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'I was not know for sure what be the Queen, Evan; was you?': Fictions of Development in Amy Dillwyn's *The Rebecca Rioter*

Karin Koehler

Amy Dillwyn's *The Rebecca Rioter* (1880) combines attention to a historical contest over infrastructure with a narrative of personal development defined by infrastructural lack. Dillwyn thus uses the capaciousness of the novel form to offer a distinctly Welsh perspective on the connections between three intersecting nineteenth-century discourses of development: infrastructural improvement, education, and national civilization. The article begins by situating Dillwyn's novel within the infrastructural imagination of 'Victorian Britain', examining how contrasting images of absent and intrusive infrastructure frame Evan's recollections. I place the novel in dialogue with a central document in the political and cultural life of modern Wales: the 1847 *Reports of the Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of Education in Wales*, which castigated the Welsh for their failure to develop in step with modern British civilization, citing linguistic and religious differences as key obstacles to advancement. On the surface, Dillwyn's narrative reflects the report's assumptions, depicting its rural Welsh setting as a wilderness, where modern infrastructures are only tenuously established. The second part of the article, however, explores how the novel complicates these initial impressions, revealing a text that is finely attuned to the complexities of Wales's status in Britain. Overall, this article seeks to demonstrate that, while the novel's form, especially Evan's retrospective narrative, foregrounds the power of infrastructures to shape individual, communal, and national futures, the text continually modulates between the project of imagining shared, collective foundations of individual development and the expression of anxieties about infrastructures' potential to suppress cultural heterogeneity and political dissent.

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Introduction

Contemplating his life from a penal colony, the narrator of Amy Dillwyn's novel *The Rebecca Rioter* (1880) recalls curiously formless formative years. Evan Williams describes his native village of Upper Killay, in South-West Wales, as 'a place where you feel the whole force of every wind that blows', which 'is so placed that it seems as if its inhabitants must naturally have more or less of a twist towards wildness'.[1] 'When I was a boy', he remarks, 'little or nothing was done to straighten this natural twist' (p. 2). The absence of regulating infrastructures and institutions that give shape to civic life — of 'civilising influence', as Evan puts it — becomes a central explanatory factor in the account of his violent involvement in the Rebecca Riots and subsequent transportation to Australia (p. 3). His fictional autobiography, then, combines attention to a historical contest over the terms of access to and use of infrastructure with a narrative of personal development defined by infrastructural lack, a *Bildungsroman* without *Bildung*. Thus, Dillwyn uses the capaciousness of the novel form to address the connections between three intersecting nineteenth-century discourses of development: infrastructural improvement, education, and national civilization. In particular, the text examines the notion, neatly summarized by Brian Larkin, 'that, by promoting circulation, infrastructures bring about change, and through change they enact progress'.[2] As it charts its narrator's trajectory, marked by seemingly irresolvable tensions between longing for improvement and resistance to 'civilising influences', *The Rebecca Rioter* sheds light on the difficulties of picturing the state as 'an agent of positive self- and social transformation' in the context of one of Victorian Britain's 'minor' nations.[3]

In the first part of this article I situate Dillwyn's novel within the infrastructural imagination of 'Victorian Britain', examining how contrasting images of absent and intrusive infrastructure frame Evan's recollections. To illuminate the specifically Welsh dimension of its engagement with contemporary discourses of infrastructure, I place the novel in dialogue with a central document in the political and cultural life of modern Wales: the 1847 *Reports of the Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of Education in Wales*, also known by the shorthand of 'Llyfrau Gleision' ('Blue Books'). Rooted in assumptions about the positive correlation between connective infrastructures and national progress, the *Report* castigated the Welsh for their apparent failure to develop in step with modern British civilization, citing linguistic and religious differences

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1 Amy Dillwyn, *The Rebecca Rioter*, ed. by Katie Gramich (Dinas Powys: Honno, 2008), p. 1.

2 Brian Larkin, 'The Politics and Poetics of Infrastructure', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 42 (2013), 327–43 (p. 336).

3 Zarena Aslami, *The Dream Life of Citizens: Late Victorian Novels and the Fantasy of the State* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), p. 5.

as key obstacles to advancement. On the surface Dillwyn's narrative neatly reflects its assumptions. It depicts its rural Welsh setting as a wilderness, where modern infrastructures — of transport, communication, and social organization — are only tenuously established: a fertile ground for social unrest. The place as well as its people appear to be both in dire need of and stubbornly resistant to improvement. A closer reading of *The Rebecca Rioter*, however, reveals a text that is finely attuned to the complexities of Wales's status in Britain.

In the second part of the article I consider how the two separate, but intertwining strands of the novel dramatize the potential for, and failure of, development in Evan's life, arguing that these structural tensions refract the protagonist's difficulties in finding a coherent frame of reference for his desires for individual and social transformation.[4] Evan's encounter with Gwenllian Tudor, the daughter of the local squire, begins a process of intellectual and moral transformation, briefly hinting at the possibility of the narrator's socialization into an Anglo-Welsh version of modernity. By contrast, his encounter with the Rebecca movement activates the narrator's political consciousness, allowing him to imagine what Anna Kornbluh describes as 'the enabling structuration of social forms to positively promote human flourishing'.[5] While both encounters suggest the transformative power of infrastructure, they foreground the contradictions between Evan's dreams of development and Victorian Britain's dominant fictions of progress. Yet the form of the text, especially Evan's retrospective narrative, continuously highlights what Hannah Appel, Nikhil Anand, and Akhil Gupta describe as 'the formative role of infrastructures in the ways we think, build, and inhabit our shared futures'.[6] Thus, it conveys the novel's commitment to imagining shared, collective foundations for individual development, but it also registers profound anxieties about infrastructures' potential to either sustain or suppress cultural heterogeneity and political dissent.

4 As such, my thinking is influenced by Aleksandar Stević's *Falling Short: The Bildungsroman and the Crisis of Self-Fashioning* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2020), which identifies the 'nineteenth-century bildungsroman as a generic structure within which those processes that can be variously described as maturation, development, social integration, subject formation, and upward social movement are not just examined but vigorously contested' and which 'tends to destroy its heroes not because they are inadequate [...] but because it cannot find a way to reconcile the contradictory historical forces to which the nineteenth century has exposed them' (p. 18). *The Rebecca Rioter* is not, of course, a conventional or canonical *Bildungsroman*, but I suggest that it can be read fruitfully in relation to, and against, the genre.

