"Is there hope for the future?": the Literary Method of Urban Design as Applied to the South Wales Valleys

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Abstract

This paper tests the possibility of utilizing a new 'literature based' method for the long-term anticipation of future urban settings and their presentation for public and professional consumption via scenario art. This method, the Literary Method of Urban Design, combines design with the literary arts in quite a specific manner and, within this paper, applies it to a specific regional urbanized setting: the South Welsh Valleys. The Literary Method of Urban Design presupposes that the cultural character of a city or town can be predicted -- along with its socio-economic and environmental challenges -- by studying and applying the themes of a geographically informed literary work that describes or references that city or town (including its social or environmental context). Though it can be considered a rather artistic approach to possible urban futures, this paper follows the idea that the literary arts --with their predilection to emotional intensity are probably a useful resource for urbanists as they may contemplate the potentially tragic and epochal changes that (Welsh) towns and cities will likely face in the coming century.

Introduction

Anxious urban policymakers across the world's cities are often in search of methods that will enable them to foretell oncoming socio-political, technological or environmental challenges that lay ahead in the future, near or far (see: Sniazhko, S., 2019). According to recent published research (Marshall, A., 2019 and Marshall, A., 2023) there is a way to predict the general patterns of various socio-environmental urban futures beyond the realms of the probabilistic analysis of current ongoing trends; one that uses significant literary works to decipher the lives of urbanized human beings. This literary arts approach advocates using the literary heritage of selected cities and the method it is distilled into, we can call the "Literary Method of Urban Design". This method offers a unique approach via works of fiction to anticipate potential urban

future scenarios. According to Marshall, A. (2018) and Marshall, A (2023) the Literary Method involves the following three main steps:

1. *Select a work of literature*: Choose a piece of literature that offers insightful themes or narratives about human society, culture, or behavior.

2. *Select a city*: Choose a city that one may wish to design or redesign. This should be an existing city or a revamped / displaced version of a present city.

3. *Apply the themes*: Use the themes or narratives from the selected work of literature to envision the future of the selected city. This could involve designing infrastructure, public spaces, or even social policies that reflect the themes of the literature.

Often the futures of cities around the world are determined ad hoc year on year by commercial trends, by city authorities, and by civic politics (Konvitz, J., 2016) with more distant plans laid out by government technocrats (Kelly, J., 2010 and Denhem-Holm, R., 2014). The latter will try to formulate a good urban plan that balances economics with social issues and with projected finances. However, to do so, the planners need some way to forecast the future and this is usually done by assembling data about changing commercial, transportation, and demographic trends and long-term projected revenues and expenditures (Bruggman, J., 2009). However, I'd like to suggest that the future can be approached via the arts (through the Literary Method) in a way that is useful, and engaging, for both planners, and also students, studying the future.

According to Marshall, A., (2023) there is a way to predict the general socio-environmental futures of cities using literary approaches beyond the realms of data. This approach specifically utilizes the literary heritage of those cities. However, since this particular work was published in the Utopian Studies journal we might have to be aware that it either is a reflection of Utopian humanities scholarship, and thus empathetic of the Utopian impulse, or, indeed, an actual prognostication of "Utopian" urban design. (For explorations about the long-acknowledged problems of deriving social policy from Utopian analysis, see, for example, Davies, 2023). In any case, the suggestion is that the futures of specific urban settings can in some way be predicted by referring to literary works which locate their stories in those same urban settings. The reason why this seems possible is that deep literary investigations of places reflect on the characters to that place. If the place is a city, then the literary work will offer patterns of reflection and experience which determine the forces in that city, and then, if extrapolated into the future, they offer a glimpse of things to come.

As noted above in Marshall (2018) and in Marshall (2019) the first of the three stated steps of the process of the Literary Method is to pick a work of literature. For this particular case study, I've selected the literary work titled "The Bells of Rhymney", a 1930s poem written in English by the Welsh poet Idris Davies. For step two, the towns mentioned in the poem are selected. In anticipation of the third step, the following section outlines the major themes of the selected poem. After this, the subsequent sections will then be applying these themes to the chosen cities.

The Themes of The Bells of Rhymney

The Bells of Rhymney is a poem written by Welsh poet Idris Davies in 1938 and published in a collated book of Davies' poems called Gwalia Deserta (Davies, I., 1938). The poem reflects the economic struggles of various deprived and exploited coal-mining towns in the Valleys of South Wales during the interwar period. At this time, the Great Depression had just recently washed over the global marketplace – and over Wales, too.

In the 1960s the poem became very famous serving as lyrics to a hit song of the same name by the American rock group The Byrds. Those that heard the song version for the first time often believe it to be story of one or other of the major Welsh mining disasters. Indeed such disasters were quite a regular occurrence in South Wales and two particular disasters probably affected much of the tone of Davies' desperate poem; that is the 1913 Senghenydd colliery disaster near Caerphilly and the Marine Colliery disaster of 1927 in Monmouthshire when 52 miners dies in an underground explosion (Graham-Jones, J., 2014, for an outline of these disasters).

