

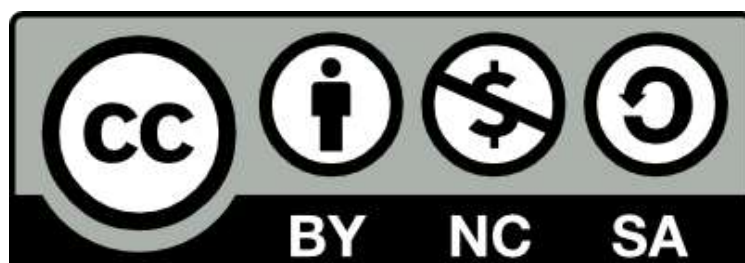
From Kitchen Table to Digital Anytime: Hay Festival and the Creation of a British Literary Institution

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Abstract

This thesis is a close study of Hay Festival and its influence on contemporary literary culture within its thirty-seven year history from 1987 to 2024. More specifically, the project explores its expansion from a small family-run arts festival with a single, definable annual festival in Wales into a wide-ranging international charity and arts organisation with multiple festivals and projects running year-round. As the festival markets itself without the definite article, this thesis will use the term ‘Hay Festival’ throughout the thesis. The accession of Hay Festival’s materials to the British Library in 2017 has been highly influential on the outcome of this project and is a strong indication of the festival’s national institutionalisation. The thesis argues that despite a recent marginalisation of literature at Hay Festival – with literature becoming one type of event among many – the festival is a powerful producer of stories that, as an institution, articulates its history and its place within the changing local and digital environments of contemporary literary culture.

The purpose of this project is to examine the central role that Hay Festival has played in particular to changes in authorship, audience, funding, and the growing commercialisation of arts organisations in the past four decades. Part one, ‘Histories,’ provides an archivally-informed history and analysis of how Hay Festival and its myriad projects and festivals developed to be one of the most successful cultural organisations of its kind. Part two, ‘Places,’ studies the impact of Hay Festival’s local and digital environments, examining the influence of the Welsh-English border landscape surrounding it, and the role of digital technology in its story. Overall, this thesis argues that Hay Festival has made a rich contribution to both the story of arts organisations in modern Britain and to the resilience of literary festivals as an international phenomenon in a post-pandemic digital era.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to my supervisors, Rebecca Roach, Alexandra Harris, and John Fagg, for their immeasurable kindness, constant guidance, and encouragement throughout this project. Thank you for being in my corner. An extra special thanks to Becky for collaborating on the research interviews with me.

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For the TIFA team, I loved working with you. Thank you to the British Library, in particular Eleanor Dickens and Rachel Foss, for sharing their expertise and introducing me to archives. Allowing me to work so closely and independently with the Hay archive inherently shaped this project and was an experience that I hope I never forget.

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I am most grateful for the support of my family and friends. Thank you to Ruth Davies for our sixteen years of friendship, the best of my life. For Kate, Ian, and Jackie Cobain, thanks for everything. To Max Cobain, thank you for the reassurance, love, and long-distance calls – bless the telephone.

I would like to thank my grandad, for his curiosity and humour. To my brothers, I miss you when you are not here. Finally, I could not have done this project without the support of my parents. Thank you for letting me come home, keeping me warm with endless cups of tea, and distracting me (in the best way) always.

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Introduction

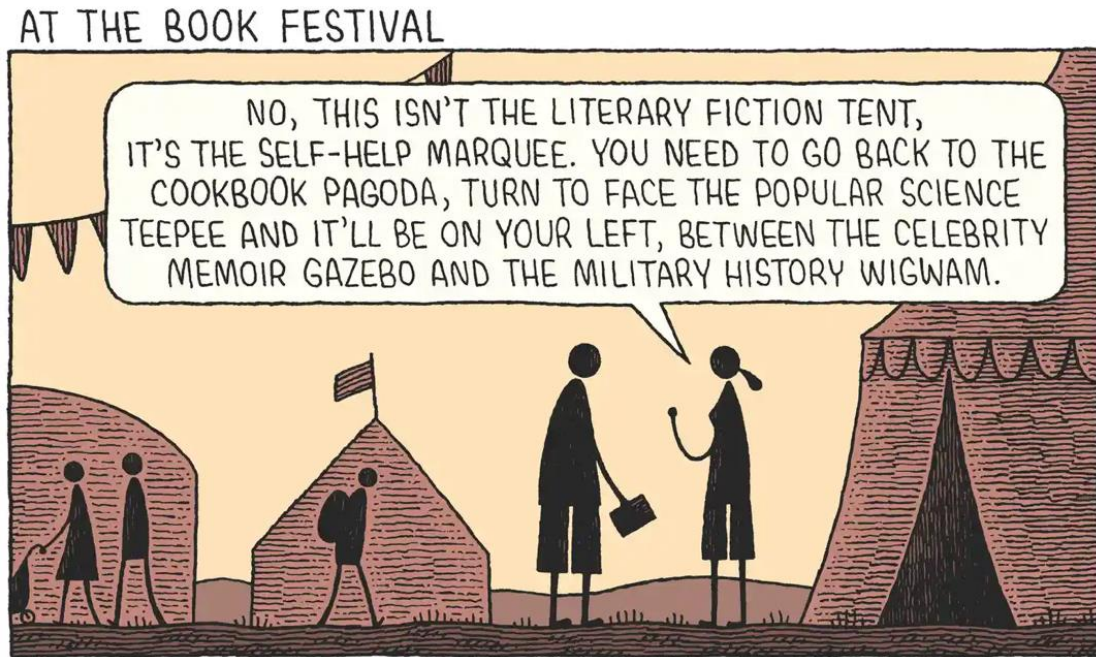


Figure 1: Tom Gauld, 'At the Book Festival,' *The Guardian* (London), June 4, 2016.

Satirising contemporary literary festivals, this cartoon strip by Tom Gauld (Figure 1) depicts the dilution of literature events at festivals professing to be about books.¹ With a book in hand, a festivalgoer asks a fellow attendee for directions to 'the literary fiction tent,' to which the comic reply discloses the numerous other genre sites at the festival (cookery, self-help, popular science, celebrity memoir). Using camping terminology to parody the literary festival, Gauld's strip, titled 'At the Book Festival,' pictures the festival site with bunting, flags, and rolling hills in the background. Due to the date of the strip's publishing at the start of June 2016, we can infer that Gauld, at least in part, refers to one large, successful festival with a similar bunting-donned, tented, and hilly site that takes place from the end of May until the beginning of June: Hay Festival. Gauld's cartoon is a suitable introduction for the topic of this thesis, Hay Festival itself. It depicts the contemporary literary festival and the

¹ Tom Gauld, 'At the Book Festival,' *Guardian* (London), June 4, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/picture/2016/jun/04/tom-gauld-on-book-festivals-cartoon>.

market segmentation of literature, where literature at literary festivals becomes one ‘genre’ of event among many. The phenomenon of Hay Festival is satirised, with the figures illustrated as lone and even confused individuals, silhouetted against the sepia backdrop of the festival. In a similar way to Gauld’s searching festivalgoer, this thesis focuses on the literature at a festival that has become a global and cultural phenomenon amongst the influx of other topics that have emerged in recent years. Aine Venables, Hay Festival’s education director, discusses the festival’s broader approach to literature being ‘more interested in stories actually than books,’ as ‘narrative covers everything from visual communication, storytelling, listening to somebody on the bus and thinking about your own story’.² In this thesis, I examine Hay Festival’s approach to literature and its influence on contemporary literary culture since the 1980s, and explore its development from a small, rural arts festival into a British institution.

Hosting its first event in 1988, Hay Festival is now one of the world’s largest and most successful literary festivals in the world, with around 150,000 visitors to its Welsh festival each year, contributing £25 million to the local economy each year, and providing 400 jobs annually, along with various global offshoot festivals, education and outreach projects.³ Hay Festival is rurally located, set in a landscape of historical literary importance in the Black Mountains, in the border country between England and Wales. The festival takes its name from its local town, Hay-on-Wye, the self-professed ‘world’s first book town’ which has around thirty bookshops and 2,000 inhabitants. Since beginning this thesis in 2020, the festival’s co-founder and long-term director Peter Florence left his role after a bullying claim was upheld, and since, Hay Festival has undergone a major shift, causing this project to adjust accordingly. The subsequent changes to the festival will be explored within this thesis.

² Aine Venables, interview by Rebecca Roach, Zoom, October 8, 2022.

³ Based within a thirty-minute drive radius of Hay-on-Wye. Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, ‘Written evidence submitted by the Hay Festival (FES0101),’ *The Future of UK Music Festivals*, May 29, 2021, <https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/21325/html/>.

The temporary and ephemeral nature of literary festivals make them difficult to analyse. Therefore, this thesis utilises mixed methods to piece together the differing fragments that make up the case study of Hay Festival. This project is the result of a Collaborative Doctoral Award (CDA) partnership with Hay Festival, with unique access to the festival site, staff members, and audiences, as well as the opportunity to catalogue the newly available Hay Festival Manuscript Archive at the British Library. This access has resulted in a thesis that analyses archival materials (programmes, letters and emails between staff and authors, newspaper clippings, hand drawn maps, funding applications, and festival accounts), qualitative research interviews with Hay Festival staff and audience members, social media posts and comments, and literary texts and their corresponding Hay Festival events, to narrate and interrogate the story of Hay Festival and its negotiation of both commercial and cultural imperatives.

The mixed methods of this interdisciplinary thesis is guided by the work of other scholars, including Anna Neima and Kathy Rose Williams, who have written histories of large UK cultural institutions, and greatly influences how the thesis is written, and as such, it is split into two parts.⁴ Part one, 'Histories,' provides an archivally-informed history and analysis of how Hay Festival and its myriad projects and iterations developed to be one of the most successful literary festivals in the world. In this part, I write a history of the festival, weaving a story with different key characters and moments to narrate the festival's extraordinary evolution and contribution to literary culture. The second part, 'Places,' studies the impact of Hay Festival's local and digital environments primarily by combining empirical research with literary analysis. As I focus on the case study of Hay Festival and its role in the

⁴ Anna Neima, 'Dartington Hall and Social Reform in Interwar Britain,' PhD dissertation, (University of Cambridge, 2018), Apollo, University of Cambridge Repository, <https://doi.org/10.17863/CAM.36969>; Kathy Rose Williams, 'Making Space, Making History: Cultural Work, Heritage and the Production of Space at Southbank Centre,' PhD dissertation, (City, University of London, City Research Online, 2018), 88-89, <https://openaccess.city.ac.uk/id/eprint/21906/>.

development of British literary culture and shaping cultural understandings of literature and reading today, the literary analysis foregrounds the role of literature at Hay Festival.⁵ I perform close readings of texts, events, and oral histories from Hay Festival staff members and focus groups with the festival's audiences to demonstrate how literature permeates all areas of the festival.