5 Anna Kornbluh, *The Order of Forms: Realism, Formalism, and Social Space* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019), p. 78.

6 Hannah Appel, Nikhil Anand, and Akhil Gupta, 'Introduction: Temporality, Politics, and the Promise of Infrastructure', in *The Promise of Infrastructure*, ed. by Nikhil Anand, Akhil Gupta, and Hannah Appel (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), pp. 1–38 (p. 30).

The Rebecca Rioter and Victorian Wales

Published by the London-based company Macmillan in 1880, Dillwyn's first novel met with positive reviews in Britain's leading literary periodicals and marked the beginning of a moderately successful, albeit reluctantly embraced, literary career. She went on to publish five further novels, while also contributing to the *Spectator*, between 1880 and 1892.[7] After the death of her father, an industrialist and politician, she took over his vastly indebted Spelter Works, returning the company to profitability. She ran the company successfully until her death in 1935, while prominently supporting radical causes including women's suffrage and trade unionism (Painting, pp. 91–107).

The Rebecca Rioter is a historical novel, set in the immediate surroundings of the Dillwyn family's Hendrefoilan House during a series of popular uprisings that took place in South Wales between 1839 and 1843. Kirsti Bohata explains that it 'was considered by contemporaries a compellingly realistic account of the riots and was consulted and quoted by historians'. She also notes that, of 'several Rebecca novels to appear at this time', it is the 'only one sympathetic to Rebecca'.[8] Largely comprised of farmers and agricultural labourers, the Rebecca movement drew on popular performance cultures to protest against high taxation, staging ritualized attacks on infrastructures and institutions perceived to embody the state's excessive fiscal demands.[9] While the riots responded to various grievances, including the Poor Laws and the impact of reduced tariffs on imported grains, in their most iconic form they involved attacks on tollgates by a group of protesters dressed in women's clothes, identified as Rebecca and her daughters.[10] As Dillwyn's novel records, they staged a scene in which Rebecca, the group's horse-mounted leader, complained of an obstruction in her path; her 'daughters' investigated the barrier until Rebecca commanded its destruction (pp. 81–85). It seems that writers like Dillwyn, Anne Beale, and Richard Dansey Green-Price turned their attention to the historical riots due to the apparent revival of 'Rebeccaism' in the late 1870s, protests against enclosure that manifested primarily through salmon poaching and attacks on salmon weirs (Rhian Jones, pp. 139–41). Dillwyn's novel is distinctive, as Bohata notes, in its comparatively sympathetic representation of the historical Rebecca rioters and their cause. Dillwyn's representation of the riots — and, more recently, the

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[7] See David Painting, *Amy Dillwyn*, new edn (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2013), pp. 78–86.

[8] Kirsti Bohata, '"A Queer-Looking Lot of Women": Cross-Dressing, Transgender Ventriloquism, and Same-Sex Desire in the Fiction of Amy Dillwyn', *Victorian Review*, 44 (2018), 113–30 (p. 114).

[9] Rhian E. Jones extensively discusses the performative and ritualistic aspects of the movement in *Petticoat Heroes: Gender, Culture and Popular Protest in the Rebecca Riots* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2015).

[10] David Williams's *The Rebecca Riots: A Study in Agrarian Discontent* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1971) offers a comprehensive account of the riots. For a briefer overview, see John Davies, *A History of Wales*, rev. edn (London: Penguin, 2007), pp. 367–71.

novel's queer resonances — have been addressed in the scholarship of Kirsti Bohata, Katie Gramich, Jane Aaron, and Tomos Owen.[11] Here, I seek to contribute to the small body of work on *The Rebecca Rioter* by exploring how Dillwyn represents Evan's emerging understanding of infrastructure's power to shape the futures of individuals, communities, and nations. I will be less interested, therefore, in the representation of rioting itself than in the ways in which Evan's involvement with Rebecca informs his autobiographical endeavour to put into narrative form — and make sense of — his life.

Writing in 1880, Dillwyn was fictionalizing events that remained within the grasp of living memory of those involved in the riots and those responsible for restoring order. As Katie Gramich explains in her edition, Dillwyn drew on her own 'father's handwritten account of his personal encounter with Rebecca' (p. xii). The Liberal MP for Swansea later in life, Lewis Llewellyn Dillwyn served as magistrate for Glamorganshire from 1837 and was centrally involved in subduing the riots. Given her family history and status, Dillwyn's decision to adopt the perspective and voice of the 'silent Other in L.L. Dillwyn's story: the Rebecca rioter himself' is striking (Gramich, p. xiii). But the rioter's story, of a failed education and a thwarted life, contains particularly rich narrative possibilities both for representing the riots and for reflecting on their enduring significance to the construction of Wales's national identity. It illuminates how recollections and representations of the riots in the second half of the century were shaped by another defining moment in the modern history of Wales: the publication of the Blue Books in 1847.

The 1847 *Report* is a contentious source that resonates powerfully both with Dillwyn's novel and with nineteenth-century discourses of development more broadly.[12] As Owen notes, the document, 'while ostensibly an investigation into the conditions of education in Wales, was in many ways a response to the rural unrest evidenced by the Rebecca Riots', while '*The Rebecca Rioter* can be read as a response to the Commission of 1847' (p. 59). The South Wales Turnpikes Act of 1844 marked the partial success of the Rebecca movement, effecting the consolidation of turnpike trusts and so reducing the burden of rural tolls. But the same year saw the publication of a *Report of the Commissioners of Inquiry into South Wales* that included a detailed investigation of the riots. Motivated by the commissioners' findings, which — like reports of the

[11] See Bohata; Katie Gramich, 'Introduction', in Dillwyn, pp. xi–xxi; Jane Aaron, *Nineteenth-Century Women's Writing in Wales: Nation, Gender and Identity* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007), pp. 128–31; and Tomos Owen, '"Never Again Stop the Way of a Welshman": Rioting and Rebellion in Amy Dillwyn's *The Rebecca Rioter*', in *Riots in Literature*, ed. by David Bell and Gerald Porter (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008), pp. 51–74.