Although other written works by Davies show these disasters affected him to the heart (Paul, R., 2009), it is far more the general social and economic background of the South Wales mining community that he was writing about in The Bells of Rhymney. In this poem, Davies seems to highlight the social betrayals suffered by the people of South Wales and also the dashing of their hopes and dreams for a better future. As a son of the Valleys himself, Davies describes from the inside – and with great effect -- the troubled psyche of toiling miners whose lives were entrenched in the unforgiving coal pits. Their struggles, hopes, and perhaps also the rhythmic symphony of their labor became the raw materials for Davies' lyrical laments in The Bells of Rhymney. (Roberts, T., Williams, I., Preston, J., Clarke, N., Odum, M., & O'Gorman, S., 2003) Thus, lines of The Bells of Rhymney reflect their working conditions, their everyday despondency, and the entrenched economic hardships faced by mining communities in general. At the time, the South Wales Valleys were often regarded as a 'hotbed of radicalism', generally of the socialistic kind. The miners' radicalism was largely founded on the appalling conditions they had to work and live in and their observance of how Britain was then dominated by age-old traditional classes whose elite members were unsympathetic to laborers and workers. These conditions and disparities resulted in the miners going on strike to demand no more reductions be taken from their dwindling pay and no more erosion of their work rights. In 1926, these coal miner protests transformed into a national general strike as over one million workers from all industrial sectors of society came out in sympathy for the coal miners. Alas, after some time, the general strike crumbled into defeat.

Ultimately, the strike ended without the miners' demands being met, and many miners returned to work under less favorable conditions than before. The failure of the strike had long-term consequences for the coal mining industry in South Wales, as it weakened the position of trade unions and led to further decline in the industry in the subsequent decades (Sewall and Dear, 2020). The poem can also be

interpreted as a reflection of the way private enterprise and government combined to side against them as well, suggests Wynn-Thomas, M., (2021).

The defeat of the strikers had a profound effect on both the economy and society of South Wales Valleys (Selway, D., 2016). The coal mining industry was already in a state of depression, and after the strike failed, the miners were having their pays cut -- whilst some workers were laid off entirely. All this put the entire South Wales region under stress. On top of this, the health and safety programs were often lax, meaning miners were subjected to risky and dangerous work just as ever – yet paid less for it (Wynne-Thomas, M., 2021). The poem thusly evokes a rising anxiety about safety endured by miner's families and the wider community, all the members of which were aware that the social, financial and managerial backstops for mineworker welfare were being withered away to help mine-owners save their employers businesses and earn investors higher profits.

If that is the social background of Davies' Wales, you might also let me explain the artistic symbols involved. The title refers to the bells of the town of Rhymney, Davies' own hometown. The bells symbolize the passage of time and the cyclical nature of life. The ringing of the bells serves as a reminder of the passing hours – sometimes fraught with anxious worry about the end of the working day perhaps – but it also carries a deeper symbolic meaning, representing both hope and despair expressed at the same time (Vaughn-Jones, 2010; Wynne-Thomas, M., 2021). The bells also convey or embody the relentless passage of time, tolling not only for the hours worked in the subterranean realms but also for the broader year-on-year struggles of the Valley's working class. As the bells ring, they carry the weight of the long duration change that was the industrial revolution (Janes, E., 2023) plus the clangor of technological progress that transformed the landscape of the Valleys and the lives of its people.

Thus, the bell's clangs and clamors not only mark the passage of time but also bear witness to social upheaval. Davies, with a poet's sensitivity, captures the struggles of the working class, their hopes and dreams interwoven with the metallic echoes of the bells (Vaughn-Jones, 2010; Wynne-Thomas, M., 2021). It's a symphony of life, in a way, a composition that encompasses both the mundane and the profound.

The poem also explores themes of loss, both of livelihoods and of a way of life, as well as the resilience of the human spirit in the face of adversity. Davies employs vivid imagery to evoke the harsh realities of coal mining life. He intimates the physical toll on the miners, the bleak landscape it creates, and the emotional burden carried by the women and children in mineworker's families. The tone of the poem is sympathetic and mournful, says Jenkins, L. (1986), expressing solidarity with those who descend the pits and acknowledging the sacrifices they make for their families.

As well as applying the general theme of the poem to the social setting of the towns to see where they may develop, I also aim to read out the individual sentence references that the poem confers upon each town contained within it. This is quite a simple process in this specific case study of the Literary Method of Urban Design, since each of the towns mentioned in the poem has a short sentence for us to engage with. In light of this, each section is headed by the associated line from the poem.

