, making visible the advancing police (238) and providing the desperately needed '[l]ight to see the enemy' (237). It seems likely that Jones based this moment on a historical incident that occurred in his home village in November 1910 when 'officials were stoned out of the electric power-

24 Dai Smith 1984, p. 96.

25 Unofficial Reform Committee 1912, p. 25. For a discussion of the pamphlet's politics in relation to the tradition and development of syndicalism more widely, see Egan 1996, pp. 13–33.

26 As Jean Ramsay puts it, 'the sweat and blood o' the Gibsons are in they fields – they should be ours ten times ower'; Barke 1950, p. 510.

27 See, for example, *The Times* 1910, p. 12.

28 Paynter 1972, p. 38.

house built in 1905 at a cost of £25,000', and his manipulation of the event underscores Len's function of enlightening and extending the vision of his community.²⁹

What is established by the end of the episode is Cwmardy's self-identification as a community under attack, indeed, in armed struggle, whose most basic principles and interests were fundamentally opposed to those of the government. This is the process Chris Williams describes as a 'societary redefinition' beginning in 1910, the outcome of which was that, by 1926, the 'Lib-Lab *gwerin* [folk] had now taken the form of a proletariat'.³⁰ The community thus repels the efforts to bind this 'lawless' fraction into the spatial order of the modern state. Rejecting police efforts to control the square, it instead uses this common space to publicly enact its own forms of justice. Jones suggests the ways that the residual folk practices and popular culture of the valley, with their distant echoes of rough music and the *ceffyl pren*, often brought by immigrants from the rural West, not only rebuts its alleged 'lawlessness' but also provide vital ways of redressing injustice and exploitation. Siân's humiliation of Evan the Overman in retaliation for his slandering of her daughter and his refusal to accept responsibility for her death is a key example. At this point the forces of shame, belonging and objectification powerfully coalesce. Siân claims the right to enact justice on Evan, a right expressed through her objectification of him: 'Don't anybody touch him ... He do belong to me' (256). The 'shame-faced figure' of Evan is associated with the exploited body of Jane as Siân dresses him in her daughter's nightgown: 'Let your eyes see it' (256). The objectifier becomes objectified in a carnivalesque public reversal.

Shame, Vision and Reification

These episodes reflect a valorisation of the immediate and the visible. 'Alien' power is expelled; unseen injustice is publicly punished; abstract conceptions of property ownership are overcome by a sense of belonging rooted in the continuity of social life in a given place over time. The community mobilises its internal resources to resist the transformation of its social life into the normative forms of capitalist modernity. It is a matter of honour that invisible powers are resisted. When the miner's leader Ezra proposes a compromise, Len tells the miners that their wives would scorn the men's fear of 'a Home Secret-

29 Dai Smith 1984, p. 66.

30 C. Williams 1996, p. 127.

ary we have never seen' and who 'don't belong to us' (268), and, comparably, he resists Ezra's recruitment efforts on the outbreak of war, asking 'Do you believe I should kill men I have never seen?' (334). However, the basic dichotomy between the immediately perceived and the unseen and thus irrelevant, is progressively complicated through a struggle over ways of seeing that plays out in the negotiation of concepts of shame and objectification. Jones's handling of commodification suggests a quite complex sense of the relationship between capitalism and subjectivity, and very particularly of the way that the ambiguity of the commodity form itself undermines any appeal to the integrity of the immediately perceived. In *Cwmardy*, Len's mother Siân uses commodification as an insult to her husband, rhetorically reducing him to a cheap commodity: 'Call yourself a man! Why, I could buy your sort for ten a penny' (95–6), a description Len's father Jim bitterly repeats after a pit explosion: 'What do hundred men count for 'longside a hundred trams of coal? Men be cheap 'nough these days, and will soon be dear at ten a penny' (132), and at an earlier point, resignedly, 'What do us men count? We be cheaper than chickens' (116).³¹ To be seen as – and to see oneself as – nothing more than a commodity is a constant threat in the novels' moral world, and these moments register awareness of the declining value of the human in capitalism's accelerating development.