[12] For a detailed discussion of the inquiry as well as its lasting impact, see Gwyneth Tyson Roberts, *The Language of the Blue Books: The Perfect Instrument of Empire* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1998).

earlier inquiries into the Merthyr and Newport Risings — drew explicit connections between social unrest and rural Welsh communities' lack of anglophone education, the Welsh-born Member of Parliament for Coventry William Williams advocated for a targeted inquiry into education in Wales. The result is remembered as 'Brad y Llyfrau Gleision', or the 'Treachery of the Blue Books'.[13] As part of the inquiry, three monoglot English commissioners were tasked with inspecting all schools in Wales and detailing their findings. Their *Report* was controversial partly because of the methods for obtaining evidence, including interviews in English with children whose education took place through the medium of Welsh. But it was the image of Welsh-speaking, Nonconformist communities as sexually licentious, immoral, dirty, and ignorant that sent shockwaves through the country and continued to reverberate well into the twentieth century (Roberts, p. 209). Rather than focusing narrowly on issues related to educational infrastructure and provision, the *Report* mounted a powerful indictment of Welsh backwardness. One of the most frequently quoted conclusions of the *Report* claimed that

> the Welsh language is a vast drawback to Wales, and a manifold barrier to the moral progress and commercial prosperity of the people. [...] It dissevers the people from intercourse which would greatly advance their civilization, and bars the access of improving knowledge to their minds.[14]

This quotation captures how closely discourses of education, infrastructure, and civilization were intertwined in the political and cultural imagination of the Victorian four nations. Simultaneously, it evokes the tensions between these entangled discourses of development and the four nations' cultural heterogeneity and multilingualism, tensions that are at the heart of Evan's first-person narrative in *The Rebecca Rioter*.

Gwyneth Roberts notes that images of isolation and disconnection recur throughout the 1847 *Report* (p. 205). Such images derive their powerfully negative effect, I suggest, because they are explicitly pitted against liberal (and neoliberal) perceptions of infrastructure, which coalesce around belief in the connection between advanced means of 'intercourse', 'improving knowledge', and 'civilization'. As Jo Guldi notes, infrastructural investment by the British state in the late eighteenth century consolidated a relatively new political union, but the large-scale development of

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[13] Roberts, p. 215. As Roberts explains, this name derived from the title of a play by Robert Jones (Derfel), and it referred to the typical blue binding of government reports.

[14] Jelinger C. Symons, 'Report on the Counties of Brecknock, Cardigan, and Radnor, under the Commission of Inquiry into the State of Education in Wales', in *Reports of the Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of Education in Wales* (London: Clowes, 1848), pp. 201–418 (p. 309).

roads, bridges, and railways (as well as postal and telegraphic infrastructure) tended to be justified by arguments about the civilizing power of connection and circulation.[15] Eighteenth-century 'advocates of centralized building' affirmed a direct 'relationship between transport and moral progress' and, by the middle of the nineteenth century, it was commonplace to see transport and communication infrastructure celebrated — in a pithy formulation from *Chambers' Edinburgh Journal* — as 'agents of civilisation and social advancement'.[16] In claiming that Welsh difference prevented full integration in Britain's flourishing commercial, intellectual, and moral 'intercourse', the *Report* evoked an understanding of connective infrastructure that was central to Victorian culture — and continues to shape the neoliberal infrastructural imagination.[17]

Wales, according to the commissioners, obstinately resisted the advantages conferred by Britain's modern 'means of intercommunication' — an accusation that ignored the enthusiasm with which new connective technologies and infrastructures were greeted in the Welsh-language periodical press and popular poetic culture.[18] The *Report* had profound consequences for Welsh nation-building. If some vigorously rejected its conclusions, many accepted the pressure to anglicize or at least reform Welsh culture; a significant proportion of popular literary culture in nineteenth-century Wales is shaped by efforts to demonstrate that a distinctly Welsh national culture was compatible with, and eager to embrace, Anglo-British modernity.[19] The document's far-reaching cultural impact is also a lingering presence in Dillwyn's fictional 'autobiography of a man named Evan Williams' (p. xxii). While Tomos Owen reads the novel as a 'corrective depiction of the Welsh working class', the contours of Evan's story suggest a relatively unambiguous endorsement of the *Report*'s findings, drawing a direct line from an upbringing in a backward, uncivilized community, to

[15] Jo Guldi, *Roads to Power: Britain Invents the Infrastructure State* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), pp. 79–127.

[16] Guldi, pp. 192–93; 'Social Effects of Railways', *Chambers' Edinburgh Journal*, 21 September 1844, pp. 177–79 (p. 177).

[17] Penny Harvey and Hannah Knox note, for instance, that roads continue to be understood as 'technologies of social integration, economic development, and modernisation'. See *Roads: An Anthropology of Infrastructure and Expertise* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015), p. 7. Addressing infrastructure more broadly, Appel, Anand, and Gupta note that 'infrastructures have long promised modernity, development, progress, and freedom to people all over the world' (p. 3); while Brian Larkin addresses the persistence of the 'belief that, by promoting circulation, infrastructures bring about change, and through change they enact progress, and through progress we gain freedom' (p. 332).

[18] See, for instance, Karin Koehler, 'A Tale of Two Bridges: The Poetry and Politics of Infrastructure in Nineteenth-Century Wales', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 26 (2021), 499–518 (p. 516). In his study of the response to the railway in popular Welsh ballads, E. Wyn James similarly notes that 'cadarnhaol, yn di-os, oedd yr ymateb hwn' ('this response was, without doubt, positive'). See E. Wyn James, 'Trenau ym Marddoniaeth Boblogaidd Oes Victoria', *Llên Cymru*, 37 (2015), 45–57 (p. 46).

[19] See, for instance, Gwyn A. Williams, *When Was Wales?: A History of the Welsh* (London: Penguin, 1985), especially pp. 209–10. For a survey of the cultural response in Wales, see Roberts, pp. 209–22.

involvement in violent social unrest, to transportation for killing — albeit without recognizing his victim — the local squire (Owen, p. 52). By allowing Evan to tell his own story, however, Dillwyn undercuts her own plot's resonances with Anglocentric accounts of individual improvement and national progress.