1. "O What Can You Give Me? Say the Sad Bells of Rhymney".

This first line of the poem, reproduced as the title of this section, certainly starts the poem off as a somber dirge. From this line, the bells themselves are so despondent that they begin not via a word but through a plaintiff cry. It is significant that the song version of the poem, written by Pete Seegar, brings this sentiment to the fore by delivering the first line in descending key -- as though it is a misplaced closing line of a lullaby. If interpreted in this dark pessimistic, somewhat terminal, manner then this first line foretells a hopeless yearning, suggesting that the speaker of the line is seeking something more than material gain but cannot really muster up enough optimism to crawl out of a setting of crushing loss and discontent. (Only by the poem's end will we recognize this first line might also be a plea for a fair and meaningful existence amid the struggles of an unsure, technologically gruesome, and unfair world).

Although the first line seems stark in its pessimism, and especially so in a jangly 1960s pop song, we surely must acknowledge audience interpretations can be highly peculiar and subjective, to the point where readers could feel this opening line is actually an emotional and somewhat hopeful plea for resolution, restitution, and some kind of restorative justice. Thus, "Oh- what Can you give me..." might not be thought of as a completely closed and forlorn cry at all, but an open-ended quest for justice.

As foretold in the introduction, Rhymney nowadays is a typical post industrial town. Before the rise of the coal industry, and prior to that the rise of copper and iron sectors there, both Rhymney and most of the South Wales Valleys were purely agrarian. The town only came into being as a solid urban setting during the mature part of the industrial revolution (the late 19th century) as it became a major player in the South Wales coal business. That was until changing global commercial circumstances and stiff international competition forced the mines nearby the town to shut. These closures proceeded slowly at first throughout the early to mid 20th century and then all of a sudden climaxing in the Thatcherite years during the 1980s. As the whole industry collapsed, British conservatives usually defenders of British industrial might refused to prop it up and save it. (Indeed, Sewall, R. & Dear, J., 2020, suggest, the Conservative Party probably wanted the industry to decay just to rid the country of the powerful unions associated with the mining sector).

Since the 1980s, there have been repeated attempts to regenerate and rejuvenate the economy of the South Wales Valleys, mostly aimed at attracting inward business investments. Another avenue for recovery and one sometimes encouraging a smidgen of economic success -- has been to celebrate the South Wales Valleys towns as sites of past industrial glory (to raise community self-esteem and attract tourists, see Price, W.R., 2020).

As an example of the latter, a grand piece of red-brick art was commissioned by the local authorities of the Rhymney Valley from artist Brian Tolle in 2011 and now sits in archway form as a heritage-

affirming sculpture on a nearby ridge (BBC South Wales, 2010). The sculpture has been titled Twisted Chimney and it strongly suggests that the Rhymney Valley's industrial heritage and the town's post-industrial life can be combined functionally to heal various problems; be they social, psychological, or environmental. Whilst the arching Twisted Chimney sculpture is a Valley favorite, it was rather expensive to build and offers little practical help for the Rhymney Valley since it's just a piece of non-functioning art. Perhaps it might attract a few day-trippers from England but its main purpose seems to be to raise the spirit of locals by helping them to celebrate their heritage.

Given all this background, and Rhymney Valley's history, and most significantly given the Davies' opening line in the Bells of Rhymney and the 2011 sculpture built overlooking the Rhymney Valley, I now present a scenario of Rhymney's late 21st century future below.

Figure 1 *Future Rhymney as inspired by Idris Davies' The Bells of Rhymney*
Source: Marshall, A. (2025)

In the scenario envisaged here, a new working carbon-capture factory is built on another ridge overlooking Rhymney -- and in a similar retro-industrial style in archway form (like the original 2011 sculpture). Unlike the Twisting Chimney sculpture, this new sculpted facility is not merely an aesthetic object but a working factory, sucking carbon dioxide from the air and plunging it deep beneath the surface of the Welsh hills. However, like the sculpture, it really acts like a symbol that conveys the idea that it was industrialism that created the South Wales Valleys, and, more significantly for us, that industrialism can yet provide for a sustainable future by neutralizing the carbon dioxide of the industrial world. Those Welsh folk involved in building the facility say they're creating a factory that reverses the damages and dangers of the industrial revolution (in the line of modern decarbonizing technopreneurs outlined by MIT writers like Herzog, 2018), and that it can also prompt economic development of South Wales (echoing the likes of writers like Lenox (2018).

However, carbon capture technology suffers numerous problems, such as the following:

Profound Technological Challenges: Carbon sequestration technologies are still in relatively early stages of development and deployment. The most common method, geological storage, involves injecting captured carbon dioxide into underground formations. This process requires suitable geological formations

and can be very expensive. Other methods, such as ocean fertilization or afforestation, also face technological and ecological challenges, such as unintended environmental impacts or limited scalability.