The episode describing Jane's death in childbirth after she has been disowned by the manager's son is a key moment in Jones's use of sight in relation to the commodity form. The macabre scene in which Len views his sister's body makes clear the link between visuality and the critique of the commodity: on each of her eyes is 'a blackened penny' (81). The image of blackened pennies signifies Jane's status as a corrupted commodity; the displaced human potential represented in money, 'the alienated *ability of mankind*', is here figured as a corruption of the organs of sight.³² Jane's eyeless baby represents the same corruption: its face 'a blob of paste' (79), carrying both the connotations of something incompletely or defectively produced, and, from 'paste', the connotation of the cheaply mass-produced commodity. When Len sees Jane's coffin, the commodity is figured as the site of displaced subjectivity: 'The shining shield near its top stared at him like a lonely, glaring eye' (79). The tragedy of Jane's death is announced by the description of her as blinded: 'In her eyes grew the dull glazed look of a hunted animal that, even as it runs, knows there is no

31 A comic and ironic subversion of this figure of speech occurs when Jim evades justice by hiding in Will Smallbeer's chicken hutch during the 1910/11 strike, p. 235.

32 Marx 2000a, p. 118; emphasis in original.

escape' (71). Elsewhere, the violence of capital's appropriation of the body of the worker is figured as the displacement of perception: when a young miner loses an arm in an accident, a 'gleaming bone wink[s] wickedly through the blood' (397). Displaced perception, in the scheme of Jones's novels, signifies the complete effacement of the subject of labour by the object of labour – the fragmentation of the human by the rationality of production. Objectified bodies can only be looked upon. The connection between this displacement of the privileged sense of sight and the perpetuation of class violence is stated clearly during the 1910/11 strike, when the gun brought by the officials to break the strike 'seemed to leer through its bore at each of them in turn' (217). But where, for the characters, blindness indicates the effacement of their subjectivity by the object of labour, here, the community's victorious defence of its own social order is figured by an uncanny reversal in the image of the smashed shop windows which, 'covered with corrugated iron sheets, looked like bandaged eyes' (265). The community successfully strikes back at the power of capitalism to animate the commodity while objectifying (and figuratively blinding) the human.

The uncanniness of these sighted figures gives form to the ambiguity of the commodity that arises from the radical duality of its nature. Despite its appearance of objectivity, direct perception cannot reveal the commodity's true nature since, 'the existence of the commodity-form, and the value-relation of the products of labour within which it appears, have absolutely no connection with the physical nature of the commodity and the material relations arising out of this'.³³ The unseen truth of this form is therefore an alien, disturbing presence within the apparently intelligible and unmediated social world of Cwmardy, a community that Len experiences early in his life as a fully 'knowable' community, in Raymond Williams's sense.³⁴ His boyhood is marked by the experience of measurable, bounded time and space, where home can be reached in 'ten strides' and 'a few minutes' (14). The essential intelligibility of the community persists through *Cwmardy* and fosters resistance to the state's attempts to recruit the community in the service of defending imperialism, as exemplified by Len's mother Siân's dismissal of the entire enterprise: 'For King and country indeed! I have never seen no king, and the only country I know is inside the four walls of this house and between the three mountains of our valley' (330). As in the 1910/11 strike scenes, the belief in the integrity of a community based on continuous inhabitation of a defined space is vital to the