Wild Wales: infrastructure, institutions, and the state in *The Rebecca Rioter*

The Rebecca Rioter launches its readers into an untamed landscape inhabited by untamed people. Dillwyn thus draws on a trope that was well established in nineteenth-century travel writing about Wales, but her narrator, unlike travel writers of the preceding decades, refuses to romanticize his setting.[20] Evan begins his story of 'Killay life' by speculating on the correlation between 'people's natures' and the 'places where they are born and pass their lives' (p. 1). In an expression of stark environmental determinism, he asks,

> is not a man much more likely to be rough and wild if he has been brought up in an exposed cottage whose walls rock and shake with every blast of wind, than he would have been if he had lived in some snug valley home, sheltered on all sides by hills and trees. (p. 1)

But while Evan affirms that Upper Killay's inhabitants are 'a rather rough set', with 'more or less of a twist towards wildness' (p. 2), the juxtaposition of an 'exposed cottage' and a 'snug valley' home also introduces important questions about the ways in which human structures and forms mitigate against the violence of a life determined purely by struggle against the elements and for survival. The statement that 'little or nothing *was done* to straighten this natural twist' further challenges the impression of inevitability, implying an unrealized potential of human intervention (p. 2, emphasis added). It is Evan's retrospective narration, however, that allows for the most explicit commentary on the socially determining power of infrastructural provision — and its absence.

Telling his story in the late 1850s, Evan recalls that during his 1830s boyhood 'the chapel at Three Crosses was the only "civilising influence", as they call it, within reach of Killay' (p. 3). He states that 'none of the children of the place knew what going to school meant, and, as a rule, we ran wild, and amused ourselves by getting into as much mischief as possible' (p. 3). Among his people, he explains,

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[20] For a brief overview of the development of travel writing, and the evolution of the 'wild Wales' trope, see Kathryn N. Jones, Carol Tully, and Heather Williams, 'Travel Writing and Wales', *Studies in Travel Writing*, 18 (2014), 101–06.

> it seemed to be taken for granted that the state of life into which a man was born was as unalterable as his colour. If the parents were black, the children would never be white, and if the parents were uncivilised, so would the children be also to the end of their days, and it was no use trying to make them anything else. (p. 2)

Evan links this inability to imagine the possibility of improvement to the infrastructural neglect that 'generate[s] the ambient environment of everyday life' in Upper Killay, while blurring the causal relationship between the two facts (Larkin, p. 327). Even as he acknowledges the more 'recent fashion to be very much interested in the education of the lower classes', noting that 'schools, churches, and chapels are springing up in all directions over the country', he expresses enduring scepticism about Victorian cultures of improvement and reform:

> There are folks now who make as much fuss about everyone's knowing how to read, and write, and spell, and understand poetry, geography, botany, history, and science and such things, as if there could be neither health, strength, nor happiness without all this learning. (p. 3)

Yet, despite his insistence that education — and, by implication, socialization into the values of an English, or anglicized, society — is not the only route to 'health, strength, nor happiness', Evan's subsequent recollections of Killay, punctuated by casual references to violent crime and harrowing domestic violence, demonstrate an acute awareness of the place's shortcomings and, accordingly, of the urgent need for transformation.

Significantly, Killay is not a remote, 'out of the way' place that serves as a fictional repository for ways of living and knowing that are at risk of being eroded by encroaching modernity.[21] Located within five miles of Swansea, the village lies on a turnpike road and mail coach route — infrastructural objects of nostalgia by the time Dillwyn's novel appeared, as Ruth Livesey has shown, but also frequently used in other 'novels of the recent past [...] to evoke the nation' and represent 'a lost national modernity'.[22] In Evan's village, however, these infrastructures only bring occasional, passing contact with those who benefit from the connections they establish, apparently failing to weave

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[21] See Bill Greenslade, '"Out of the Way" Places: Exploring Remoteness in Hardy's Fiction', *Thomas Hardy Journal*, 26 (2010), 43–60. In this essay Greenslade notes that Hardy expresses the 'loss of contact with the past' that characterizes modernity is 'organised spatially', so that remote spaces serve to 'harbour and contain records of the past in the form of living traditions' (p. 46). By contrast, 'living traditions' are strikingly absent from Dillwyn's depiction of Upper Killay.

[22] Ruth Livesey, *Writing the Stage Coach Nation: Locality on the Move in Nineteenth-Century British Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 1, 2.

Killay itself into the network of the modern, unified nation. The road — like the modern state that has built it — seems foreign and unable to mitigate against the place's wildness. Yet while Evan foregrounds the absence of 'civilising influences', he also stresses the state's intrusive and punitive presence, in the shape of poorhouses, jails, and courts. Law enforcement is the familiar face of the state in Killay, and it is viewed with hostility — a problem to solve rather than the solution to a problem. Evan, like his peers, takes pride in the skill with which he evades and undermines the police, 'the natural enemy of everyone' (p. 70). For instance, when he helps the runaway sailor Bill Jones (who later turns out to be the long-lost son of the local squire) evade detection, he reflects: 'I had the pleasure [...] of feeling that I might have helped a policeman, if I had chosen, and had *not* done it' (p. 53). Attitudes towards the law are similarly negative. When Evan is first invited to a meeting about the Rebecca movement, he notes:

> That the magistrates should be against the meeting did not make me at all averse to going there, for the magistrates, to me and to most poor people, simply meant rich people who were in power, and who made laws to suit themselves, and then send anyone who broke those laws to prison. (p. 62)

Upper Killay is badly served by modern infrastructures and institutions, then, but Evan also leaves his audience wondering whether this is merely the result of a neglectful state or a product of his community's deeply entrenched belief that the state's only function is to punish and control — not protect and support — its subjects.[23]

Despite the important distinctions between Wales's and Ireland's relative positions within the nineteenth-century British state, Claire Connolly's work on Irish roads in Trollope's novels helpfully illuminates the representation of infrastructure in Dillwyn's Welsh text. Trollope's novels, Connolly demonstrates, regularly stage a 'negatively framed connection between out of the way Irish places and neglectful transport infrastructure'.[24] In these remote Irish places, 'to move off the high road is also to slip backwards in time', not because modernity has never touched them, but rather because it has been, done its damage, and gone (Connolly, p. 272). Trollope's novels thus bear witness to the fact that 'many of the great projects of the modernizing

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[23] As Aslami notes, British novels from the 1880s and 1890s reveal the emergence of a vision of the state as 'not only coherent, knowable, and personified, but also heroic and endowed with the capacity to transform people's lives' (p. 5). For Dillwyn's narrator, these fantasies of the state are unavailable, so that his political imagination remains curiously detached from existing political institutions.