As a gathering of readers and authors united through a shared interest in discussing literature, Hay Festival and its events fall under the definition of 'social reading practices' which can come in the form of book clubs, mass reading events, author interviews, as well as literary festivals. Social reading practices have variously been identified and studied in previous research, though not to great length, and the largest literary festivals in the world, Hay Festival, has been understudied.⁶ In addition to using the aforementioned original research interviews and archival research, this thesis also studies a broad range of scholarship rooted in literary studies, publishing studies, performance and audience studies, sociology, and cultural geography, among others. This thesis places Hay Festival within the landscape of British literary culture, examining the festival's history to understand its role in shaping broader social reading practices today.

Spanning the period of the coronavirus pandemic, this thesis investigates the dramatic shift in social reading practices into the online space and the subsequent changed cultural

⁵ This is in part influenced by Ellen Wiles's dissertation and its style, written in 'experiential literary ethnography,' or 'speakerly language – language that speaks, reflexively, to these ideas about sound and voice,' to reflect and re-evolve the experience of the live literature event. See: Ellen Wiles, 'Live Literature and Culture Value: Explorations in Experiential Literary Ethnography,' PhD dissertation, (University of Stirling, STORRE: Stirling Online Research Repository, 2019), 16-20.

⁶ Janice Radway, *A Feeling for Books: The Book-of-the-Month Club, Literary Taste, and Middle-Class Desire* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); Elizabeth Long, *Book Clubs: Women and the Uses of Reading in Everyday Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); Beth Driscoll, *The New Literary Middlebrow: Tastemakers and Reading in the Twenty-First Century* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Wenche Ommundsen, 'Literary Festivals and Cultural Consumption,' *Australian Literary Studies* 24, no.1 (2009), doi: 10.20314/als.8316a06a76; Danielle Fuller and DeNel Rehberg Sedo, *Reading Beyond the Book: The Social Practices of Contemporary Literary Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2013); Rebecca Roach, *Literature and the Rise of the Interview* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); Millicent Weber, *Literary Festivals and Contemporary Book Culture* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

environment that literary festivals now endure. While some research exists about the use of digital technologies at literary festivals, these studies now need updating following radical developments in not only digital technology and how literary events look, but also how audiences and authors experience digital events following the pandemic. The results of this project may provide insight into audience perceptions of digital literary festivals through focus group data, as well as the semi-structured research interviews providing a unique insight into the challenges faced by the cultural workers at Hay Festival creating digital events.

In addition to this thesis, an outcome of this project has been the catalogued Hay Festival Manuscript Archive at the British Library which will enable other researchers to learn more about Hay Festival. At the close of the project, the oral history accounts with Hay Festival staff members will be deposited at the British Library to further augment the Hay Festival archive and inform the work of any future researchers into Hay Festival and literary festivals more broadly. By collecting information on audiences, authors, and other cultural workers' intentions and opinions of literary festivals, this thesis may provide Hay Festival with the opportunity to use this research in its fundraising and sponsorship efforts to secure a stable future for the organisation.

Archival reflections

This thesis is the first study to use the archive of a literary festival as the core basis for its analysis and is the first singular history of Hay Festival.⁷ The organisation's archive was

⁷ Other scholars have looked at Hay Festival as an example within wider projects or as the focus for journal articles. See: Grzegorz Kwiatkowski, Ove Oklevik, Anne-Mette Hjalager, and Helene Maristuen, 'The Assemblers of Rural Festivals: Organizers, Visitors and Locals,' *European Planning Studies* 28, no. 2 (2020): 256, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2019.1651829>; Ellen Wiles, 'The Hay Festival: The Remote Welsh Field That Stages the Global Publishing Industry,' in *Live Literature: The Experience and Cultural Value of Literary Performance Events from Salons to Festivals* (Cham: Springer International Publishing AG, 2021), 41-138 and Wiles's dissertation with the same focus, 'Live Literature and Culture Value: Explorations in Experiential

accessed by the British Library in 2017 to celebrate the festival's 30th anniversary and cement its place within the prestige and cultural capital of the national library. The wider Hay Festival archive is comprised of some 5,000 audio recordings, 2,000 video recordings, and almost 500 folders of correspondence and admin paperwork. It exists as multifarious forms: cassette tapes, DVDs, DVCs, CDs, floppy discs, and VHS tapes. It comprises the single largest donation of literary recordings to the British Library's collection to date.⁸

Despite this heft, as an archive of an event that is both ephemeral in nature and annually recurring, and as a curated archival deposit where not every document from the festival's history was donated, there are gaps and elisions, leading the co-founder and former director of Hay Festival Peter Florence to state that '[t]he archive is largely documentary. I wish we could somehow record all the friendships, the collaborations, the adventures started at Hay, the sheer human creativity'.⁹ This thesis is conscious of the absences in the archive, attempting to understand what is lost and forgotten, and how research interviews and literary analysis can fill these gaps in to tell the story of one of the largest literary festivals in the world.¹⁰

Literary Ethnography'; Ian Jenkins, 'The Hay Festival: A Longitudinal Study on its Attributes and the Sustainable Impacts on a Small Welsh Town,' in *Literary Tourism: Theories, Practice and Case Studies*, eds Ian Jenkins and Katrin Anna Lund (CABI, 2019), 121, <https://doi.org/10.1079/9781786394590.0120>; Ian Jenkins, 'The Hay Festival: Sustainable Impacts on a Small Welsh Town,' *Tourism Cases* (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1079/tourism.2021.0031>; Liana Giorgi, 'Between Tradition, Vision and Imagination: The Public Sphere of Literature Festivals,' in *Festivals and the Cultural Public Sphere*, eds. Liana Giorgi, Monica Sassatelli, and Gerard Delanty (Oxford: Routledge, 2011); Simone Murray, *The Digital Literary Sphere: Reading, Writing, and Selling Books in the Internet Era* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018); Weber, *Literary Festivals and Contemporary Book Culture*.

⁸ Richard Price, 'A Conversation: Celebrating the Donation of the Hay Festival Archive,' *The British Library Sound and Vision (blog)*, June 20, 2017, <https://blogs.bl.uk/sound-and-vision/2017/06/a-conversation-celebrating-the-donation-of-the-hay-festival-archive.html>.

⁹ Dan Glaister, 'From Heaney's Poetry to Rushdie's Surprise Appearance: Inside Hay's 30-Year Archive,' *Guardian* (London), June 3, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/jun/03/hay-festival-archive-heaney-rushdie-cultural-powerhouse>.

¹⁰ Research into archival absences have influenced my study into the Hay Festival archive and the decisions made by the festival to include or not include documents in the deposited archive. For more, see: Michael Moss and David Thomas, *Archival Silences: Missing, Loss, and Uncreated Archives* (Oxford: Routledge, 2021); Andrew Prescott and Alison Wiggins eds., *Archives: Power, Truth, and Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023); David Thomas, Simon Fowler and Valerie Johnson eds., *The Silence of the Archive* (London: Facet Publishing, 2016).

Even with these lacunae, the Hay Festival archive traces the festival's small beginnings and its early focus on literature and 'other arts media' to the cultural institution that it has become today.¹¹ As well as my cataloguing of the archive in 2022, the archival history of Hay Festival presented here offers original analysis, with the rich range of materials representing the ideas, connections, and planning that Hay Festival used to thrive in a field of numerous other literary festivals. I ask the question: how can the ephemeral spirit, work, connections, and events of a finite and temporary literary festival be remembered and captured within an assortment of documents in an archive?

Short definitions and histories of literary festivals

Historically, festivals have been conceived as recurrent short-term events that celebrate various social, religious, national, ethnic, or historical associations.¹² As festivals have developed in the contemporary world, Andy Bennett, Jodie Taylor, and Ian Woodward argue that they respond to the 'increasingly fragmented' notions of culture and 'processes of cultural pluralization, mobility and globalization, while also communicating something meaningful about identity, locality and belonging'.¹³ Festivals sell cultural performance, generate tourism and have a particular significance in rural communities, making them an important part of the socio-economic make-up of the host areas through their calendar of events.¹⁴

Fundamentally, literary festivals gather readers and authors together in a shared environment to discuss and sell books. They have been traditionally defined as a

¹¹ Norman Florence, Hay Festival programme, 1988, Add MS 89482/4/32, 1, Hay Festival Manuscript Archive, British Library (unless specified otherwise, all the following archival references are to this collection).

¹² Jodie Taylor, Andy Bennett, and Ian Woodward, *The Festivalization of Culture* (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2014), 1.

¹³ Taylor, Bennett, and Woodward, *The Festivalization of Culture*, 1.

¹⁴ Taylor, Bennett, and Woodward, *The Festivalization of Culture*, 2.

‘concentration of events in time and space’ and as a public celebration of literature.¹⁵ During a literary festival, events are held across a site, either contained in one area or sprawling across various venues in a village, town, or city, and take many forms: a typical author interview, with the author answering questions about their book to an audience of readers; a performance or reading from the author’s book; a lecture; a panel conversation; a musical performance, and more. Another characteristic of literary festivals is the festival bookshop, the place where books are browsed, bought, and signed in an all-important chance for the reader to interact with the author.

The twentieth century saw the introduction of what David Finkelstein and Claire Squires call new ‘book events’ and ‘book environments,’ including a fresh focus on the promotion of reading through library events and book reading schemes in the first third of the century, sporadic and short-lived book festivals in Europe in the 1920s and 1930s, and mail order book clubs.¹⁶ In post-war Europe, book fairs where the publishing industry trade rights and market books proliferated, including the Frankfurt Book Fair’s revival and the London Book Fair’s emergence.¹⁷ At this time in Britain, literary festivals began to appear in response to the efforts in Europe in the interwar period to establish national book events, including the Foire Internationale du Livre in Florence and the annual Fiesta del Libro in Spain, both locally-based events that stimulated reading and supported book culture across the regions.¹⁸ The Cheltenham Literature festival was established in 1949 and is widely accepted as being

¹⁵ Giorgi, ‘Between Tradition, Vision and Imagination: The Public Sphere of Literature Festivals,’ 42.

¹⁶ David Finkelstein and Claire Squires, ‘Book Events, Book Environments,’ in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain*, eds. by Andrew Nash, Claire Squires, and I. R. Willison (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 670-672.