Energy and Resource Intensiveness: Many carbon sequestration methods require significant amounts of energy and resources to operate effectively. For example, capturing carbon dioxide from industrial processes or power plants often requires large amounts of electricity and specialized equipment. Additionally, storing CO_2 underground may require additional energy for compression and transportation. These energy requirements can limit the overall effectiveness of carbon sequestration and may result in increased greenhouse gas emissions from the additional energy generation.

Long-term Viability and Risks: While carbon sequestration has the potential to temporarily mitigate carbon dioxide emissions, there are concerns about its long-term viability and associated risks. For example, stored carbon dioxide could potentially leak back into the atmosphere over time, negating the benefits of sequestration. There are also risks associated with geological storage, such as the potential for earthquakes or groundwater contamination. Furthermore, carbon sequestration may divert attention and resources away from more sustainable solutions, such as renewable energy and energy efficiency measures, which address the root causes of carbon emissions.

If these problems and dangers are so significant then in this case, when The Bells of Rhymney asks "O What Can You Give Me", modern day industrialists are offering dubious promises of redemption and prosperity based upon more risky technology and engineering solutions that probably will not work, let alone spur economic success in the region. In the spirit by which Idris Davies offered up his poem, The Bells of Rhymney might rightly cry out once again (as we see in the final section of this article).

2. "Is there hope for the future? Cry the brown bells of Merthyr."

If in the first line, the bells sound nothing much more than a depressing dirge, the second line might just possibly express a small seed of hope. When an individual or group of individuals are led to contemplate any kind of future for themselves, there is always a chance (though one knows how great this chance is) that things will get better. In this regard, Maybe Davies' poem imagines the 1930s Welsh economy might improve all by itself as time passes. Or maybe it imagines British politics will take a democratic turn, thus offering more power to the working classes than so far gained. Or if the exogenous forces do not improve, perhaps the people of the Valleys can work together within their community independently of the wider British capitalist economy and national political system to become secure themselves as stewards of their own local or regional future (as commented upon by the likes of Ballard, P., 2004 and Ward, M.R.M., 2015). This can be achieved despite the cycle of exploitation and abandonment that has plagued South Wales valleys for a hundred years (again as commented by the likes of Ballard, P., 2004 and Ward, M.R.M., 2015).

The scenario painted here below accepts the possibility that the future of the town Merthyr Tydfil (shortened to Merthyr by Davies) might -- by shear stint of lucky unforeseen circumstances -- head upwards rather than downwards.

Figure 2 *Future Merthyr Tydfil as inspired by Idris Davies' The Bells of Rhymney*
Source: *Marshall, A. (2025)*

Davies himself had a strong connection with the countryside around Merthyr Tydfil. Although he knew it to be despoiled and polluted by the mining industry, with dangerous and toxic slag heaps scattered about just outside the town, Davies could still find within the area, semi-wild serene places that he might explore to reinvigorate his weary industrialized mind. For instance in another poem he says this about the moorlands surrounding Merthyr Tydfil:

> *Scatter my dust on the moorland*
> *Where I dreamed my boyhood's dreams,*
> *Where the reeds are, and the curlews,*
> *And the quiet springs and streams.*

This is the landscape to which Davies escaped for adventure and solace as a youngster and where his boyhood dreams would be formed and fashioned. And as Davies noted elsewhere in the poem above, such "boyhood dreams only die when you do". Indeed, Davies also opined the not uncommon refrain that as one grows older, we often hark to the past as we hope for the future (Alokovska, A., 2018; Sharma, A., 2021).

Given this, and the openness of any future, the above printed scenario forecasts a green and pleasant Merthyr Tydfil where the Glamorganshire canals are regenerated as artificial rivers (in a vein predicted elsewhere in the world by S. Harvolk, L. Symmank, A. Sundermeier, A. Otte, & T.W. Donath., 2014) whilst the damaged hill slopes are reconstituted into urban forests and the hilltops revegetated with vibrant moorland grasses. The specter of a post-industrial wasteland is replaced by one where the beauty, splendor and the natural services that ecosystems might provide are at once practical, aesthetic and spiritual. Instead of the gigantic machine depicted in the previous scenario, in this one, there are trees and grassy zones acting as to capture carbon naturally -- and to store it in a sustainable manner. However, as the illustration shows, just as Merthyr Tydfil starts forging a future that recuperates the natural environment, global warming erupts with ravenous wildfires to indicate that even if the future is rosy, it is still replete with challenges.

3. "Who Made the Mineowner? Say the Black Bells of Rhondda".

If the first line cries hopelessness yet the second evokes some kind of hope by pondering the possibility of a better future, the third line takes a tentative step into the political realm. If we admit that some form of corrective solution can only be applied if we can identify the source of the problem, then this might be what's happening within this line -- and within the graphic scenario presented below.