[24] Claire Connolly, 'Lane-ism: Anthony Trollope's Irish Roads in Time and Space', in *The Edinburgh Companion to Anthony Trollope*, ed. by Frederik Van Dam, David Skilton, and Ortwin de Graef (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), pp. 272–87 (p. 271).

nineteenth-century British state were first developed in Ireland', leaving in their trail the 'ruins of past improvement' (pp. 275, 280). Yet, as Trollope's Irish roads illuminate a history of state violence, they also raise the question whether 'roads represent the power of the colonial state or rather its uncertain reach?' (p. 274). Dillwyn's depictions of connective infrastructures that fail to fulfil their modernizing and civilizing promises, I argue, invite similar questions about the unequal distribution of modernity in the Victorian four nations and about the uncertain reach of the centralized state's power in its peripheral localities.

In *The Rebecca Rioter* the state's unstable power over its Welsh subjects finds a striking representation in the ease with which characters move on and off the turnpike road network, even before Rebecca's arrival. After leaving Killay the turnpike road passes through a piece of common land called 'Fairwood moor' where the boundaries between state-governed infrastructure and its unenclosed surroundings are blurry, just like the boundary between law and lawlessness. The moor at night, Evan notes, is a place in which even locals need all their wits; on one occasion, charged with fetching home the family's donkey, Evan chooses to 'walk along the grass by the edge of the road instead of taking the shortest cut, because I did not want to get into the bogs' (p. 36). The proximity of the turnpike road to the moor signals relative visibility and safety; conversely, for an outsider (even one from just a dozen miles away), the moor's encroaching presence near the road means danger, partly because of the many hiding places it provides to those wishing to escape scrutiny — a fact that regains significance in Dillwyn's representation of the riots and of Evan's run from the authorities. Evan's search for the donkey is disrupted gruesomely when he witnesses the violent robbery of John Smith, a farmer who had been seen earlier in Killay's public house, 'far gone in liquor already, and calling for a hot brandy-and-water to warm him before he rode across "that cursed old moor"' (p. 35). Evan's response reinforces the lack of 'civilising influences' evoked in the opening chapter: although he suspects the farmer is severely injured, he 'resolve[s] to keep out of sight and not meddle in the matter' (p. 38). Subsequently, he joins the rest of the village in thwarting the police's efforts to find the perpetrators. 'At Upper Killay, where I had lived all my life', he explains, 'ideas of right and wrong were rather mixed, and people generally thought that might was right; and what was the wonder of that, when no one had ever taught them any better?' (p. 37). Dubious morality goes hand in hand with sophisticated skills of evading the state apparatus, physically embodied here by the turnpike road. Thus Evan's memoir suggests a wilfully maintained — and negatively framed — distance from modern civilization. But his insistence that education might have made a difference complicates this suggestion.

In the remainder of this article I offer close readings that seek to demonstrate that Evan's autobiography — despite the narrator's scepticism towards 'civilising influence' and despite his eventual transportation to Australia — reveals a deep investment in the possibility of moral, intellectual, and political development. In examining the conditions that might render positive development possible, I argue, Dillwyn's novel evokes the transformative potential of infrastructure in two distinct ways. First, the novel's plot echoes — with a radical twist — liberal arguments about the circulation of ideas and people: turnpike roads appear as potential agents of transformation at two critical junctures in Evan's life, as they lead to his encounters with Gwenllian Tudor and, later in the text, Rebecca. Second, the text is shaped — structurally and thematically — by Evan's preoccupation with the socially determining power of infrastructural provision. Through the interplay between the generically and ideologically disparate strands that develop around Evan's encounters with Gwenllian and Rebecca, *The Rebecca Rioter* embraces a vision of infrastructure as a public good, but it also explores the fissures that emerge when apparently universal and harmonious accounts of development — of infrastructure, individuals, and nations — are examined from the margins.

Gwenllian: *The Rebecca Rioter* as *Bildungsroman*

Were it not for the novel's title, the opening chapters, describing how Evan 'first fell in with Miss Gwenllian Tudor' (p. 5), might lead readers to expect a different, more conventional Victorian narrative of individual development and socialization. Gwenllian arrives in Evan's life in a driverless carriage. He watches the carriage and knows that 'an upset [will] surely follow' but resolves — in further illustration of Killay's moral shortcomings — that 'it was no business of mine' (p. 6). His attitude changes, however, when 'the young lady [...] chanced to look quickly round just as she got near enough for me to see her face plainly'. Evan describes an instant transformation:

> For a moment her large dark brown eyes looked full into mine, and seemed to be asking for help, and in that moment a curious change came over me — I suddenly became very pitiful for her, and anxious that she should not be hurt. (p. 6)

This moment prises open a potentially transformative space between Evan and the 'rough environment' in which he was raised. The pity and 'anxious' care he feels for the vulnerable stranger distance Evan from the 'wildness' and 'roughness' of his community.

Evan breaks his arm while rescuing Gwenllian and her aunt. He is rewarded for his troubles with Gwenllian's attentions, initially directed towards his physical recovery

and, subsequently, his intellectual and moral improvement. When Evan has recovered fully, she invites him to visit Penfawr, her father's house, for reading and writing lessons. Through her 'strange power', Gwenllian's wishes become Evan's 'law'; he explains that 'there was nothing that I would not do to try and please her, and whatever she told me to do I felt as if I certainly must do' (p. 18). Gwenllian becomes Evan's moral compass as well as an effective teacher: 'She got to make a pretty tidy scholar of me before long', Evan notes, 'for [...] I was quick to learn when I had a mind to it; and I had mind enough to learn when I saw how it pleased her' (p. 29). While the text quickly disperses any illusions about the possibility of a cross-class romance, Dillwyn nevertheless activates generic markers that prime readers for an account of social mobility and individual transformation catalysed by romantic and sexual desire, a plot that would see Evan leaving his 'rough' Welsh origins and becoming socialized into the modern anglicized identity that Gwenllian represents. But while the novel is unequivocal about Gwenllian's morally elevating influence, it also recognizes the incompatibility between the pathway to social advancement she represents and the patterns of communal and national belonging that are central to Evan's self-understanding.