¹⁷ Finkelstein and Squires, ‘Book Events, Book Environments,’ 670-673; The Frankfurt Book Fair is the world’s largest trade book fair and first began in the mid-16th century, before stopping in 1632, and then beginning again in 1949. For more on the Frankfurt Book Fair, see: Beth Driscoll and Claire Squires, *The Frankfurt Book Fair and Bestseller Business*, Elements in Publishing and Book Culture (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

¹⁸ Finkelstein and Squires, ‘Book Events, Book Environments,’ 670-671.

the longest-running literature festival in the world.¹⁹ Following this, there was a literary festival boom in the UK in the 1980s, with Edinburgh International Book Festival established in 1983, and Hay Festival hosting its first in 1988. The growth of literary festivals also coincided with the more general festivalisation of culture, with film and music festivals such as South by Southwest (SXSW), Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF), and Glastonbury Festival all established in the seventeen years between 1970 and 1987. From a standing start in the postwar decade, British literary festivals have expanded rapidly to over 200 separate events by the second decade of the twenty-first century. This festivalisation is attributed to the social, cultural, and financial value of festivals to local communities as they shape writing, publishing, and reading communities.²⁰

Unlike in the United States where the state-hopping bookshop tour forms the core of book promotion, in Britain, contemporary literary festivals are a primary feature of the literary promotional circuit.²¹ Though originating in Europe, literary festivals spread quickly to so-called Commonwealth countries – an association of fifty-six countries that had once been a part of the British Empire – where the literary festival circuit is particularly vibrant. Australia arguably boasts the richest literary festival scene with around 112 festivals held across the country in 2023, with major festivals such as Adelaide Writers' Week, Melbourne Writers Festival, and Sydney Writers' Festival populating the summer and autumn literary calendar.²² As a consequence, Australia is also home to many leading scholars researching literary festivals, including Millicent Weber, Beth Driscoll, and Simone Murray, resulting in many of the case studies concentrating on Australian perspectives. Wenche Ommundsen

¹⁹ Driscoll, *The New Literary Middlebrow*, 154.

²⁰ Finkelstein and Squires, 'Book Events, Book Environments,' 668.

²¹ John Freeman, 'Hay Festival: "The Woodstock of the Mind",' *Guardian* (London), June 1, 2008, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2008/jun/01/hayfestivalthewoodstockof>.

²² Lee Tulloch, 'Surprising Events among the Fastest Growing Magnets for Tourism,' *Sydney Morning Herald*, May 15, 2023, <https://www.smh.com.au/traveller/inspiration/surprising-events-among-the-fastest-growing-magnets-for-tourism-20230505-p5d60f.html>.

explores the cultural phenomenon of Australian literary festivals and concludes that Australian literary festivals work to detach themselves from the colonial grip of the original literary festivals in the UK through a process of ‘*differentiation* ... whereby each festival seeks to distinguish itself, not only from stuffy “old world” events, but also from one another’.²³ The festival in Adelaide ‘emphasises its informal, relaxed atmosphere,’ while Melbourne has ‘cosmopolitan sophistication,’ and Sydney orients itself ‘towards the cultural diversity of the city itself’.²⁴

Contributing to the literary promotional circuit, literary festivals possess both commercial and cultural value, hosting literary debates and literary stars while being also ‘enmeshed in the commercial structures of the publishing industry’.²⁵ The commercial aspect of literary festivals departs from the trade book fairs around the world such as Frankfurt and London as instead of catering to the publishing industry exclusively, festivals connect authors and readers through events and book signings which then promote the image of the author and sell books.²⁶ As such, literary festivals play a role in the circulation of ideas about literary celebrity, and many scholars and publications study performing authorship and the role of the audience in detail. Joe Moran’s *Star Authors: Literary Studies in America* (2000), for example, explores the phenomenon of literary celebrity – how it is produced, what kinds of meanings are attached to it, and how these authors grapple with fame, performance, and the new meanings to their work.²⁷ Moran adopts Daniel Boorstin’s definition of a literary celebrity as someone ‘well-known for his well-knownness ... the human pseudo event,’ a definition that aids my discussion about the professionalisation of authors at Hay Festival in

²³ Wenche Ommundsen, ‘The Circus is in Town: Literary Festivals and the Mapping of Cultural Heritage,’ in *Australian Writing and the City: Proceedings of the 1999 Conference Association for the Study of Australian Literature*, eds. by Fran de Groen and Ken Stewart (Sydney: Association for the Study of Australian Literature, 2000), 178.

²⁴ Ommundsen, ‘The Circus is in Town,’ 178.

²⁵ Driscoll, *The New Literary Middlebrow*, 153.

²⁶ Finkelstein and Squires, ‘Book Events, Book Environments,’ 668.

²⁷ Joe Moran, *Star Authors: Literary Celebrity in America* (London: Pluto Press, 2000).

chapter two.²⁸ The commercial value of literary festivals is arguably as important as the cultural, and as government arts funding in the UK has continued to diminish, literary festivals have had to rely upon commercial sponsorships to survive, an area that will be discussed further in this thesis. As a literary festival, Hay Festival mirrors the tensions between commercial and cultural priorities in the publishing industry, explained by co-founder Peter Florence's description of the festival as equally 'a party' and an 'Ideas Exchange,' as well as being a space for authors to 'flog a lot of books'.²⁹

Theorising the literary festival

Literary festivals do not fit into any clear disciplinary area, but are part of many: literary studies, book history, publishing, tourism, cultural geography, sociology and the wider social sciences, and audience and performance studies. Up until this point, much of the research into literary festivals takes a sociological point of view. My response to Hay Festival differs from other approaches in that I focus on the literature, analysing the books and authors featured at Hay Festival and their corresponding events. I do this in order to understand the role of Hay Festival within contemporary literary culture, its influence on the author-reader connection, and what happens to literature when it is discussed at festivals. This current section explores the various interdisciplinary lives of literary festivals, beginning with the sociologically-focused research that draws on work by Pierre Bourdieu and Jürgen Habermas, before moving onto concepts within cultural geography and Simone Murray's concept of the 'digital literary sphere'. I then sketch out the main issues, scope, methods, and direction of the thesis.

²⁸ Daniel Boorstin, *The Image* (1962; reis., New York: Knopf Doubleday, 1992), 157-158, quoted in Moran, *Star Authors*, 2.

²⁹ Hay Festival programme, 1999, Add MS 89482/4/32, 4; Peter Florence, letter to Ffiona Campbell, January 11, 1995, Add MS 89482/1/7.

Literary studies and book history

First though, to understand how literary texts are interpreted and presented at literary festivals and how Hay Festival approaches literature, I will briefly outline ways of theorising this relationship between author, text, and reader(s) over the last fifty years. Roland Barthes's 'Death of the Author,' wherein he argues that readers should disavow any information about the author when reading and interpreting a text, catalysed a seismic shift in the 1960s in the conception of literary texts.³⁰ Wolfgang Iser developed Barthes's theory by producing a reader-oriented theory wherein the individual reader is perceived as meaning-maker, not the author or critic.³¹ Conversely, Stanley Fish's concept of 'interpretive communities' underlines social reading practices by proposing that individual readers are part of a wider group of readers, and the meaning taken from a text is shaped by the cultural assumptions of this powerful interpretive community.³² In the 1980s, Gérard Genette theorised that each literary text has a dynamic set of relations attached to it. Genette's *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (1987) explores the 'paratextual' material around the book (its cover, title, front and back matter, author biography, interviews, diaries and letters) affecting the meaning of the text that they frame. The book, according to Genette, is not a boundary or a sealed border, but rather what he calls 'a *threshold*' that 'offers the world at large the possibility of either stepping inside or turning back'.³³

Drawing on Genette's theory, Ellen Wiles has more recently suggested that 'live literature events' – defined as 'live performances of and about literature for audiences that take place in shared physical spaces, such as literary festivals and salons' – are paratexts to

³⁰ Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author,' in *Image, Music, Text*, translated by Stephen Heath, 142-149 (1967; reis., London: Fontana, 1977).

³¹ Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (London: Routledge, 1978).

³² Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in this Class?: The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980).

³³ Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

the books discussed and expand interpretations of the text itself.³⁴ I develop this idea of festival events as paratexts in this thesis. Overall, I argue that literary festivals and their events open up understandings of texts, interpretations, and reception from audience and interviewer, as well as the author's input, ultimately consolidating DeNel Rehberg Sedo's claim that 'all reading is rooted in the social'.³⁵

Public spheres

Scholars over the last fifteen years researching literary festivals have often approached the subject using cultural sociology and creative economy methods, applying empirical research to understand festival audiences, and then creating conceptual frameworks to uncover what the festivals mean to the people who attend them. For example, Katya Johanson and Robin Freeman's 2012 investigation into the 'reader as audience' at literary festivals uses qualitative data collection and analysis from the Eye of the Storm Writers Festival in the remote Northern Territories of Australia to understand the literary festival's audience and what they share with and where they depart from other arts audiences. Johanson and Freeman conclude that the social aspect of festivals is vital in widening creative interactions with literature and that the isolated location and quintessentially Australian landscape of Eye of the Storm heightens the audience's sense of being a part of a literary community, amplifying the qualities of the predominantly Australian literature featured at the festival.³⁶ Johanson and Freeman's qualitative research influences my own qualitative data collection, something I will expand on later, as I interview Hay Festival staff to understand the creative decisions

³⁴ Ellen Wiles, *Live Literature: The Experience and Cultural Value of Literary Performance Events from Salons to Festivals*, 7, 191.

³⁵ DeNel Rehberg Sedo, *Reading Communities from Salons to Cyberspace* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 16.

³⁶ Katya Johanson and Robin Freeman, 'The Reader as Audience: The Appeal of the Writers' Festival to the Contemporary Audience,' *Continuum* 26, no. 2 (2012), <https://doi.org/10.1080/10304312.2011.590575>.

made by the cultural workers creating the festival, and conduct focus groups to explore the audience's relationship with the festival.

Despite divergent approaches to literary festivals, most researchers agree that literary festivals promote a platform for innately social reading practices. In a study of reading 'beyond the book' in the UK and North America, literary scholars Danielle Fuller and Rehberg Sedo explore the social practices inspired by sharing books in public spaces and what they call 'mass reading events,' or MREs, localised events where a book forms the focus of a series of activities – author events, craft workshops, pub crawls, and more – often engaging with aspects of mass media.³⁷ Fuller and Rehberg Sedo argue that these events and their 'production, promotion, circulation, and reception' suggest why 'a feeling for reading and sharing books persists in North America and the United Kingdom in a digital age'.³⁸ Their text, *Reading Beyond the Book: The Social Practices of Contemporary Literary Culture* (2013), attempts to answer questions about large-scale reading events, such as '[w]hy has there been a proliferation of MREs when there are so many other ways to spend one's leisure time, including opportunities for engaging in popular culture? And why reading events, when there are so many alternatives available to the person who wishes to experience storytelling?'.³⁹ By analysing Hay Festival's success and its influence on contemporary literary culture, this thesis expands upon Fuller and Rehberg Sedo's claim that the physical book still holds a 'special status' for readers who choose to practise social reading by attending events such as literary festivals.⁴⁰

Within sociological studies into contemporary literary culture, some scholars look at how literary festivals offer new examples of the Habermasian public sphere.⁴¹ Liana Giorgi,

³⁷ Fuller and Rehberg Sedo, *Reading Beyond the Book*, 4.