Figure 3 *Future Rhondda Valley as inspired by Idris Davies' The Bells of Rhymney*
Source: *Marshall, A. (2025)*

The "Who made the mine-owners?" line alludes to the idea that mine companies grew their wealth on the backs of the miners. The future envisaged here acknowledges this situation – and tolerates it somewhat – but it also displays a future wherein there is a strong obligation, written into law and ethical codes, for mining capitalists (plus their investors and industrial managers) to 'pay back' the miners' communities by stimulating and promoting the towns and cities, where they are all entangled together, in order to improve general human welfare and provide for vibrant civic cultures.

Such an agreement harkens back to the corporatist social contracts of the mid twentieth century (Booth, A., 2001), where various socio--economic classes attempted to cooperate for a consensually arranged and shared future. As the graphic above alludes, in the towns of the future Rhondda Valley, labor unions push to allow economic benefits to flow to their members but they do so without threatening either the managerial and upper classes. In turn, the riches made by the mining companies percolates either via tax or by voluntary contributions into the infrastructure of the Rhondda, as well as into its public architecture.

This architectural reinvestment – legally-mandated or not -- tends to serve and satisfy all community members, even if there's a gigantic gulf in personal incomes between rich capitalists and everyday workers. By promoting a splendid civic environ, protestations and advancing radicalism in the

Rhondda Valley is fended off with beautiful public schools and libraries, concert halls, health clinics, civic meeting rooms, and all-access pedestrian walkways, so that the community can at least feel more livable and the people cared for in some manner (at least in comparison to the late 20th and early 21st centuries – see Rees, G., & Rees, T.L. (Eds.), 1980, and Thompson, Piers, Jones-Evans, Dylan & Kwong, Caleb., 2012) .

4. "And Who Robbed the Miner? Cry the Grim Bells of Blaina."

As the poem unfolds into the fourth line, those that are suffering under an exploitative working setting declare it openly; the miners are being "robbed"! Sitting line outlined previously, we see the poem move from seeking empathy and humanity to becoming a clarion call for rebelling against the biased policies of the mine-owners and their friends in government. According to this line, the miners of the South Wales Valleys, including the small town of Blaina, have been robbed of their dignity, their safety, as well as any fair treatment and future economic welfare. Thusly, the fourth line comes as a cry for resisting those perpetuating social and economic injustice. In the scenario pictured below, this call for justice has been – over a lengthy period of time, decades maybe – more or less heeded and achieved.

Figure 4 *Future Blaina as inspired by Idris Davies' The Bells of Rhymney*
Source: Marshall, A. (2025)

Currently, Blaina has a beautiful, rehabilitated lake in the northernmost reaches of the town located just under the Cwmcylyn mountain reserve. In a way, it can be held out as a successful example of ongoing environmental restoration in the South Wales Valleys since the once polluted waterway has gradually been returned to pre-industrialized tranquil beauty. Compared to decades past, the decades of the future will see slowly developing within the lake a healthier arrangement of non-dangerous waterborne life forms – including fish and freshwater crustaceans -- that is fast attracting greater and greater hordes of tourists and weekenders, especially foodies, nature-lovers and anglers.

However, because it is becoming so beautiful, the lakefront zone has also become prime real estate for the private housing market and the reserve is set to become much more limited in access; with new luxury homes and apartments restricting public ingress to lakeshore and associated wetlands.

This growing exclusivity does not go unnoticed by the rest of Blaina's residents and, eventually, they gather together to publicly insist on their right to partake in the beauty of the lake by composing community-wide public access by-laws. These act to robustly preserve public walkways, cycleways, boat ramps and boardwalks to and from -- and around -- the lake. The town of Blaina then works with various social clubs and civic groups to assert common ownership over the lake and its surrounds, to foster its burgeoning natural beauty, and also to creatively integrate the industrial heritage of the reserve. In this way, an old canal boat becomes a floating organic produce cafe, and chiming vibrational wind turbines – shaped like pithead support towers of yesteryear – are erected and re-erected to give future Blaina its own distinctive suburban landscape.

5. "They Will Plunder Willy-nilly, Say the Bells of Caerphilly"

Halfway through the poem -- and just as we might hope for some workable compromise between the capitalist class and the working class as the towns of South Wales Valleys forge their own future -- a series of disastrous climate change events will likely wreak havoc upon the Welsh landscape. This graphic scenario below, for instance, shows the town of Caerphilly in flood after a series of record-breaking rainstorms.