Gwenllian is, in Evan's words, 'one in a thousand' (p. 13), an atypical member of her class who possesses an exceptional capacity for empathy and respect for the rural poor. Her behaviour is juxtaposed to that of her aunt, who 'never seemed to think that poor people could be quite the same flesh and blood as herself' and whose charity is undermined by contempt and condescension (p. 26). The text's structure helps to frame Gwenllian's influence on Evan as both positive and necessary, yet fragile. Gwenllian is physically present in the narrative for three short chapters; they are framed, on one side, by the introductory description of Killay's 'twist toward wildness' and, on the other, by a chapter that begins with a 'sketch of the landlord of our public-house', who 'sometimes treated [his daughter] shamefully when he was drunk', and closes with Evan's passive collusion in violent robbery and manslaughter (pp. 2, 32, 31). Although Gwenllian enables Evan to perceive a need for change where previously he had seen none, her transformative power is limited precisely because it emanates from one exceptional individual. Evan's reaction to the attack on John Smith emphasizes the fragility of her influence: 'Miss Gwenllian and her teaching suddenly [come] across [his] mind', preventing him from becoming 'mixed up in any way with a robbery' (p. 37); he has a sleepless night wondering 'if [he] had that night acted as she would have had [him] do' (p. 44). Yet he refuses to intervene in the crime and 'by degrees [he gets] to think less and less of the murder' (p. 50). Despite Evan's 'queer fancy that at some time or other [Gwenllian] might quite suddenly be able to see [him] or know what [he] was doing when I least expected', physical absence gradually weakens her

sway over his moral conscience and 'ideas of right and wrong' (p. 44). Thus the plot signals the weakness of a privatized infrastructure of individual development, in which 'civilising influences' become the exclusive responsibility of individuals, either in the shape of self-improvement, parental influence, or philanthropy.

But the novel presents another — less contingent — factor that undermines Gwenllian's transformative power. Gwenllian's last name, Tudor, evokes the long history of Wales's complicated 'union' with England, including what Mari Wiliam describes as the 'time-honoured tradition of reiterating Wales's unique yet loyal connection to the monarchy, predominantly through the Tudor "lineage"'.[25] By the same token, her character embodies the future possibility of Wales's harmonious integration into Anglo-British modernity.[26] Evan's recollections reveal his resistance to this vision of the future, as they foreground a deep attachment to his 'own home and country' (p. 178). In this context it becomes significant that a crucial condition for Gwenllian's 'strange power' over Evan lies in his own exceptionality. Recollecting his concern about the local children's behaviour in front of Gwenllian and her aunt, Evan acknowledges that 'there was not much chance of the ladies understanding what was being said, because it was all in Welsh' (p. 10). He links the children's 'rough' behaviour to their use of the Welsh language, while also indicating that this language has become foreign to members of the rural, anglicized elite. Simultaneously, he makes a point of explaining his own ability to communicate with 'the ladies' in English, 'which I had learnt though my mother's being an Englishwoman' (p. 7). The road brings Evan into contact with Gwenllian and her 'dark brown eyes' arrest his attention, but his unusual English-language fluency is the necessary linguistic infrastructure for her improving influence. The novel thus acknowledges the dynamics of language change in nineteenth-century Wales: bilingualism was becoming increasingly common, due to the perceived superiority and real usefulness of the English language, while internal migration led to a steady reduction in the number of those who were able to speak and understand Welsh.[27] As it echoes the *Report*'s (and other contemporary sources') promotion of English as the language of modernity, progress, and civilization, the novel also identifies Evan as a potentially outstanding member of his class and community, more likely to achieve personal and social advancement — and better suited to protagonicity. Instead of following a course that would distance him from his origins and identity, however,

[25] Mari Elin Wiliam, 'Monarchy and National Identity: Wales and the 1953 Coronation', *Cultural and Social History*, 19 (2022), 301–22 (p. 305).

[26] Gramich addresses the significance of characters' names in her introduction (p. xix).

[27] See Geraint H. Jenkins, 'Introduction', in *Language and Community in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Geraint H. Jenkins (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1998), pp. 1–20.

Evan's life — and the narrative of this life — is redirected by the possibility of political and social transformation from within his own social and linguistic community.

Rebecca: *The Rebecca Rioter* as political fiction

Evan is exposed to the flow of radical ideas at Carmarthen Fair, 'a wonderful place for meeting people from all parts of the country' (p. 50), where he listens to a speech by Dillwyn's fictional Rebeccaite organizer Thomas Beynon. Significantly, his immediate response to 'that meeting at Carmarthen' reveals a strange combination of enthusiasm for the cause and ignorance of the political and economic structures Beynon attacks (p. 73). In response to Beynon's criticism of taxation, Evan notes,

> everyone in the room gave a sort of grunt — like there always is in chapel when the preacher is very moving — and we all felt, when we heard him put the matter before us as he did, that it was indeed a burning shame — as he said.

Shortly after, Evan notes that 'he spoke so beautifully, and was so much in earnest, that he entirely carried with him all of us who were listening' (p. 64). Following the meeting, Evan reflects that

> I was burning with impatience to begin fighting against a grievance which I had borne all my life without ever finding out that it was a grievance till Beynon told me so. For, however wrong the turnpikes now appeared to me, I very much doubt that I should have discovered their wrongfulness for myself if no one had put the idea into my head. (p. 73)

Dillwyn's phrases — 'put the matter before us', 'carried with him', 'told me so', and 'put the idea into my head' — signal passivity, creating the impression that Beynon's listeners accept his arguments and demands without question and, more significantly, without full comprehension. This impression is heightened when, responding to Beynon's criticism of the monarchy, Evan's friend Tom Davies 'whisper[s] to [him]: [...] "I was not know for sure what be the Queen, Evan; was you?".' Evan replies, 'Well — no — not to be quite certain sure [...]. But you can see for yourself what a wicked one she must be for to have to do with such goings-on' (p. 63). It is possible to trace in this comic exchange, and Dillwyn's surrounding descriptions, the implication that men like Evan Williams and Tom Davies are ignorant, impressionable, and susceptible to manipulation by radical organizers — easily incited to violence in support of causes they do not fully understand. But the broader context and structure of the text require a more nuanced response. Arguably, when Evan wonders 'how we all managed to stay quiet so long while we were being treated so badly', he expresses a profound

political alienation rather than ignorance (p. 64). To lack the linguistic and conceptual infrastructure for an articulate critique of socio-economic arrangements, Evan's voice insistently reminds us, is not the same as to be ignorant of them.[28]