³⁸ Fuller and Rehberg Sedo, *Reading Beyond the Book*, 1.

³⁹ Ibid, 4, 248.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 247.

⁴¹ These studies look at Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1992).

writing about Jürgen Habermas's research about the development of eighteenth literary salons, periodicals, and coffee houses as emerging facilitators of the new public sphere and democracy for the bourgeoisie, uses the literary festival as a contemporary example of the public sphere.⁴² Giorgi argues that festivals 'serve similar functions [to the Habermasian public sphere] in that they are often established explicitly for promoting the exchange of ideas and to link the arts and politics'.⁴³ However, she argues that the concentration of time and space and 'explicit support for plurality' at literary festivals shifts the rigid distinctions between high and low brow culture and 'serve more as stages for *mediating* different cultural tastes'.⁴⁴

In her wide-ranging study of contemporary literary festivals, Millicent Weber, conversely, explores Habermas's allegation that the quality of discourse over the course of the twentieth century has eroded due to increasing commercialisation and the move from a critical and analytical to a capitalist, consumer public.⁴⁵ Weber criticises Habermas's early 'idealisation of the political potential of the bourgeois public sphere,' and his negative conception of the contemporary cultural public sphere.⁴⁶ She instead adopts Lauren Berlant's idea of an 'intimate public sphere' to discuss literary festivals.⁴⁷ Though charting the emergence of the US political sphere as an affective space of attachment and identification, Berlant argues that popular culture texts have the potential to generate an affective impact for their readers and offer them ways to define themselves positively through a shared emotional reaction, thus 'connecting their personal emotional lives with the larger world'.⁴⁸ Weber's

⁴² Giorgi, 'Between Tradition, Vision and Imagination.'

⁴³ Giorgi, 'Between Tradition, Vision and Imagination,' 35-36.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 42-43.

⁴⁵ Weber, *Literary Festivals and Contemporary Book Culture*, 20.

⁴⁶ Weber, *Literary Festivals and Contemporary Book Culture*, 21.

⁴⁷ Fuller and Rehberg Sedo also use Berlant's theory of the intimate public sphere in their research into social reading practices.

⁴⁸ Weber, *Literary Festivals and Contemporary Book Culture*, 21; Lauren Berlant, *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

application of Berlant's idea to literary festivals supports the idea of a public sphere directly created by the literary text and its circulation, therefore framing readers' engagement with a reading public in affective and social practices. However, in emphasising affect rather than a broader imaginative engagement with literary texts and in applying Berlant's theory about the US political sphere into an entirely new context of literary festivals, Weber runs the risk of neglecting the great range of experiences that reading literature and participating in social reading practices can bring.

Hay Festival, and its expansion into various other educational, literary, and global projects, offers an opportunity to study what particular type of public sphere it occupies, and whether the model of the public sphere is an appropriate term for a place where a paid ticket is required to see most events. In research interviews with Hay Festival staff members, a question about the different conceptions of the festival within the public sphere provides an insight into the diverse ways that festival workers see and narrate Hay Festival and its various utopian iterations, from 'a commune ... a community trying to achieve something that's a beacon, sort of an example to people living outside of it of how we think things could be,' and 'like going to university in ten days,' to 'Glastonbury, ... a library [or the] Groucho Club'.⁴⁹ All of these descriptions highlight the multifarious identities of Hay Festival as well as the ambivalence that staff members have towards the festival as a public sphere.

In attempts to categorise and define literary festivals, Giorgi, Driscoll, Ommundsen, Weber, and Fuller and Rehberg Sedo have all discussed Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of cultural capital and the 'literary field'.⁵⁰ The literary field is a valuable conceptual model transcending

⁴⁹ Poppy Evans, interview by Ellen Addis, Zoom, September 23, 2021; Maggie Kerr, interview by Ellen Addis, Zoom, September 27, 2021; Andy Fryers, interview by Ellen Addis, Zoom, September 29, 2021.

⁵⁰ These studies draw upon Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993); Giorgi, 'Between Tradition, Vision and Imagination'; Driscoll, *The New Literary Middlebrow*; Ommundsen, 'Literary Festivals and Cultural Consumption'; Weber, *Literary Festivals and Contemporary Book Culture*; Fuller and Rehberg Sedo, *Reading Beyond the Book*; Sarah Brouillette, *Literature and the Creative Economy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014).

old debates about popular culture versus literary culture to offer a nuanced perspective and when applied to literary festivals, can exemplify how the movement of the solitary act of reading into the public space creates tangible reading communities where readers and authors engage in-person.⁵¹ Bourdieu writes about the artistic ‘autonomization’ in bohemian nineteenth-century Paris that was created by a group of artists who valued their own autonomy from capital and attempted to divide the art and commerce world, achieving, in Sarah Brouillette’s words, ‘something of a monopoly hold over the production of interpretations of culture and society’.⁵² Bourdieu perceives society as split into different ‘fields,’ or structured spaces with complex and hierarchical relationships and different forms of capital (social, economic, cultural), with the literary field being one.⁵³

Weber argues that literary festivals do not represent a particular site in literary debates, but are instead a signifier for the broader literary field, and therefore, are ‘spaces in which authors and readers identify themselves to one another and in which these authors and readers, alongside publishers, festival directors, governments, and sponsors, compete for legitimacy through the acquisition of cultural, social, and economic capital’.⁵⁴ However, Weber warns that the ideas of theorists such as Bourdieu are limited in application and cannot move beyond hypotheses or account for ‘the textured detail of real-world experiences of audience members interacting with print culture’ and instead calls for direct engagement with these festival audiences and workers to expand and question existing knowledge.⁵⁵ This thesis responds to Weber’s call for more direct engagement with festivals, though it departs from her research in that rather than taking a broad view of the subject with various case studies, it is a diachronic study of one influential festival over time. I treat Hay Festival as an

⁵¹ Weber, *Literary Festivals and Contemporary Book Culture*, 22.

⁵² Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, 54; Brouillette, *Literature and the Creative Economy*, 17;

⁵³ Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, 29-31

⁵⁴ Weber, *Literary Festivals and Contemporary Book Culture*, 32.

⁵⁵ Weber, *Literary Festivals and Contemporary Book Culture*, 34.

example to understand the shifting literary festival landscape over the last thirty-seven years, but also more recently since the coronavirus pandemic and the changing digital environments, an area not yet widely covered by research into literary festivals.

Studies about literary festivals often place them within middlebrow conceptions of literary culture. Developing Giorgi's appraisal that the main difference between contemporary literary festivals and earlier literary salons is the role of '*mediating* different cultural tastes' and democratising culture, as well as using Bourdieu's literary field, Driscoll theorises that literary festivals have dual commercial and cultural priorities. This duality, Driscoll argues, does not make them contradictory spaces. Driscoll includes literary festivals in what she terms the 'new literary middlebrow,' a phenomenon of the mid-twentieth century of the emerging cultural space between the elite and the popular, and her chapter dedicated to the 'middlebrow pleasures of literary festivals' describes the events as 'overtly social' examples of a 'temporary community'.⁵⁶ Driscoll's use of 'community' bypasses the use of public spheres to prioritise the festivalgoers and the relationship between author and reader, and I mainly adopt the term throughout the thesis. Much of the research on literary festivals puts a false opposition between commercial and cultural spaces and idealises more 'literary' events, denigrating the middlebrow, in turn failing to see the complexity and significance of the literary space.⁵⁷ Yet by bringing together readers, writers, and cultural intermediaries, literary festivals promote emotional and earnest reading practices.⁵⁸

Hay Festival, as a place where authors and readers interact, as well as a place where cultural and economic capital co-exists, could come to represent the broader literary field. However, the commercial input at literary festivals must be interrogated. For example, Hay Festival's long-term former sponsor Baillie Gifford, an international investment business, has

⁵⁶ Giorgi, 'Between Tradition, Vision and Imagination,' 42; Driscoll, *The New Literary Middlebrow*, 43, 160, 152-153, 170.

⁵⁷ Weber, *Literary Festivals and Contemporary Book Culture*, 32.

⁵⁸ Driscoll, *The New Literary Middlebrow*, 153.

not come without its conflicts, and the unwanted baggage of a commercial sponsor like Baillie Gifford, such as its investment in companies dealing with fossil fuels, can also become synonymous with Hay Festival – and all the other literary festivals that they sponsor.⁵⁹ There is a wider context of oil and pharmaceutical companies sponsoring other cultural sites. Famously, the Sackler family’s donations to cultural institutions such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Guggenheim both in New York have been tarnished by the Sackler’s significant role in the opioid epidemic in the United States. These practices are known as ‘artwashing’ and ‘greenwashing’ and I will explore these terms and the complications of the Baillie Gifford sponsorship further in my third chapter.

The contradictions caused by contemporary literary festivals and their needed economic support often provided by corporations are not easily explained away. For example, in Wiles’ study of the ‘live literature’ at literary salons and festivals, she visits Hay Festival and notes that she:

Came away with a sense that economics significantly shaped, not just Hay’s curation and programming, but the hyper-efficient design and layout of the space, the precise event synchronisation, the impeccable organisation, and standardized event format. Every single event I witnessed was impeccably run, precisely to schedule. In combination, all these factors can make Hay seem like a giant mechanism of industry control over consumers.⁶⁰

Although Wiles argues that the culture-commerce tension present at Hay Festival enables it to be a successful event producer, her sterilised description of the festival as a ‘giant mechanism’ also squeezes out the imaginative, cultural work that goes into creating Hay

⁵⁹ Lucy Knight, ‘Authors Join Call for Baillie Gifford to Divest from Fossil Fuel,’ *Guardian* (London), October 13, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2023/oct/13/leading-authors-call-for-baillie-gifford-to-divest-from-fossil-fuel-literary-festivals>; Scott Nisbet, ‘Fossil Fuels: Our View,’ *Baillie Gifford*, September 7, 2023, <https://www.bailliegifford.com/en/uk/individual-investors/insights/ic-article/2023-q3-fossil-fuels-an-answer-to-concerns-10035889/>; Ella Creamer, ‘Edinburgh International Book Festival Announces “Relaunch” as Sponsor Row Remains Unresolved,’ *Guardian* (London), April 5, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2024/apr/05/edinburgh-international-book-festival-announces-relaunch-as-sponsor-row-remains-unresolved>.

⁶⁰ Wiles, ‘Live Literature and Cultural Value,’ 241-242.

Festival, and implies that the commercial input of sponsors such as Baillie Gifford sanitises the creativity and spontaneity of such festivals. Wiles's implication that creative events should not be well organised provides an insight into one perspective about festivals, where professionalism is deemed a consequence of commercialisation, rather than experience.