Figure 5 *Future Caerphilly as inspired by Idris Davies' The Bells of Rhymney*
Source: *Marshall, A. (2025)*

Far from being an isolated event though, as the 21st century proceeds and climate change in Britain becomes more pronounced, such floods become more and more common (see Davies, W., 2020). Floods like these not only drown riverside towns in stagnant water, they convey great pollution through the streets and cause landslides large and small. Since, some of these landslides unearth un-remediated industrial waste from decades past (as explained by Cassale, R. & Margottini, C., 1999) as well as more recent agricultural waste. All this flooding and associated pollution destroys or degrades infrastructure, from roads and bridges to sewage systems and public buildings. Indeed, such watery degradation will probably ruin the old stone facades of many well-loved works of South Wales architecture, covering them in slimy dirty

filth – and eroding them away little by little as well. Thus, climate change challenges the architectural heritage of Caerphilly which -- building by building – gradually crumbles. Some waterways are so engulfed and swollen by continuing rainstorms that South Wales Valleys might be subject to perma-flood conditions – and revert to being wetlands.

Of course, although climate change is every body's concern, those capitalist enterprises who gain profits by producing and selling climate-changing products, especially coal and steel, will be the ones to drag their feet as a transition to a fully sustainable economy is tabled by political leaders then recognized as important by the people (as explored by Klein, N., 2015). Thus, this fifth line of Davies' poem ("They will plunder willy-nilly") warns that the gross industrial exploitation of the Valleys is far from a thing of the past but may continue in the future.

6. "They Have Fangs, They Have Teeth, Shout the Loud Bells of Neath".

Whilst some single environmentally-challenging businesses admit to and apologize for their adverse ecological impact – and even promise to change their ways toward a more sustainable form – there are those who will probably long continue to deny climate change or even suggest that it is not such a bad thing anyhow (as promoted by the likes of Rathi, A., 2024). Such industrialists will fight back against eco-consciousness of both governments and the public to derail restrictions as best they can (as explained by Gouldson, A., & Murphy, J., 1998) including via public statements and straight-out propaganda saying that the global economy must on no account be hurt just to stop dubious adverse climate change impacts.

If the coming future decades, Britain falls under such a regime of organized and well-funded resistance to eco-friendliness -- and with some fossil fuel friendly governments back in power -- then environmentally-degrading industries (from coal mining to gas fracking to ironmaking and copper-making) might well find themselves getting huge subsidies and supportive legal frameworks. This might especially apply to South Wales -- if it does not manage to expunge itself from the United Kingdom by the later decades of the 21st century.

Of course, because such enterprises can perhaps only maintain their profitability by being regulated by very soft environmental standards -- and chronically bad labour conditions -- then when new iron foundries and coal mines are opened-up later this century in the South Wales Valleys, a new program of environmental degradation and worker exploitation will arise. South Welsh towns like Neath, who had spent decades rehabilitating polluted streams and slag heaps, now become degraded once again.

One of the ways that governments, conservative figures, and corporations can begin this grand re-infliction of past deeds onto future Welsh communities is by promising money for traditional Welsh cultural ventures, including Rugby Clubs and heritage sites like Neath abbey.

Figure 6 *Future Neath as inspired by Idris Davies' The Bells of Rhymney*

Source: *Marshall, A. (2025)*

Though one of these is derived from English culture and the other was wrecked by an English monarch (when King Henry VIII dissolved all the nation's monasteries in in the 1530s) they are both regarded as quintessentially part of the South Wales landscape, Because the new copper makers and coal miner operators promise to support both rugby and the Neath Abbey, they are forgiven for their deadly social and environmental sins. Anyone that disparages such investment in popular Welsh culture is then suspected of being unpatriotic and criticized for being anti-Welsh.

7. "Even God is uneasy, say the moist bells of Swansea".

If there is a resurgence in industrialism -- and grand-scale technological projects in the vein of some of those depicted above -- then renewed iron smelting and coal mining might encourage a grand rise in financial investment into the South Wales Valleys. Probably, in this case, the British government will also forge ahead with a variety of new grand infrastructure projects in late 21st century Wales. One of these is a grand new lagoon-like harbor port for Swansea, as depicted below (and which serves as an enlarged Vision of present proposals for an artificial lagoon near the city, see BBC Wales, 2018).

Figure 7 *Future Swansea as inspired by Idris Davies' The Bells of Rhymney*
Source: *Marshall, A. (2025)*

However, as the line "Even God is Uneasy" attests, such huge projects might well provoke a sense of unease from many Swansea residents. There are huge environmental problems associated with setting up new ports. Here are some of the key challenges and problems (as explained by the likes of experts like Braathen, N. A., & Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development ,2011; Lalla-Ruiz, E., Heilig, L. & S. Voos., 2019; Nogué-Algueró, B., 2020; Roberts, T., Williams, I., Preston, J., Clarke, N., Odum, M., & O'Gorman, S., 2023):

A. Air and Water Pollution: Ports are major hubs of economic activity, but they also contribute to local air and water pollution. Emissions from ships, trucks, and port machinery can release pollutants into the air, affecting both human health and the environment. Water pollution occurs due to ballast water discharge, oil spills, and other contaminants. These pollutants can harm marine ecosystems and coastal areas.