In fact Beynon inspires enthusiasm in his audience because his words, delivered in the Welsh language, resonate powerfully with their lived experience of infrastructural neglect and economic precarity as well as with their sense of social, cultural, and national belonging. Evan's response to Gwenllian's teachings anticipates his reaction to Beynon's rhetoric, revealing a similarly unquestioning submission: 'I was quite satisfied that whatever she taught me must be all right', he remembers, 'and I wanted to think and do whatever she wanted me to think and do' (p. 30). But while Evan's assent to Gwenllian's moral teaching is rooted in 'worship [...] and longing' (p. 45), his enthusiasm for Beynon's ideas is based in experiential knowledge as well as convictions that are central to his understanding of social forms, but which he has never articulated in political terms. For instance, when Beynon asks, 'What right have the Queen and her Government to put a tax on things that poor people must have? On the things without which they cannot live?' (p. 62), his questions resonate strongly with Evan's belief in 'common property' (p. 23). Earlier in the text, having been compelled by Gwenllian's father 'never to poach [on his grounds] again', Evan explains:

> I never can see that a man has any right to preserve hares and rabbits. When God made the land He put them into it just like the blackberries, and the mushrooms, and such like, for the good of everyone who lives there, and I cannot see what right any man has to take possession of them and call them his own. Why they are common property — just like any moor or common is common property on which the neighbours may turn out their horses, cows, geese, donkeys, pigs, and sheep to graze as they like, and which no man has a right to enclose and shut up from the rest. (p. 62)

Beynon and Evan both use the language of 'rights' to frame taxation on essential goods and practices of enclosure, respectively, as ethical transgressions, which produce and exacerbate unnatural socio-economic distinctions. But while Evan's critique remains curiously limited to the private realm — the rights of 'a man', 'any man', and 'no man' to deprive others of 'common property' — Beynon's speech emphasizes the state's capacity for regulating the distribution of resources. In attacking the state's excessive demands on (some of) its subjects, he also evokes the alternative possibility of political institutions that provide and protect the infrastructures of human survival and, indeed, development — infrastructures such as the commons.

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[28] My thinking about linguistic and conceptual infrastructure is indebted to the work in *Concepts at Work: On the Linguistic Infrastructure of World Politics*, ed. by Piki Ish-Shalom (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2021).

As Beynon asks what the 'Queen [...] and the people she chooses for her ministers do with the money they take from us' (p. 62), his rhetoric goes beyond a simple rejection of taxation and government. Rather, he interrogates the nature and purpose of taxation, asking what goods and services should be taxed and what goods, services, and resources should be public goods. A set of rhetorical questions about Queen and Government — 'Are they poor? Or hungry? Or cold? Or naked? Not they!' (p. 62) — implies that political institutions should, but fail to, provide the basic infrastructures of human life. Through a metonymic conflation of monarch and state, Beynon briefly suggests, only to withdraw, a vision of a caring state: 'Since [the Queen's] power over us is so great, surely her care for us should be equally great; the hand to help should reach out as far as the hand to punish; but is that so? (p. 63). Instead, he emphasizes the remoteness between the monarch — and by extension, state — and the people: 'What does she know of you and me? Nothing. Does she come among us and find out if her servants are treating us well? No, never' (p. 63). Evan stresses the transformative impact of this 'meeting', recalling that it 'made a great change to [me]' (p. 73). Listening to Beynon's words, I argue, provides Evan with a new way to make sense of a life shaped by infrastructural neglect and punitive institutions. But the form of the novel, as suggested above, ensures that from the very first page Evan's recollections are shaped by an acute sense of the ways in which public infrastructures, or their absence, determine the seemingly natural conditions of daily existence. Thus Evan's encounter with Rebecca not only determines the subsequent course of his life, it also profoundly shapes his act of narrating this life.

Beynon's speech enables Evan to articulate infrastructures' power to shape — and perhaps improve — individual and collective futures. Crucially though, he approaches questions of infrastructural provision through the terms of a resistant Welsh nationalism, which further complicates the novel's engagement with nineteenth-century discourses of development.[29] In his focus on 'one tax in particular', the 'absurdly high toll[s]' raised at 'every turnpike', Beynon continues to stress economic inequality and survival (p. 64). Through its emphasis on connective infrastructure, however, the speech evokes broader concerns about education and national civilization. In the decade preceding the Rebecca Riots, campaigns against the 'taxes on knowledge' and excessive postage had given popular currency to the argument that infrastructures of intellectual and moral improvement — the press and the postal service, in particular — ought to be treated as public goods rather than sources of revenue.[30] In this light

[29] Aaron notes that, in the novel, 'English rule is represented as not necessarily desirable for Wales' and that Dillwyn had some connection with Cymru Fydd, a group campaigning for Welsh home rule (p. 128).

[30] For a discussion of the 'early Victorians' emphasis on the morality of diffused knowledge', see Richard Menke, *Telegraphic Realism: Victorian Fiction and Other Information Systems* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), pp. 16–18, 39.

Beynon's claim that the government spends 'little enough [...] on repairing the roads — the state they are always in proves that for itself' takes on additional significance (p. 64). Specifically, the expensive, badly maintained roads come to appear as barriers — maintained either by design or through neglect — that prevent rural populations from accessing 'improving knowledge' and civility. In its emphasis on the poor state of rural infrastructure, the novel implies an alternative perspective on the accusations expressed in the Blue Books, then, attributing blame for the unequal development of modern civilization to the British state rather than to its Welsh subjects. But crucially, as the novel's unrealized *Bildungsroman* plot also suggests, the expansion of centralized institutions and infrastructures throughout the four nations constitutes a troubled solution, at best, to the problem of 'differential provisioning' (Appel, Anand, and Gupta, p. 3).