While literary scholars using a cultural sociological lens to look at literary festivals demonstrate theoretical relations between the literary field and festivals, this is not always a perfect fit. In more recent years, there has been a pushback against how Bourdieu's literary field has been applied to literary festivals. Most notably, Driscoll and Squires' collaborative and playful work approaches festivals through theories of the carnivalesque and the newly-coined concept of 'Ullapoolism': a 'post-data, activist and interventionist epistemology for contemporary book culture studies' committed to participatory and arts-based creative methods to investigate the power relations at literary events.⁶¹ Driscoll and Squires satirise the literary festival, creating games to highlight its antagonistic aspects, undercutting festivals' commercial operations and the hierarchical encounters between authors and audiences.⁶² In providing a different approach to study literary festivals, Driscoll and Squires reveal that there must be an extension of Bourdieu's model 'to account for an uneven global distribution of prestige and access to resources,' noting the 'dramatic difference' between festivals in the middle and on the periphery of global literary culture and the ongoing legacy of colonialism.⁶³

Driscoll and Squires' research has prompted new approaches to literary festivals. Inspired by the 'expressive directions' that Driscoll and Squires are taking literary scholarship, Wiles's autoethnographic study into live literature events investigates the

⁶¹ Beth Driscoll and Claire Squires, 'Experiments with Book Festival People (Real and Imaginary),' *Mémoires du Livre* 11, no. 2 (2020): 7, <https://doi.org/10.7202/1070271ar>.

⁶² Driscoll and Squires, 'Experiments with Book Festival People (Real and Imaginary),' 24.

⁶³ Beth Driscoll and Claire Squires, 'Serious Fun: Gaming the Book Festival,' *Mémoires du livre* 9, no.2 (2018): 3, <https://doi.org/10.7202/1046988ar>.

dynamic experiences of ‘author-performers’ and ‘reader-audiences’ at these events.⁶⁴

Additionally, Rebecca Roach takes Driscoll and Squires’ critiques that literary festivals ‘are neoliberal, money-making operations’ that ‘perpetuate neocolonial power structures’ to their logical end point.⁶⁵ Using the framework of ‘special economic zones’ (SEZs) and globalised economics, Roach explores the book festival as a type of ‘enclosure’ – a geographically and temporarily demarcated area that ‘facilitates between the national and the global’.⁶⁶ Literary festivals mediate ‘between the nation-state and global *cultural capital*,’ and Roach’s study and her use of analogy foreground the relationship between the festival as enclosure and the context of contemporary globalisation that festivals exist within.⁶⁷

By using archival research, interviews, literature, and literary analysis to provide a comprehensive case study of Hay Festival, its local and digital environments, and its impact on contemporary literary culture in the UK, this thesis expands upon Driscoll, Squires, Wiles, and Roach’s novel and playful approaches to literary festivals, moving away from studies singularly sociological in nature and instead showing the creative possibilities of interdisciplinary research.

Performance, archives, and ephemerality

Driscoll’s claim that literary festivals bring together readers as a ‘temporary community’ influences my approach to Hay Festival.⁶⁸ Limited by time, literary festivals and their events *are* ephemeral, but only up to an extent. Hay Festival, I argue, attempts to create an enduring legacy for its festival and dispute the claim that festivals are ephemeral in three distinct ways:

⁶⁴ Wiles, ‘Live Literature and Cultural Value,’ 57, 64.

⁶⁵ Driscoll and Squires, ‘Serious Fun: Gaming the Book Festival,’ 22.

⁶⁶ Rebecca Roach, ‘Book Festivals and the Special Economic Zone of Culture,’ *Interventions* (2024): 5-7, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369801X.2024.2401520>.

⁶⁷ Roach, ‘Book Festivals and the Special Economic Zone of Culture,’ 8.

⁶⁸ Driscoll, *The New Literary Middlebrow*, 170.

creating lasting physical and digital records through its subscription streaming service of archived events, Hay Anytime, and the British Library archive, programming year-round projects and offshoot international festivals outside of the typical annual festival timeframe, and increasing its online presence through its online book club, Book of the Month, social media channels, and its digital events. This thesis brings together research from theatre and performance studies to explore the lasting connection between event and audience. Matthew Reason and Dee Reynolds's 2012 book *Kinaesthetic Empathy in Creative and Cultural Practices* describes the imagined empathic connection between spectator and performer, formed via an intersubjective understanding and shared sensorial experience, known as 'embodied engagement'.⁶⁹ Similar to a live theatre performance, a literary festival event engages audiences through their physical, shared experiences with the authors on stage and their fellow festivalgoers seated next to them. I will now explore research in performance studies informing my understanding of the literary festival event as both ephemeral and one that leaves material traces in the archive.

Literary festivals offer a stage for authors to perform or discuss their work. This stage can be a productive and creatively conducive space for generating stories, or a place of discomfort for those authors not accustomed to performance. In an anthropological study into literary readings in Ireland, Helena Wulff analyses literary readings as performances central for the career and promotion of Irish writers.⁷⁰ Wulff argues that reading aloud during literary events, whether that be at a festival or a book signing, is a multisensorial embodied experience for the audience that extends the boundaries of the written text and places the author into the position of performer: '[p]erforming a text at a reading entails a rereading, a

⁶⁹ Dee Reynolds and Matthew Reason, *Kinaesthetic Empathy in Creative and Cultural Practices*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012), 139.

⁷⁰ Helena Wulff, 'Literary Readings as Performance: On the Career of Contemporary Writers in the New Ireland,' *Anthropological Journal of European Cultures* 17, no. 2 (2008), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43234472>.

new interpretation, a transposing – even if it is the author who does the reading’.⁷¹ The contact between the author and the audience adds what Weber calls ‘an extra, valuable dimension to some individuals’ enjoyment of the creative work,’ leading to both individual and communal textual responses to the event.⁷² In this way, the literary festival is a hybrid performance space, combining many different iterations of performance on stage.

As an arts organisation that has planned over 145 festivals worldwide, Hay Festival has no clear policy of recordkeeping all materials over its history. The festival’s archive at the British Library is the consequence of selections, elisions, and choices by staff members, records that in Dan Glaister’s words represent ‘how the intellectual life of this country in the past 30 years has been played out in public,’ with the archive ‘as much about performance as it is about text’.⁷³ In her investigation into historical community drama productions staged in the early 1930s at Dartington Hall, a significant social and cultural experiment in South Devon, Neima states that ‘[p]erformance leaves few traces’.⁷⁴ Though this rings true, it is to the ephemera in the archive – what Florence calls ‘the friendships, the collaborations, the adventures started at Hay, the sheer human creativity’ of the festival – that this thesis attends.⁷⁵

In their wide-ranging edited volume about the evolving nature of archives and the growth of digital archives in the twenty-first century, Andrew Prescott, Alison Wiggins, and the various contributors to *Archives: Power, Truth, and Fiction* (2023) explore the ‘dynamism and perpetual motion of the archive’.⁷⁶ In her chapter within *Archives: Power, Truth, and*

⁷¹ Wulff, ‘Literary Readings as Performance: On the Career of Contemporary Writers in the New Ireland,’ 106-107.

⁷² Weber, *Literary Festivals and Contemporary Book Culture*, 123, 130.

⁷³ Glaister, ‘From Heaney’s Poetry to Rushdie’s Surprise Appearance.’ In Glaister’s article, he references letters from the archive found in the basement of the Hay Festival office, some of which are not included in the archive deposited at the British Library, showing that some documents are missing or have been kept by the festival.

⁷⁴ Anna Neima, ‘The Politics of Community Drama in Interwar England,’ *Twentieth Century British History* 31, no. 2, (2020): 181, <https://doi.org/10.1093/tcbh/hwz035>.

⁷⁵ Glaister, ‘From Heaney’s Poetry to Rushdie’s Surprise Appearance.’

⁷⁶ Prescott and Wiggins, ‘Introduction,’ in *Archives: Power, Truth, and Fiction*, eds. Prescott and Wiggins, 2.

Fiction about digital archiving, Eirini Goudarouli investigates how records change as they become increasingly digitised and born-digital, with new approaches to collecting materials required as archivists are ‘rethinking the well-established archival framework whilst they experience the emergence of new technologies and actively seek ways to embed these new technologies in their theories and practices’.⁷⁷ The motion of the archive is reflected in the Hay Festival archive which becomes thinner in material with the digitalisation of communications in the 2000s and the transfer of previously material systems of filing to digital files on computers and in the cloud. The choice to only deposit printed and material matter to the archive at the British Library has led to gaps in the most recent years of the festival, reflecting the input of the Hay Festival team’s recordkeeping practices.⁷⁸ In contrast to the material archive, the Hay Anytime digital archive becomes richer as digital technologies advance, with more and better quality recordings deposited to the archive, representing both digitised and born-digital recordkeeping and capturing the festival’s event history.

In performance studies, the debate over how recording performance changes performance intrinsically has a long history. In 1993, Peggy Phelan famously wrote that performance ‘becomes itself through disappearance,’ and that ‘performance’s independence from mass reproduction, technologically, economically, and linguistically, is its greatest strength’.⁷⁹ Six years later, in *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (1999), cultural

⁷⁷ Eirini Goudarouli, ‘Digital Innovation and Archival Thinking,’ in *Archives: Power, Truth, and Fiction*, eds. Prescott and Wiggins, 268. Goudarouli explores the three broad categories of digital records preserved at The National Archives: Born-digital records (‘records that originally produced in digital form such as spreadsheets, emails, websites, databases, images, and video’), digitized records (‘a scanned copy of paper or parchment record that is accessioned in place of the paper record’), and digital surrogates (‘the digital image that is used as an access copy of a paper or parchment original which is retained as the record’). Goudarouli, ‘Digital Innovation and Archival Thinking,’ 271.

⁷⁸ The Hay Festival Sound Archive which also makes up the wider Hay Festival archive at the British Library and is made up of sound and video recordings from the festival since 1991 is currently in the process of being digitised by the British Library Sound Archive team.

⁷⁹ Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (Oxford: Routledge, 1993), 146-149.

critic Philip Auslander suggested that live and recorded performance, what he calls the ‘mediatized’ performance, are not oppositional categories, but instead have an intertwined and reciprocal relationship.⁸⁰ Auslander joins live and recorded together, exploring how the historical context of liveness originates from the development of broadcast technologies such as sound or picture recording for radio, television, or films that made it necessary to see representations as ‘live’ or not live, binding the history of live performance with the history of recording media.⁸¹ Auslander’s study into conceptions of ‘liveness,’ both digital and in-person, informs my understanding of Hay Festival’s digital events and digital archive on Hay Anytime and how audience engagement changes when they watch an event online, live or on-demand.