B. Greenhouse Gas Emissions: The shipping industry is a significant source of greenhouse gas emissions. Ports play a crucial role in this, as they handle cargo and facilitate maritime transport. Efforts to reduce emissions need to extend beyond seagoing ships alone. Ports must adopt sustainable practices to minimize their carbon footprint.

C. Noise and Air Pollution: Port operations involve heavy machinery, trucks, and ships. Noise pollution from these activities can impact nearby communities and wildlife. Ports also attract a large volume of cargo and vehicular traffic. Congestion around ports can lead to increased emissions, longer travel times, and disruptions to local communities.

D. Contamination of Sediments: Sediments in port areas can become contaminated with heavy metals, chemicals, and other pollutants. These sediments may affect marine life and habitats.

E. Socio-Cultural Impacts: Port development may necessitate the relocation of communities or changes to local livelihoods. Balancing economic growth with social and cultural considerations is essential. Some communities may be displace. Many of the new jobs will go to outsiders. And social vices such as crime and prostitution may take a bound upwards.

If we are sympathetic to Idris Davies experience with industrial developments, all these impacts would make any kind of bell-tolling Christian rather uneasy about Swansea's new port, especially if nature, labour and the nearby social settings, were so grossly endangered.

8. "Put the Vandals in Court, Cry the Bells of Newport"

Despite the grand nature Swansea's new lagoon port, industrialists of the later 21st century are seeking taxpayer funds to for even grander projects in South Wales. As depicted below, one of these is the planning and construction of a gigantic, bridged dam built between the Welsh city of Newport and the English city of Bristol. This "Newport Mega-Bridge" is set to serve as a vital defense mechanism against the increasing threats posed by climate change, safeguarding the coastal towns of the Bristol Channel from the impacts of coastal flooding and storm surges. The barrier also takes advantage of the strong tidal forces of the Bristol Channel to act as an energy harvester. As the tidal waters flow out, they drive massive hydro-turbines which can then supply electricity to just about all southern Wales and southern England. Also, because the barrier is so massive, it also acts a linear city stretching right across the Bristol Channel, complete with retro-futuristic buildings, both public and private perched atop it.

Figure 8 *Future Newport as inspired by Idris Davies' The Bells of Rhymney*
Source: *Marshall, A. (2025)*

Alas, although the Newport Mega-Bridge looks stunning, the social and environmental costs are likely to be huge. Using other megaprojects as a guide (for instance, those covered in Diaz-Orueta & Fainstein, 2008; Korytárová, Jana. & Hromádka, Vit., 2014; Flyvbjerg, B; Bruzelius, N., & W. Rothengatter., 2023) we can see some of these costs might include:

A. *Displacement of communities:* Megaprojects often require the acquisition of large swathes of land, which can result in the displacement of local communities and disruption of their social fabric. People may lose their homes, livelihoods, and connections to their cultural heritage.

B. *Inequality and gentrification:* Megaprojects can exacerbate socioeconomic inequalities by favoring wealthy investors and residents while marginalizing low-income communities. Gentrification may

occur as property values rise, leading to the displacement of existing residents who can no longer afford to live in the area.

C. *Environmental degradation*: The construction and operation of megaprojects can lead to environmental degradation, including habitat destruction, pollution, and depletion of natural resources. This can have adverse effects on local ecosystems and biodiversity, as well as the health and well-being of nearby communities.

D. *Social disruption*: The influx of new residents and workers associated with megaprojects can strain existing infrastructure and services, leading to congestion, overcrowding, and increased pressure on public amenities such as schools, healthcare facilities, and transportation systems. This can disrupt the daily lives of local residents and contribute to social tensions.

E. *Cultural erosion*: Megaprojects may result in the loss of cultural heritage and identity as traditional communities are displaced and historic sites are demolished or altered to make way for new development. This can lead to a sense of loss and alienation among affected populations.

Overall, while megaprojects like the Newport Line may promise economic growth and development, but they act – as presaged by Idris Davies   as a vandalization of Wales' south coast and maybe the entire Bristol Channel.

9. "And what will you give me, say the sad bells of Rhymney"

The last line of the poem is the same as the first. As declared earlier, when the poem is sung to the tune of Pete Seegar's arrangement, this line is performed in a terminating tone -- both its first and final utterances. Now, having worked our way through the above series of future scenarios -- both dark and bright, and from 'modest' to "mega", I now venture to lay out a (positive) scenario for the first line (after it was initially introduced above in section one as being very negative). In this final scenario, the titular South Wales town of Davies' poem feels only loosely conscious of the mega-style technophilic promises mentioned in the two sections immediately above, and actually just about abandons the glorious promises of giant projects altogether. In their stead, the citizens of future Rhymney experiment with smaller scale industrial solutions to the precise mix of problems of the Valley. What is proposed is "Green" low-tech solutions that connect South Wales' heritage and culture with its people and its future.