33 Marx 1990, p. 165.

34 R. Williams 1975, pp. 202–3.

community's survival. But from the outset, the closed, intelligible community is shadowed by the disturbing, unknowable and unbounded forces of modernity. When Len begins to work, a milestone that he considers his initiation into manhood, his first experience is of the 'uncanny' intuition that 'the pit had a life of its own' (148), as well as a horror of the infinite distance and endless time of labour (151). The pit appears possessed of its own expanding and insatiable nature, transforming daily life so that 'quietly and stealthily, the pit became the dominating factor in his life' (159). Daily Len joins the 'never-ending silent flow of men to the pit' and travels 'the same ever-lengthening pit roadway' (159); time and space extend indefinitely with no sense of progression. Here Jones suggests the reification of time described by Lukács in 1922: 'time sheds its qualitative, variable, flowing nature; it freezes into an exactly delimited, quantifiable continuum filled with quantifiable "things" ... in short, it becomes space'.³⁵ Scenes of both economic and sexual exploitation are marked by a heightened sense of limitless time and space: in the pit, 'the men were immersed in a universe of coal, sweat, and clamour. If anything happened to stop the machinery they felt that the world would become suddenly void' (395), while the hours of Jane's labour feel to Len as if they will never end while '[e]very second became an embodied nightmare' (73).

Forms and Modes

Len becomes aware that the commodity form is the dominant form in his life: he understands that his life is without value in the scheme of exploitation: '[The officials] measure coal without giving a thought to our flesh. They think, they dream, they live for coal, while we die for it. Coal – that's the thing' (184). His development is determined by a quest to find order and meaning as the community is increasingly pressured by the crises of the early twentieth century. While at first the community seemed to offer a definite form against the abstraction of capitalism, it is only through recognising its true nature – that which is visible and that which the visible form of the commodity must repress – that its place on the world stage can be understood. Len becomes aware of this duality in himself as something 'moulded in the pit by his fellow workmen', and 'without them he knew his world would be empty' (537); it is both the indefinite form of work and the definite forms of sociality and solidarity that have shaped his life (that is, both the commodity and its repressed

35 Lukács 1975, p. 90.

history). The version of 'belonging' evoked by Len is central to both of Jones's novels and informs the texts' account of how the class community can resist the dehumanisation of commodification and instead affirm the possibility of a different society.

The 'phantom objectivity' of the commodity form, as Lukács calls it, seems to inform Jones's narrative strategies and deployments of generic convention.³⁶ Courtroom scenes dramatise the different relationships that the workers and the capitalist class have with material objects. In the Tonypandy episode, the law is clearly figured as defending property, but Jones also demonstrates that working-class knowledge and experience are not recognised by legal epistemology. At the inquest following a fatal explosion in the mine in *Cwmardy*, Jim describes how 'it was awful, mun, to see your butties lying cold like that' (126), to which the lawyer defending the mine owners responds, 'we want to know what you saw, not what you felt' (126). Jim's insistence that the dead miner's lamp has been tampered with is based on his practical knowledge that 'the first thing a miner will do whenever he get a lamp in his hand is to twist the pot ... It do come natural to us' (128). Jim's knowledge gained in labour – the history of production the commodity conceals – rather than the acceptance of the object in its appearance of 'phantom objectivity' is inadmissible in the court.³⁷ A second, more curious, example of this procedure occurs in the seemingly self-contained 'Night on the Mountain' episode in *We Live*, in which a young miner is found dying by Len and Mary. The episode develops like a murder mystery, complete with a crucial clue, a 'button shining' (560), and an incomplete deathbed accusation, 'it was a b–' (571). Jones again uses a courtroom scene to illustrate the way that the construction of evidence in law blocks the achievement of justice and masks class violence. Mary is told, 'We want to know what you saw, not what you think' (575). She is not permitted to make the association

36 Lukács 1975, p. 83.

37 These scenes would undoubtedly have resonance for contemporary readers as a result of the widely reported and widely condemned inquiry into the Gresford colliery disaster, which killed 266 North Wales miners in September 1934. The inquiry criticised managers and inspectors but ultimately absolved them of direct responsibility, and allegations were made that (as in *Cwmardy*) evidence had been tampered with and records destroyed. See, among many examples of the *Daily Worker's* coverage: *Daily Worker* 1936b; and Fred Pateman's reflection on the inquiry's report: Pateman 1937. In his contribution to the *Fact* issue on documentary, Arthur Calder-Marshall cited the testimony of one miner at the inquiry, John Edward Samuel, as exemplifying the type of language that documentary fiction should aspire to, 'a command of language and vividness of description, similar to Hemingway or Dos Passos', Calder-Marshall 1937a, p. 39.

between the silver button and the policemen who appear with increasing frequency in *We Live*.