Searching for ways to fill the fissures that events and performances leave behind, in her article ‘Performance Remains,’ Rebecca Schneider aims to ‘think rigorously about performance as ephemeral’.⁸² Writing in 2001, Schneider challenges the established view of performance as a process of disappearance and interrogates ‘the imperialism inherent in archival logic’ itself, calling for a rearticulation of archives and different ways to access the history of performance, where archives can include ‘oral storytelling, live recitation, repeated gesture, and ritual enactment’.⁸³ She asks: ‘do we ignore other ways of knowing, other modes of remembering, that might be situated precisely in the ways in which performance remains, but remains differently?’.⁸⁴

In ‘Ephemera as Evidence: Introductory Notes to Queer Acts,’ José Esteban Muñoz states that performance ephemera – ‘traces, glimmers, residues, and specks of things’ – do not

⁸⁰ Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Routledge, 2008).

⁸¹ Philip Auslander, ‘Digital Liveness: A Historico-Philosophical Perspective,’ *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 34, no. 3 (2012): 3, [https://direct.mit.edu/pajj/article/34/3/20\(102\)/3/55466/Digital-Liveness-A-Historico-Philosophical](https://direct.mit.edu/pajj/article/34/3/20(102)/3/55466/Digital-Liveness-A-Historico-Philosophical).

⁸² Rebecca Schneider, ‘Performance Remains,’ *Performance Research: A Journal of the Performing Arts* 6, no. 2 (2001): 100, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13528165.2001.10871792>.

⁸³ Schneider, ‘Performance Remains,’ 101.

⁸⁴ Schneider, ‘Performance Remains,’ 100-101.

disappear but are distinctly material.⁸⁵ Muñoz applies Raymond Williams's 'structures of feeling' to argue that ephemera are material, though are not always stable.⁸⁶ He uses the example of queer performances as evidence of queer possibilities, in that though queerness has not been able to exist visibly or be recorded extensively in archives, the ephemeral and fleeting moments, such as performance, do not negate its existence.⁸⁷ While Muñoz and Schneider discuss performance and ephemerality in terms of theatre, this can be applied to literary festivals. In my mixed methodology, I work to excavate the history and current work of Hay Festival, supplementing archival work by creating oral histories with staff and audiences, and thinking creatively about the role of literature at the festival through my own close reading of texts and events.

Like Muñoz and Schneider before her, performance scholar Diana Taylor resists Phelan's equation of performance with impermanence or loss, and in her 2003 book, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, she writes that Phelan 'delimits the life of performance to the present'.⁸⁸ Taylor argues that live performance has a different relationship to material remains and recorded performance and discusses the 'archive of supposedly enduring materials' and what she calls the 'repertoire of embodied practice/knowledge' that 'enacts embodied memory: performances, gestures, orality, movement, dance, singing – in short, all those acts usually thought of as ephemeral, nonreproducible knowledge'.⁸⁹ Taylor introduces the term 'scenario' and explores how it can be used as a meaning-making paradigm for understanding social structures and behaviours, as well as texts and narratives studied in literary analysis, allowing us to draw from the repertoire of 'corporeal behaviors such as gestures, attitudes,

⁸⁵ José Esteban Muñoz, 'Ephemera as Evidence: Introductory Notes to Queer Acts,' *Women and Performance* 8, no. 2 (1996): 10, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07407709608571228>.

⁸⁶ Muñoz, 'Ephemera as Evidence,' 10.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 9.

⁸⁹ Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, 19-20.

and tones not reducible to language'.⁹⁰ In performance studies, Taylor's term '*repertoire*' is foundational as it proposes an expansion of the archive and new systems of sharing knowledge, turning attention towards the ephemeral and embodied practices that should be studied.⁹¹ Rather than severing the archive from performance, Taylor argues that both are mediated and both can have moments of vanishing, and that while there exists a strain between archive and the repertoire as the liveness of performance exceeds the archive's ability to capture it, this 'does not mean that performance – as ritualized, formalized, or reiterative behavior – disappears'.⁹²

Taylor, Muñoz, and Schneider understand performance not as form of disappearance or impermanence but as offering a chance to interrogate the archive and broaden its definition, while Auslander focuses on the afterlives of performance that recording technologies allow. These understandings can be applied to literary festivals. By sharing new systems and ways of knowledge about how performance remains for the audience, this thesis widens the possibilities of research into literary festivals to contribute to the legacy of these events and cement their importance not only to the creative economy but to the story of literary and cultural heritage in the UK.

Hay Festival's creation of both digital and material public remains for its work signals an intent to generate a legacy for the festival. This legacy created through archival remains of the ephemeral event can then be used to secure government funding. This is shown especially by the festival calling Hay Anytime and the British Library archive its 'contribution to culture' in written evidence for the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) Committee's 2021 report 'The Future of UK Music Festivals,' describing the British Library archive in

⁹⁰ Ibid, 28.

⁹¹ 'Repertoire,' *Glossar: Institute of Para-Enactment Research*, accessed April 8, 2024, <https://i-p-e-r.org/Repertoire>.

⁹² Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, 20.

particular as an ‘important contribution to the UK’s cultural reputation worldwide’.⁹³ Housing its archive at a public, national library, Hay Festival disavows the practices of many cultural organisations and publishers such as HarperCollins whose archives are kept private, and transports the usually transitory, one-off festival experience to archival remains.

Local environments

Beyond field-specific studies responding to literary festivals, another area of research speaks to the importance of geographic location to festivals. Murray and Weber argue that there are two variations of place at literary festivals. The first is a ‘cosmopolitan conception of community,’ one that defies geographical boundaries and celebrates a Habermasian public all because of a shared cultural interest in writing.⁹⁴ Festivals embrace international writers and debates and even have a level of consecration in that host places become a significant location on the international festival circuit.⁹⁵ The other is economic. Festivals reflect global interests and reflect on the cultural specificity of the host location, emphasising local distinction to attract tourism.⁹⁶ Murray and Weber explore how festival organisers ‘engage in complex strategies to ensure these two, frequently competing, senses of community can – however unstably – be mapped onto each other’ to balance both cosmopolitan internationalism and local identity.⁹⁷ Other scholars, such as Cori Stewart, divide conceptions of place at literary festivals by those in ‘peripheral’ (rural) places and those ‘international’ festivals, typically located in urban centres.⁹⁸

⁹³ Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, ‘Written evidence submitted by the Hay Festival.’

⁹⁴ Simone Murray and Millicent Weber. “‘Live and Local’?: The Significance of Digital Media for Writers’ Festivals,’ *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 23, no. 1 (2019): 63-64, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354856516677531>.

⁹⁵ Murray and Weber. “‘Live and Local’?: The Significance of Digital Media for Writers’ Festivals,’ 63-64.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 64.

⁹⁷ Ibid, 64.

⁹⁸ Cori Stewart, ‘The Culture of Contemporary Writers’ Festivals,’ *PhD dissertation* (Queensland University of Technology, 2009), QuT ePrints, <https://eprints.qut.edu.au/31241/>, 5.

Geography is central to Hay Festival's self-identity, though little has been said about how it is both peripheral in its geography, and yet international in its output and programming. This makes Hay Festival and its place branding a unique case study to analyse the influence of literary festivals on the broader literary culture in the UK and understandings of reading today. As a global destination festival located in a rural location, Hay Festival is described by staff as both 'very rooted in [the] community' and 'ambitious and look[s] internationally'.⁹⁹ In chapter four, I examine Hay Festival's conception of place deriving from its special borderland position and the literary inheritance of the area.

Discussion of literary festivals and place often occurs within tourism studies. Alexandra Coghlan, Bev Sparks, Wei Liu and Mike Winlaw investigate how festivals play a significant role in local 'placemaking,' a process that benefits the local community economically by encouraging community aspirations 'to develop a shared sense of place'.¹⁰⁰ Ian Jenkins performs a useful longitudinal study into the sustainable impacts of Hay Festival on Hay-on-Wye, exploring how the book town is an ideal tourist destination that gives it a competitive advantage over other rural towns in the area.¹⁰¹ Analysing Visit Wales's framing of Hay Festival, I look at the festival as a revitalisation tool for the border country. I perform a close reading and cultural geography approach, looking at the limitations of the terms 'peripheral' and 'rural' festivals and investigate how Hay Festival breaks out of this mould through its event programming.

Research in cultural geography and literary cartography, as well as into the growth of other kinds of literary tourism such as writers' houses running in parallel with the success of literary festivals, informs my approach to Hay Festival's borderland location. Sally Bushell,

⁹⁹ Cristina Fuentes La Roche, interview by Ellen Addis, Hay Festival, Hay-on-Wye, June 6, 2022.

¹⁰⁰ Alexandra Coghlan, Bev Sparks, Wei Liu, and Mike Winlaw, 'Reconnecting with Place Through Events,' *International Journal of Event and Festival Management* 8, no. 1 (2017): 67-68, <https://doi.org/10.1108/ijefm-06-2016-0042>.

¹⁰¹ Ian Jenkins, 'The Hay Festival: A Longitudinal Study on its Attributes and the Sustainable Impacts on a Small Welsh Town,' 121.

Barbara Piatti, David Cooper, Christopher Donaldson, and Patricia Murriete-Flores all emphasise the importance of literature to a mental imagining and mapping of place, an area, I go on to argue, that Hay Festival capitalises upon in its conception of its own identity which is so tied to its literary inheritance.¹⁰² Cultural geographers more broadly have attempted to combine the concept of digital space through the advent of the field of ‘digital geography,’ an approach focusing on how senses and spaces are transformed through digital technologies, though these studies have not been widely applied to the digital literary festival.¹⁰³

Digital environments

Previous research has reflected upon the new reading experiences that the internet and social media have enabled, but the field of digital literary studies is still a new and evolving one. While past research into literary festivals has amplified the importance of place to the feeling of being at a literary festival, Murray is one of the few scholars that have attempted to explain the sense of place at virtual writers’ festivals. Moving beyond a simple focus on public spheres and literary festivals, Murray’s ‘digital literary sphere’ looks at the online space as a type of public sphere, and calls for sociological perspectives in literary studies to interrogate the relationship between digital communication technologies and contemporary literary culture. Not confined to just the literary festival, Murray’s comprehensive research examines the various places of ‘book talk’ online and how digital and social media is radically reconfiguring the literary landscapes in composition including discussions on literary

¹⁰² Sally Bushell, ‘The Slipperiness of Literary Maps: Critical Cartography and Literary Cartography,’ *Cartographica: The International Journal for Geographic Information and Geovisualization* 47, no.3 (2012), <https://doi.org/10.3138/carto.47.3.1202>; Barbara Piatti, ‘Mapping Fiction: The Theories, Tools and Potentials of Literary Cartography,’ in *Literary Mapping in the Digital Age*, eds. David Cooper, Christopher Donaldson and Patricia Murriete-Flores (Oxford: Routledge, 2016); David Cooper, Christopher Donaldson, and Patricia Murriete-Flores, introduction to *Literary Mapping in the Digital Age* (Oxford: Routledge, 2016).