Figure 9 Future Rhymney II as inspired by Idris Davies' The Bells of Rhymney
Source: Marshall, A. (2025)

These "lower tech" or "appropriate tech" solutions will include:

A. The re-establishment of South Wales railway lines that were closed in the post-industrial era (a process that might soon have precedents as long-abandoned railways in western Wales are being slated to be rebuilt, see Shuttleworth, P. & Servini, N., 2024).

B. The subsidization of local beer-crafting industries to lend the place a certain commercial and cultural flavor (as a precedent, see Myles, C.C., & Breen, J.M., 2018)

C. An expansion of walkways around the landscape, through farmlands and forests and towns, along ancient pre-industrial droveways, and with strong citizen-made stone bridges and community maintenance programs. This would certainly please Idris Davies since he was a keen walker himself, finding inspiration in the contrast between the rolling hills and the industrial feel of many South Wales towns (Janes, 2023). It allows for sustainable movement of locals and the development of tourism – something that the original twisted chimney aimed to do too (see BBC, 2010, and Price & Rhodes, 2020).

D. And, most visibly, the carbon capture factory plan is transformed just before it gets started to be a housing plan, where the magnificent arching monolith serves not to promote a dubious industry but as high-density housing for local homeless.

Summary

There is a possibility that the future of the South Wales Valleys might improve through technological mega-projects and massive re-industrialization -- despite such developments relying on unproved and over-hyped technologies like carbon capture and sustainable copper-making. However, the Literary Method of Urban Design asks us to seriously gaze through a particular literary lens when scoping that future. In this regard, Idris Davies' The Bells of Rhymney offers us a challenging, perhaps gloomy, future – but one where the seeds of hope are allowed to grow if the worst excesses of capitalist industrialism are reigned-in democratically.

Of course, as with just about any poem, the Bells of Rhymney as a whole, and its individual lines, too, are open to multiple meanings. Most saliently, this poem might seem but a gloomy tale of hopelessness and despair but since it was uttered so determinedly and emotionally at a time of Welsh economic desperation, it can also be seen as an active cry for a way to open up a hopeful future.
Nowadays, the South Wales Valleys are a post-industrial landscape. As the coal industry continued to decline in the latter half of the 20th century, many industrial sites closed as well, or were relocated, or transformed. The once-active mines and factories have given way to a different kind of landscape—one shaped by post-industrial social change and environmental remediation, and one which constantly reflects upon community identity and its loss, and to possible economic alternatives in the public service, private light industry, and digital economies. Communities in the Valleys nowadays still face economic and

commercial challenges due to their isolation along the main westward automotive corridors of the UK and the stigma of decaying industrial heritage. Despite the changes and challenges, the South Wales Valleys continue to transform though quite slowly -- and the region is still probably one of the poorest and most underprivileged in the UK, with high unemployment and high child poverty rates. Indeed, social progress after the mine closures of the 1960s, 70s and 80s has been exceedingly slow, if not backward – and clearly lagging behind the rest of the nation.

In the early 21st century, Wales has tried to adopt a range of new schemes devoted to the environment; from the "Green Recovery" schemes to "Green Cities" schemes and ideas of "Green Growth" (see Cato, M. S., 2007; Messenger & Stephanie, 2021). At the same time there has been calls for Wales to draw upon its cultural and artistic heritage as it draws up a creative economy (as outlined by Cato, M. S., 2007; Thompson, P., Jones-Evans, D. & Kwong, C., 2018; Myles, C.C., & Breen, J.M., 2018; Price, W.R., 2020). My suggestion here is not that literary heritage of South Wales might be deeply involved in the consumable content of tourist-friendly economic attractions, but that it might well be used to predict the pathway of the Valleys forays into "Green Growth" and its "Heritage Industry". To express this concretely, Idris Davies' "the Bells of Rhymney", as famous as it is in some popular culture circles, offers a reflective, historical, emotional and direct prediction of the future of the South Wales towns by suggesting we either forego rampant earth-destroying, though perhaps profitable industrial projects, in favor of a future that welcomes the reinvigoration of the Valley's natural settings and a care for community members via smaller-scale – and fairer -- technological interventions. The Bells of Rhymney are daily tolled via its name-sake pop song even today. With a little bit of luck, these bells are released of their overwhelming sadness and stigma to see the darksome coal-dusted Valleys' they elicit grow green for a moment -- at least in the mind.

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