Such narrative incompleteness is not, however, necessarily allied to defeat, and at other points a refusal of convention opens an important narrative space. The shift between the mock-heroic and the heroic modes that describe Jim and Len's respective war exploits is a useful example. Jim, like Siân, is a comic force in the novel and his bragging about his own heroic feats in the wars he has fought is a source of humour (10; 241). Jones resists the potential for a tragic narrative to be motivated by Jim's drunken enlistment for the Great War and instead resolves the subplot in an almost bathetic manner, with Jim returning home apparently unscathed (388–9). This move keeps Jim within the associative grouping of comedy and survival in the narrative. In his earliest published piece of fiction, 'Young Dai', published in 1932, Jones's plot moves at a tangent to that of *Cwmardy*, telling the story of a miner who, unlike Len, did catch 'the germ' and enlist in 1914.³⁸ The story is told in an anecdotal, laconic manner by a collective working-class voice that comments with indifference on Young Dai's decision: 'It was obvious to all of us that he had caught the germ'.³⁹ Dai's misfortunes in the ensuing years are recounted, before Jones states the thematic development elaborated in *Cwmardy*: 'His nephew has also caught the germ 18 years after Old Dai had it. He wants to fight now. But he knows his enemy'.⁴⁰ In *Cwmardy* and *We Live* this movement of transition from imperialist to anti-fascist war is narrated from within the relationship between father and son, but unlike Dai, Big Jim is not harmed by his experiences. This gesture keeps open a necessary hope, allowing even the experience of war to be assimilated in the comic and vital structure of proletarian feeling in the novel. While Graham Holderness has described Jones's novels as 'naturalistic', this is to underrate the political significance of Jones's compulsive depiction of the ways that subjectivity and the commodity interplay.⁴¹ One might therefore attribute to Jones more sensitivity to the politics of form than he is normally afforded.⁴²

38 Jones 1932, p. 6.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid.

41 Holderness 1984, pp. 27–8.

42 Frank Kermode, for example, implies that Jones was not, in effect, in control of the modes he was using, as evidenced by what Kermode considers a tendency towards 'posh overwriting' and 'fancy creative-writing-course prose' (Kermode 1988, p. 89). Kermode's wider point is a more nuanced one about working-class fiction's relationship with bourgeois

Spain and Home

The intensifying pressures on the community's way of seeing are traced in *We Live*, which begins in 1924, six years after the end of the First World War that concluded *Cwmardy*. The novel charts the increasingly acute tensions between the politics of the older generation, characterised by a prioritisation of immediate struggles and a rejection of what is considered to be outside the community, and a newer militant politics oriented towards wider alliances and solidarities. Len's developing insight is always tempered by uncertainty, and this quality distinguishes him from Ezra whose vision becomes, dialectically, a form of blindness as his power recedes and the demands of history outpace him: 'I know the struggle from A to Z ... What I have done I have done with my eyes open and the people have listened to me' (522). Ezra's decline is hastened by his misrecognition of Communism as a foreign theory, predicated on his misunderstanding of 'home' as what is immediately experienced (674). The final confrontation between Len and Ezra occurs in the shadow of the rise of fascism; Len looks over the valley at the point 'when the whole world was centred on Leipzig' with his 'thoughts fixed on Dimitrov', and from this vantage point – a position of superior insight both literally and figuratively – he watches Ezra entering the house of the mine owner (671). The revelation of Ezra's betrayal announces that the community can no longer distinguish simply between what does and does not belong in Cwmardy. Siân's vision has to give way to the realisation that the 'home' is not independent of the wider totality, and that its interests cannot be defended within the limits she indicates. On hearing of Len's plan to join the International Brigade, she is dismissive of its relevance to her family: 'Huh! Spaniards indeed! I have never seened one of them and don't owe them a single penny' (849). Siân's conflation of experience ('never seened') and economic relations ('single penny') is no longer adequate as a way of delineating class interests.