¹⁰³ James Ash, Rob Kitchin, and Agnieszka Leszczynski, ‘Digital Turn, Digital Geographies?,’ *Progress in Human Geography* 42, no. 1 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132516664800>.

festivals and place, authorship, audience, and conceptions of liveness.¹⁰⁴ Consequently, the digital literary sphere has a large position within this thesis as I investigate Murray's terms such as the 'spatiotemporal immediacy' of literary festivals and ask what happened to festivals during and after the coronavirus pandemic.¹⁰⁵

Murray's digital literary sphere utilises Habermas's concept of the public sphere and its 'complex interplay of intellectual, political, and economic forces'.¹⁰⁶ Murray also applies Bourdieu's field theory to the online environment and the internet's 'fluctuating constellation of agents and institutions,' though she stresses that unlike the elite actors possessing all symbolic capital in Bourdieu's literary field, the contemporary literary sphere levels the playing field, offering transparency and 'mass democratic accessibility' in its 'vocal celebration of amateur self-expression'.¹⁰⁷ As a consequence, like Weber, Murray concludes that Bourdieu's model, while useful in offering vocabulary to challenge exclusionary cultural paradigms, needs reframing to engage with digital phenomena and the broader contemporary literary landscape.¹⁰⁸ Other scholars that build upon Murray's digital literary sphere include Bronwen Thomas's *Literature and Social Media* (2020) which looks at reader interactivity online and argues that social media platforms offer spaces for the production and dissemination of literature while also transforming engagement with the literature itself.¹⁰⁹ Murray's digital literary sphere and Thomas's social media research guide my discussion of digital environments at Hay Festival, an area bringing together literary discussion in a hybrid space, splitting discussion both in-person at festivals and online through social media and digital events in a way to extend the temporary festival community to across the year.

¹⁰⁴ Simone Murray, *The Digital Literary Sphere: Reading, Writing, and Selling Books in the Internet Era* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018), 1.

¹⁰⁵ Murray, *The Digital Literary Sphere*, 85.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 2.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 18.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 18.

¹⁰⁹ Bronwen Thomas, *Literature and Social Media* (London: Routledge, 2020), 1.

Another rich layer of research that expands from Murray's refusal to make binary oppositions of print and digital media is the introduction of 'post-digital' imaginings of the book.¹¹⁰ Conceptions of the post-digital moment see books and other analogue technologies as resilient and coexisting, having emerged on the 'other side of the digital's disruption with their material forms intact, but irrevocably changed' in an age where digital and material exist with 'simultaneous relevance'.¹¹¹ I return to the post-digital moment in my fifth chapter, investigating how print and digital collided at Hay Festival's digital festivals during the pandemic.

Though digital technologies are mentioned by some scholars who take the sociological approach towards literary festivals, these digital technologies are often seen as 'disembodied' and detached from physical experience, an argument that this thesis refutes. I instead view Hay Festival's digital presence as embodied, encapsulating Laurence Scott's 'four-dimensional human,' wherein digital culture imbues people's lives. According to Scott, humans experience a sense of 'everywhereness' thanks to digital technologies, making the real world all the more vivid and precious in contrast to the online.¹¹² Digital technologies at literary festivals disrupt what Murray calls the traditional 'spatiotemporal co-presence' between author and audience at in-person festivals and transports communal festival experiences to the interconnected realm of the internet.¹¹³ By mingling physical and digital bodies and collapsing space and time, Hay Festival's digital platforms such as its online

¹¹⁰ Murray, *The Digital Literary Sphere*, 19.

¹¹¹ Matthew Kirschenbaum, *Bitstreams: The Future of Digital Literary Heritage* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021), 83. For more on post-digital book cultures, see also: Corinna Norrick-Rühl and Shafquat Towheed, eds. *Bookshelves in the Age of the COVID-19 Pandemic* (Cham: Springer International Publishing AG, 2022); Florian Cramer, 'What is "Post-Digital"', *Post-Digital Research* 3, no. 1 (2014), <https://doi.org/10.7146/aprja.v3i1.116068>; Alexandra Dane, and Millicent Weber eds., *Post-Digital Book Cultures: Australian Perspectives*, (Clayton: Monash University Press, 2021), 1; Jessica Pressman, 'The Aesthetic of Bookishness in Twenty-First-Century Literature,' *Michigan Quarterly Review* 48, no. 4 (2009), <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.act2080.0048.402>; Jessica Pressman, *Bookishness: Loving Books in a Digital Age* (Columbia University Press, 2020).

¹¹² Laurence Scott, *The Four-Dimensional Human: Ways of Being in the Digital World* (London: Windmill Books, 2015), 11.

¹¹³ Murray, *The Digital Literary Sphere*, 101.

archive, social media accounts, and digital events become embodied places, acting as refuge and reality at once. This thesis brings together research about the interventions that literary festivals make in the digital literary sphere into the contemporary moment, highlighting the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on live literature events.

The limited research into Hay Festival frames the festival as broadening out literary culture, shown in what Murray and Weber call its ‘minimalist nomenclature’ wherein ‘references to print culture have been excised altogether to indicate a broader arts-and-culture suite of programming’ in order to gain wider audience and media attention leading to economic stability.¹¹⁴ Alternatively, this study primarily explores how literature and storytelling is infused in Hay Festival’s history and current output. Hay Festival’s distinctive narrative combining both the local, borderland landscape with its successful digital platforms and events tells a story of a festival’s meteoric rise to the top of British literary culture and society.

Scope

A review of all of Hay Festival’s projects and festivals would be unwieldy and unachievable in a thesis-length study and so within the strictures of this project, there are areas that I have had to omit. I choose to dedicate my research to the festival’s literature events with a primary focus on the original Wales festival, and the time period of Hay Festival 1987-2024, the most recent years of which have seen dramatic changes in leadership as well as new digital projects and events due to coronavirus pandemic. In my history of Hay Festival in the first three chapters, reference to its other endeavours is mentioned, but this is limited thereafter as I focus more on the literature and narratives of the festival’s local and digital environments.

¹¹⁴ Murray and Weber, ““Live and Local”?”, 75.

Methodology

As aforementioned, this thesis uses a mixed methodology, employing a creative format that combines interdisciplinary approaches to analyse Hay Festival rather than limiting research to one area of study. Archivally based and weaving together previous approaches to the topic from sociology, literary, and tourism studies, this thesis has been largely influenced by new approaches by historians researching other UK cultural and historical institutions. The result is a diverse project best fit to narrate and interrogate the intricate story of Hay Festival.

The cultural historians who use archival collections to write histories of similar large UK cultural institutions that have guided this study include Neima's dissertation, 'Dartington Hall and Social Reform in Interwar Britain,' which utilises the Dartington Hall Trust Archives to inform an extensive cultural history of the estate.¹¹⁵ Kathy Rose Williams's sociology dissertation, 'Making Space, Making History: Cultural Work, Heritage and the Production of Space at Southbank Centre,' is also influential to this project's methodology, and examines the Southbank Centre's archives to supplement semi-structured research interviews and ethnographic observations to understand the lived texture of culture work at the London arts centre. However, due to difficulties with access to the archive and the lack of catalogued material, Williams shifts her project to what she calls 'live sources' (meaning research interviews) as opposed to archival materials to analyse 'the ways in which heritage was re-framed and recycled at Southbank Centre in the present'.¹¹⁶ In my own thesis, I combine both Neima's historical and Williams's live approaches, mixing archival primary source research with the processes of cataloguing and conducting semi-structured oral history accounts with literary close readings to understand Hay Festival's historical and present narratives. This dual timeline is reflected in the two parts of the thesis: 'Histories,' based heavily in the

¹¹⁵ Neima, 'Dartington Hall and Social Reform in Interwar Britain.'

¹¹⁶ Williams, 'Making Space, Making History: Cultural Work, Heritage and the Production of Space at Southbank Centre,' 88-89.

archive, and ‘Places,’ examining live sources, to use Williams’s term, such as research interviews and literary analyses.

The combination of empirical research with literary analysis derives from my background in literature, resulting in a view that events at literary festivals are another literary text to read. ‘Places’ pairs analyses of literary texts with their corresponding literary festival events and discussion takes a case study approach in order to understand how Hay Festival creates stories to understand its history and its local and digital environments. This approach is also guided by Fuller’s methodology in *Writing the Everyday: Women’s Textual Communities in Atlantic Canada* (2004). Here, Fuller pairs analyses of literary fiction by female authors about women’s everyday experiences in Atlantic Canada with empirical research into the textual communities in these areas to understand the ‘intra-textual phenomenon’ and ‘extra-textual practice’ of constructing and articulating these experiences in fiction. As she writes:

Writing the everyday puts words to group-based social realities, and those words are then heard and valued, prized or rejected, by members of the local communities who *do* recognize the knowledges embedded in the stories and in the telling, or realization, of those stories.¹¹⁷

In conducting empirical research about everyday female experiences and then analysing the fiction that these women read and identify with, Fuller combines an experiential and literary analysis that influences my own approach to Hay Festival and its literature.

I marry literary close readings with analysis of qualitative and quantitative data. The qualitative data collection comes from a series of semi-structured research interviews with twelve Hay Festival staff members, taking the form of oral history accounts, conducted by myself and my supervisor Rebecca Roach in 2021 and 2022. An interview guide was produced with questions tailored to each interviewee and included questions about each

¹¹⁷ Danielle Fuller, *Writing the Everyday: Women’s Textual Communities in Atlantic Canada* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2004), 15.

individual's history with Hay Festival, how they conceive of Hay Festival's evolving identity, pandemic experiences, and conceptions of the Hay Festival audience.¹¹⁸ These interviews form narrative accounts of Hay Festival which I then analyse. To supplement this, working with the marketing agency the Good Cause Project, I co-led four focus groups with groups of five to eight audience members at a time during Hay Festival 2023. As the most referenced author in chapter five, I also conducted an interview with Ali Smith over email, asking about her literary festival experiences during the pandemic. To supplement the qualitative research interviews, I accessed selective Hay Festival quantitative data from audience surveys and data collection throughout the past five years.

These interviews took place during the pandemic and tell the story of a large cultural organisation at a moment of significant changes. During the research for this thesis, Hay Festival has undergone extraordinary and unforeseen changes to its internal structure. The pandemic forced the festival fully-online for the first time in its history in 2020 and 2021. After Peter Florence left the festival in 2021, a new CEO, Julie Finch, was appointed in 2022, Hay Festival became a registered charity in the same year, and it had a substantial rebrand uniting all Hay Festivals as 'Hay Festival Global' in 2024. The research interviews formulate a highly valuable body of work that reveal the inner workings of an organisation in a transitional moment in its narrative, negotiating unseen upheaval after almost thirty-five years as a family-run festival.