Rather than argue for the better integration of rural Welsh places into British networks, Beynon responds to poor infrastructural provision with a fierce rejection of improvement on the terms of the Anglo-British state, insisting that 'England [...] is no guide for us' (p. 65). He asks his audience to imagine a national future based on an earlier moment in the history of Wales, prior to Edward I's thirteenth-century conquest of Wales and prior to the 1536 Act of Union. Participation in the riots becomes a patriotic matter, as he reminds his listeners that they 'belong [...] to that wild Wales, which, in days gone by would be ruled by none but her own native princes' (p. 65). As the focus shifts in scale, from the turnpikes to 'the task of helping [Wales] shake off her chains' (p. 65), Beynon's speech evokes the centrality of infrastructure as a site for the construction — imaginative and physical — of national futures.[31] His call to 'destroy every turnpike' becomes about something other, and more, than the abolition of an 'unjust tax', suggesting the necessity of rebuilding infrastructure in radically different ways (p. 65).

Conclusion

But since *The Rebecca Rioter* is a work of historical rather than utopian fiction, no such radical rebuilding materializes within its pages, nor does the novel leave readers with a clear vision of the forms to which such building might aspire. The historical Rebecca Riots led to a modest reform of the turnpike system as well as enhanced efforts by the British state to subdue Welsh difference. In Evan's fictional life participation in the riots

[31] On the role of infrastructures in the project of imagining and constructing different futures, see Appel, Anand, and Gupta, p. 31. For a suggestive reading of the possibility of rebuilding infrastructure to shape different national futures, see Michael Rubenstein, *Public Works: Infrastructure, Irish Modernism, and the Postcolonial* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010).

leads to transportation — suggesting a further dimension of the interplay between 'improvement' and the state's infrastructures of mobility — and a premature death, 'cut off from that liberty to which every man is born, and which gives a sweetness that nothing else can give to life; and [...] from all the people and places that I loved' (p. 173). Intriguingly, rather than the penal state that Evan has skilfully evaded throughout his life, it is his 'worship of Gwenllian' that condemns him to live out his days in an Australian prison, suggesting the enduring tension between individual development and political commitments.[32] After shooting one of Rebecca's 'enemies' during the climactic attack on the Pontardulais turnpike (p. 11), Evan unrepentantly sets out for a future 'in America or any other land where every man (as I had heard) was listened to alike, and had a voice in making the laws which he was expected to obey' (p. 162). It is only when he discovers that his actions have 'brought sorrow and trouble to the person whom I most cared for in the whole world' that he resolves to return to Swansea, to explain himself to Gwenllian (p. 164). Evan's 'insistence on going back to see Miss Gwenllian from Bridgend' is at odds with his defiant commitment to Rebecca and passionate belief in the 'righteousness of the cause for which [he] had been fighting' (p. 122). But arguably, this seemingly strange decision arises from a contradiction in the novel between, on the one hand, profound sympathy for Evan's longing for social transformation and, on the other, authorial distance from his violent involvement in the riots — a contradiction that also informs the novel's dissonant conclusion.

As Gramich notes, the novel's ending expresses Dillwyn's commitment to 'a redemptive and ultimately unrealistic rapprochement between the classes' (p. xix). As Evan returns to the issue of 'civilising influences', he conjectures that

> if the rich would civilise the poor — not merely by giving them money, and blankets, and coals at random, but by going among them with real and unaffected sympathy that forgets differences of rank, and sees in each poor person a fellow-creature with the same faults, virtues, needs, and feelings as a gentleman has — then poor men would not be imbued with that feeling of natural enmity and distrust towards their supervisors which had a very great deal to do with the Rebecca riots. (pp. 173–74)

[32] Space prevents me from discussing transportation and imprisonment — which are described only briefly in Evan's story but which, of course, mediate his autobiographical narrative — in more detail. It is worth noting that several historical rioters — most prominently Dai'r Cantwr (David Davies) and Shoni Sgubor Fawr (John Jones) — were transported to Australia (see David Williams, pp. 286–89). Evan's fate thus closely mirrors historical reality. However, it would also be illuminating to study *The Rebecca Rioter* in relation to the transportation novel genre, to assess further how Evan's narrative is mediated by Britain's penal infrastructure.

Recollecting Gwenllian's impact on his life, Evan acknowledges that 'one person cannot make up for the evils of a whole system', asserting that 'the system of narrowness and of pride, and of exclusiveness, and of no one doing anything for another, unless there is something to be gained in return [...] makes rich and poor natural born enemies to each other' (p. 174). He concludes that 'it is the rich who should make the first attempts to break down these barriers, because they have the responsibility of that superior knowledge and education which come to them as a birthright' (p. 174). Thus the novel's ostensible solution to social inequality and class conflict foregrounds personal morality, albeit on a collective scale, rather than institutional and infrastructural transformation. Evan imagines the working classes and marginalized communities as passive recipients of 'sympathy' and generosity rather than active participants, or indeed leaders, in the project of remaking social forms.

But the trouble with conclusions is that, in their finality and endeavour to impose coherence, they might undermine the nuance and complexity of the words — and, in the case of an autobiography, lives — that precede them. In Evan's case the reliability of the conclusion is undermined further by the mediations of a transcriber and editor, the 'physician to one of our convict establishments' to whom Evan relates his autobiography (p. 178). The brief, seemingly unobtrusive editorial preface claims that 'in transcribing it I have been obliged somewhat to alter the Welshy, and sometimes uncouth, language used by him, as otherwise it might not have been intelligible to the general reader', thus calling into question the subsequent reassurance that 'in other respects the story is here presented to the public exactly as it was told' (p. xxii).

Evan's 'story of the life of my old self' ends on a resigned note, as he regrets not having learnt the 'necessary virtue' of 'patience' earlier in his life (pp. 177, 173). And yet, as I have argued, Evan's narrative choices demonstrate a profound and enduring belief in the determining power of infrastructures and, accordingly, the possibility that alternative infrastructural arrangements can generate different futures. By the end of his life, Evan has learnt patience, since, in his own words, 'a man is always patient when he cannot avoid his trouble, but has to bear it whether he likes or not' (p. 173). But it would be a mistake, I think, to read these words as a moral lesson in resignation for the novel's readers. Rather, the qualifying phrase, 'when he cannot avoid his trouble', emerges as an invitation — and invitation to imagine infrastructures, and national futures, otherwise.