It is useful, at this point, to consider Jones's novels in light of Jed Esty's study of the problematic or incomplete Bildungsroman of late imperialism. While, Esty argues, in the classic novel of development, the 'soul-nation allegory' suggests that the nation gives mature, finished form to modern societies just as adulthood gives finished form to the modern subject, imperial crisis disturbed the transition from immature colony to mature nation, and hence colonial societies were locked in a state of permanent transition registered through

standards of value, but it nonetheless depends on an assumption that Jones's own relationships with those standards were largely unconscious.

the 'figure of youth, increasingly untethered in the late Victorian era from the model and telos of adulthood' that 'seems to symbolize the dilated/stunted adolescence of a never-quite-modernized periphery'.⁴³ The Bildungsroman functioned to mediate between the open-ended temporality of capitalism and the bounded countertemporality of the nation.⁴⁴ The nation, Esty argues, provided 'an emergent language of historical continuity or social identity amid the rapid and sweeping changes of industrialization'.⁴⁵ In many ways Len represents something resembling the characteristic subject of the Bildungsroman: sensitive, slightly detached, dreamy, physically weak, 'queer' (20), Jones's central character feels acutely the tension between the stability of community and the unceasing revolution of modernity. His sense of a life that has no inner form or meaning, that is shapeless under capital's regime of endless expansion, causes in adolescence a serious illness (163) and preconditions his eventual acceptance of the Marxist message of the novel's ideological donor figure, the educated shopkeeper's son, Ron. But while Len is used to focalise questions of development in the novels, he does not reach the condition of maturity and social accommodation that is the signature resolution of the classic Bildungsroman. He continues to be physically overshadowed by his father, and his sexual development is disturbed by a continuing association between sex and death originating in his sister's death, so that Len and Mary's sexual relations are continually figured as deathly (as when they are 'buried in each other', 493). The primal trauma of his sister's exploitation stunts his development and ensures he cannot achieve conventional (bourgeois) masculine maturity as father and head of a household. His wife Mary is comparably emotionally inhibited and physically weakened. The family, as Raymond Williams points out, is the most accessible fictional centre for the working-class novelist, and would, of course, provide Jones with an obvious structure in which to formalise his alignment of Communism with life and creation.⁴⁶ But Jones refuses to separate the family from the relations of exploitation that determine life in Cwmardy. The family of Evan the Overman is fated to fail as a structure through which life can be reproduced as a consequence of Evan's implication in practices of exploitation: Evan's son is another man's child – 'see if you can find the likeness', Siân tells him (66) – and Jane and her baby both die. Patrilineal structures are shown to be dependent on and liable to debasement by the economic system Evan exploits.

43 Esty 2012, p. 137.

44 Esty 2012, p. 5.

45 Esty 2012, p. 4.

46 R. Williams 1982, pp. 116–17.

The refusal to integrate Len into the 'organic' social form of the family is a consequence of Jones's desire, particularly evident in the final chapters of *We Live*, to deflect attention onto the fate of the community rather than of the individual, in order to demonstrate that the forms that stunt the growth of singular lives can only be overcome by collective action. Through the actions of the Communist characters, political consciousness grows in the community, culminating in a mass march in 1935.⁴⁷ The constant threat of dehumanisation is ultimately met not with individual vocation but with Len's recognition that his 'existence and power as an individual was buried in that of the mass now pregnant with motion behind him' (747). Jones's figuration of the march is significant because it meets the endless proliferation of modernity with seemingly limitless popular power that overtakes spatial and temporal organisation: 'Time and distance were obliterated by the cavalcade of people, whose feet made the roads invisible' (747–8). The people are now innumerable, no longer the fragmented, quantifiable subjects of modernity or the sociable but numerically weak members of a peripheral community. The march achieves a plenitude and coherence in time and space that capitalist modernity's constantly mobilising and expanding dynamics do not allow. Ultimately, it is the community's social and political development that is the subject of the novels, and the march is the point at which it finds itself capable of a more radical gesture than the localised attacks on the visible signs of exploitation that preceded it. While Len himself is a figure of incomplete development, his final glance at his community is one of pride in its maturation from 'a tiny village' to an industrial town of 'hundreds of streets and big buildings with bright windows' (863).

Len's death in Spain is both an ending and the refusal of an ending. He conceives of his participation in Spain as giving form and purpose to his disenfranchised, unfulfilled life; though he has lived as 'a man who had always been unemployed – a man who wandered from meeting to meeting and street to street looking for something he never seemed to find' – the children of Cwmardy will remember him and think, 'We knew Len. He fought for us in Spain' (855–6). While this suggests the essentially novelistic quality Lukács calls 'the story of the soul that goes to find itself',⁴⁸ Len's letter from Spain, received after his death, announces that he has not found his true self in the socially different context of a foreign land but has instead returned home:

47 The march is based on the ones Jones led in the Rhondda in early 1935. These marches were reported in the *Daily Worker*: B. Francis 1935.

48 Lukács 1978, p. 89.

Yes, my comrade, this is not a foreign land on which we are fighting. It is home. Those are not strangers who are dying. They are our butties. It is not a war only of nation against nation, but of progress against reaction, and I glory in the fact that Cwmardy has its sons upon the battle-field, fighting here as they used to fight on the Square, the only difference being that we now have guns instead of sticks.

p. 876

In this peroration, 'Home' and 'the Square' have become not just spatial designators but intensely political, even utopian, ideas, the integrity of which have been fought for throughout the preceding episodes in the novels. As the novel constructs it, the war is a class war in which the false differentiation of nationhood ('strangers') gives way to class solidarity ('butties').

Len is a figure of curtailed development whose death marks a historical impasse for Communist politics in Europe in so far as it (perhaps unintentionally) allegorises the imminent collapse of the Republic and the withdrawal of the Brigades. But it marks him, too, as a figure of permanent transition, of unrealised revolution. Len's failure to achieve socially integrated adulthood signifies Jones's refusal to accept that conditions in the Valleys could be lived with as they were. But the novels' often comic and burlesque narration of a community developing in history also speaks against the assumption made by other Welsh writers that the industrialisation of South Wales and the subsequent economic collapse had been an unmitigated tragedy that was entering its final stages during the late thirties. Idris Davies's 1938 poem *Gwalia Deserta* imagines Wales ('Gwalia', the archaism making clear Davies's elegiac intent) as a land ruined by an unspecified and alien 'they', who 'slunk away and purchased/ The medals of the State', leaving 'the landscape of Gwalia stained for all time/ By the bloody hands of progress'.⁴⁹ T.S. Eliot described Davies's works of this period as 'the best poetic document I know about a particular epoch in a particular place'.⁵⁰ The Nationalist poet and politician Saunders Lewis, meanwhile, ruminating on the decade's many failures on the eve of war, saw in the 'human

49 Davies 1994, p. 11. There is, however, more to this poem than simple nostalgia, and an interesting study could be made of its conflicted attitudes to popular culture, the various angles from which it recalls the defeat of 1926, and its connections with better-known poetry of the decade (with Louis MacNeice's *Autumn Journal*, for example). At its more anecdotal narrative moments (for example, in section VIII) the tone is not dissimilar to Jones's.

50 Qtd. Stringer (ed.), p. 157.

wreckage' of the crisis-stricken Valleys a culture-less and denationalised wasteland that 'once was Wales'.⁵¹ Jones's novels stand counter to these projections of catastrophe, asserting instead that the working-class community's resources of survival and self-definition placed it at the heart of the struggle for the survival of civilisation and for the possibility of a new society. The fragility of that community must be stressed; the crisis in South Wales was so severe that serious proposals were made to clear the industrial Valleys of much of their population.⁵² Jones saw the unruly, creative culture of collective direct action that emerged under the extreme pressures of industrialisation as offering a living example of the type of culture projected by the Popular Front, and his novels both celebrate the integrity of that community and reflect the optimism and despair of the closing years of the 1930s.

Conclusion

Have had a letter from the boys in Spain in which they issue a challenge that they will have finished the Fascists there and be back home by the time the second book is published. That's the spirit for you.⁵³

Jones died suddenly in January 1939, in the week that Barcelona fell to Franco's forces. Dai Smith and Hywel Francis both suggest that Jones had intended, after *We Live*, to write a third work in which the volunteers returned, victorious, to lead a socialist revolution in the valley.⁵⁴ Barke's *The Land of the Leal* and Jones's *We Live* were published almost simultaneously in 1939, and at least one critic made the connection between them. Frank Swinnerton, writing in the *Observer*, praised the sincerity of *We Live* despite its being 'crudely written'; he also commended the pastoral elements of *The Land of the Leal*, though appeared puzzled by the connection between the urban and rural sections of Barke's text. He concluded, however, that if Barke, like Jones, 'has to use the Spanish War as a useful mechanism he has the excuse that it is part of the history of our time and a fitting landmark in such a chronicle'.⁵⁵ But the novels do more than appropriate the war as a plot mechanism. Len's letter in Spain

51 S. Lewis 1967, p. 246.

52 G.A. Williams 1991, p. 252.

53 Jones, undated facsimile letter to Garman, DG 6/4, Douglas Garman Papers, Department of Manuscripts and Special Collections, University of Nottingham.

54 Dai Smith 1992, p. 76; and H. Francis 1984, p. 103.

55 Swinnerton 1939.

echoes a letter from Will Paynter to Arthur Horner, President of the South Wales Miners' Federation, published in 1937:

From it all emerges one thing at least, and that is that the International Brigade and the British Battalion as part of it, is not some noble and gallant band of crusaders come to succour a helpless people from an injustice, it is the logical expression of the conscious urge of democratic peoples for self-preservation.⁵⁶

In his study of the British volunteers in Spain, James K. Hopkins has suggested that

there was a logical, sequential development of issues in the lives of many British militants: first, looking for explanations for the unemployment and repression they experienced; second, seeing the rise of fascism on the continent as an issue that concerned them; and third, seizing the opportunity to strike back at oppression, if not in Great Britain, then in Spain.⁵⁷

But Barke's and Jones's novels do not simply reflect but actively participate in the cultural production of that sequence, giving emotional weight and life to those connections – a more difficult and conflicted process than such a summary allows. Both writers' interventions in the cultural life of the volunteers extended beyond their depiction in fiction: Barke, Gustav Klaus reports, wrote a bagpipe march for the Scottish Ambulance Unit in Spain, while Hopkins claims that the Welsh Brigaders enthusiastically read *Cwmardy*.⁵⁸ What might be written out in the production of such sequential narratives are, as Williams suggests, 'the *disconnections* of a wide cultural and political life'.⁵⁹ These novels nevertheless represent remarkable examples of writers' efforts to articulate the relationship between the values, traditions and distinctive culture of communities marginalised in regional and class terms and the most urgent global historical realities of the decade. Their conclusions in heroic death and the epic motif of homecoming both confront and refuse to accept the death of the political hopes whose development they have narrated.

56 Published in *Miners' Monthly*, June 1937; qtd. Paynter 1972, pp. 69–70.

57 J.K. Hopkins 1998, p. 107.

58 Klaus 1998, p. 8; J.K. Hopkins 1998, p. 383.

59 Williams 2005, p. 225, emphasis in original.