In terms of the internet research methodology, I examine pre-existing and publicly available data online and via social media platforms such as TikTok, Goodreads, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram, researching online communities and exploring how readers interact online with each other and Hay Festival. My research includes analysing

¹¹⁸ The interviews took place mainly on Zoom during the pandemic between August and November 2021, with one interview taking place in May 2022 during the first in-person Hay Festival after the pandemic.

public posts and comments and observing the live online chatrooms during Hay Festival's digital events, archiving forum discussions for analysis. I perform visual, textual, semiotic, and content analysis of social media posts, tweets, comments, and interactions.

Hay Festival is representative in part of the cultural milieu of literary festivals in the latter part of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, though it does have particularities that make it distinct from other literary festivals in the UK. Family-run from its inception until 2021, the Florence family's early cultural connections have shaped its programming and work throughout the years. Its border location, spanning the 'extraterritorial zone of two nations' specifically changes Hay Festival's self-identification, with the festival split between both English and Welsh sensibilities, while also being locally embedded yet internationally reaching.¹¹⁹ Its multinational expansion (between 2024-2025 the festival will host fourteen 'editions' including the shorter 'forum' format across the world) is unique from many other literary festivals of its kind.¹²⁰ However, throughout the thesis, I make brief comparisons to other festivals – both literary and general arts-based – to represent the wider field.

Structure

Part one, 'Histories,' provides an archivally-informed history and analysis of how Hay Festival and its myriad projects and festivals developed to be one of the most successful literary festivals and brands in the world. Each chapter in part one is named after different spatial metaphors to trace the festival's evolution. The first chapter, 'The kitchen table: Domestic and utopian beginnings, 1987—1989' explores Hay Festival's first years, arguing that the festival's early aims were a utopian imagining of the arts, using literary events as a

¹¹⁹ Roach, 'Book Festivals and the Special Economic Zone of Culture,' 6-7.

¹²⁰ Jaipur Literature Festival (JLF) began expanding internationally in 2013 with a festival in London at the British Library, and has since been held in Valladolid, Spain; the Maldives; in North Carolina, Seattle, Colorado, and New York, USA; and in Toronto, Canada.

tool to build a textual community. The Florence family's kitchen table became the symbol of Hay Festival's early years, signalling towards the festival's humble, domestic start, its family connection, and the primary aim to create a literature festival 'to be together'.¹²¹ The kitchen table is a symbol to which I will return throughout the thesis in my discussion about the narratives that Hay Festival constructs about itself. This chapter interrogates the tensions arising from the festival's early utopian vision, and asks: how can a festival with a simple purpose 'to be together' sit alongside the idiosyncrasies of the myriad creative individuals gathered at a literary festival? Translating archival materials and research interviews with current Hay Festival staff into a narrative about Hay Festival, this chapter lays the groundwork for the reader's understanding of Hay Festival. As the thesis continues, I trace how Hay Festival and its narrative have changed and evaluate whether the festival's early utopian artistic vision was realised.

Chapter two, 'The dinner table: Expanding Hay Festival, 1990—1999,' examines Hay Festival's decade of exponential growth. By the end of the century, Hay Festival had become an increasingly exclusive 'dinner table,' with literary stars and celebrities populating its events and the festival establishing strong relationships with publishers, journalists, publicists, and others in the British literary circuit.¹²² In turn, Hay Festival quickly grew a 'national profile,' entering the nation's living rooms with media coverage from Channel 4 and BBC Wales and newspaper title sponsorships from the *Sunday Times* and the *Independent*.¹²³ The chapter evaluates Hay Festival's middle-class assumptions, illustrating its quick success and growing national relevance as it worked to become what one author called a 'British institution'.¹²⁴ Drawing on author letters in the Hay Festival archive from Terry Pratchett, Bill

¹²¹ Peter Florence, 'Hay Festival Hopes to Be in Tehran in 10 Years' Time,' interview by Phil Blizzard, *LinkedIn*, June 5, 2016, <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/hay-festival-hopes-tehran-10-years-time-phil-blizzard/>.

¹²² Arnold Wesker to Peter Florence, March 20, 1995, Add MS 89482/1/11.

¹²³ Norman Florence to Welsh Arts Council, November 1, 1990, Add MS 89482/2/11.

¹²⁴ Magee to Florence, June 6, 1997, Add MS 89482/1/20.

Bryson, and Arnold Wesker, the chapter examines the informal personal relationships that enabled Hay Festival to succeed and the type of authors that the festival programmed. These authors' letters, while showing one function of literary festivals as promotional activity, disrupt the assumption that festival appearances simply generate book sales and income for authors.

The final chapter of part one, 'The platform: Promoting literature, 2000—2024,' narrates Hay Festival's move into the new millennia and examines the implications of the rise of the internet and the festival's international expansions for understandings of Hay Festival as a cultural organisation. This was a period in which the New Labour government doubled government spending on the arts yet still continued the neoliberal programme established by the Conservatives in the previous decade. Analysing Hay Festival's physical programmes and letters from publishers in the archive, the decade saw changes to the professionalism and economies of writing and the increasing presence of the publicist within Hay Festival correspondence as the festival attracted more celebrities. Meanwhile, Hay Festival's move from a festival in Hay-on-Wye to a large field on the outskirts of town epitomised its development in the 2000s and its symbolic move away from the early intimacy of the kitchen table and to the commercial marketplace stand, with its global festivals, corporate sponsors, and celebrity programming. The chapter considers Hay Festival's existing position within literature as a marker for literary value and a broadening out of literature shown through a preoccupation with ancient and classical literature through oral 'storytelling' as it moved towards a more generalised appeal and audience.

The second part, 'Places,' examines the impact of Hay Festival's local and digital environments on the festival itself. The first chapter in this part, 'On the borders: Mapping the literary inheritance of the Wales-England border,' and chapter four overall, examines the influence of the surrounding borderland landscape on Hay Festival. Literary festivals are

placemakers and literary festivals in rural areas such as Hay Festival can sustain, create, and radically transform an area both culturally and economically. While ‘peripheral’ in geographical terms, Hay Festival’s strong sense of place creates its identity and enables the festival to have international success and prominence within the literary world. For case studies, the chapter examines the literary texts that form the literary inheritance of the area, and that Hay Festival binds itself to in order to create its strong sense of place: Francis Kilvert’s diary (1870-1879; 1944), Raymond Williams’s *Border Country* (1960), and Bruce Chatwin’s *On the Black Hill* (1982). By foregrounding the area’s literature, the festival in turn strengthens and provides a distinctive identifier of the place and people, offering new insight into how cultural organisations can shape and capitalise upon an existing identity of a landscape.

As the final chapter of the thesis, ‘Digital past, present, future: Accessing Hay Festival online’ argues that Hay Festival’s virtual internet archive, book club, and digital festivals reveal its wider digital presence to be a DIY, improvisatory project that utilises emergent digital technologies, and is hence reminiscent of the festival’s kitchen table beginnings. Hay Festival capitalises upon these arenas of book talk to extend the temporary community created at its physical festival by creating its own digital literary sphere. Framed by a quote from the author Patricia Lockwood describing the internet as a ‘living, moving, breathing text,’ this chapter conceives of the internet as embodied.¹²⁵ Examining social media profiles, video streaming platforms, and the festival website, the chapter demonstrates that Hay Festival’s ‘fleet of foot’ digital approach enables it to exploit digital opportunities to prioritise individual audience accessibility and extend experiences of literature.¹²⁶ The chapter uses the case studies of Zadie Smith, Lockwood, and Ali Smith to analyse literary texts and their

¹²⁵ Patricia Lockwood, *Priestdaddy: A Memoir* (New York: Penguin Books, 2018), 18.

¹²⁶ Andy Fryers, interview by Ellen Addis, Zoom, September 29, 2021.

corresponding Hay Festival events. In doing so, it exemplifies how digital book talk can transform the audience's experience of the text, offering ways of thinking about the literary festival's place in the digital literary sphere.

Part One

Histories: Looking back through the Hay Festival Manuscript Archive

The playwright Arnold Wesker questions his Hay Festival payment in the form of cases of wine. Not because wine is not an adequate form of payment, but because there is not enough of it. ‘Wine: Two cases of wine valued at £500 means the bottles would be about £20 each. Heady. Would prefer 4 cases of bottles valued at £10 each!’ he states in his letter to the festival director, Peter Florence, in 1995.¹ Wesker closes the letter with an admission: ‘But yes, the principle of wine as payment is fine.’ This letter is barely legible on the old fax paper, the words fading into a similar pale grey as the sheet that they are printed on. It is these types of correspondence between authors and festival workers, as well as administrative documents such as contracts and funding applications, that make up the Hay Festival archive and inform my understanding of the festival’s history.

Before chapter one, I will describe the archive and explain its significance not only to this project, but to the construction of Hay Festival’s pivotal place within the evolution of British literary culture and shaping cultural understandings of literature and reading today.

The correspondence in the archive exhibits the changing modes of communication during Hay Festival’s history. In 1988, the festival relied upon typed and handwritten letters, incorporating fax in the early 1990s, before the popularity of email in the mid-1990s. Strewn through the correspondence are postcards, personal letters of thanks from authors, and communications with the festival’s audience. In the next two decades, Hay Festival would come to rely on audience feedback in surveys to shape its festival programming and ‘encourage and empower participation in the event of the Festival, and in Literature as an art

¹ Arnold Wesker to Peter Florence, March 20, 1995, Add MS 89482/1/11.

form'.² The festival accounts tell the story of missed funding deadlines and struggling to rely on sponsors, but also the success of its relationships with local and national arts funders and newspapers. The final part of the archive, the printed materials and photographs, showcase the programmes and marketing of the festival, marking Hay Festival's evolution from homegrown to international, documented by the abundant press cuttings accompanying each festival year. Buried within these materials, the growth of the festival can be discerned. Beginning as a 'modest festival' and flourishing into one with 'global reach,' the archive is like the back of a tapestry, showing the wefts and warps of the patterned weaving needed to create the work of art.³ The threads, hanging loose, are the artefacts in the archive that tell the story of Hay Festival.

There is little direct evidence in the archive of how the first Hay Festival occurred, other than stories later created about the place where the festival began: the Florence family's kitchen table. Throughout the archive and its years covering Hay festival up to 2017, there is also scant evidence of festival planning and programming notes from meetings, but there are letters inviting authors to appear. Evidently, the archive has omissions, documents that are either lost or still at the festival offices. Michael Moss and David Thomas discuss archival silences and absences, where voices are excised, perhaps because record creators or archive donors choose to suppress them, and that these silences 'only come into existence when researchers look for specific pieces of information in the archive,' though '[a]bsence of evidence is not evidence of absence'.⁴ In the Hay Festival archive, the gaps are the result of amateur recordkeeping, not silences. As discussed in my introduction, the nature of an archive for a festival such as this will always have lacunae as events and performances leave

² Hay Festival funding application to Arts Council of Wales, 2000, Add MS 89482/2/22.

³ Peter Florence to Antonia Byatt from the Arts Council of Great Britain, 1989, Add MS 89482/2/13; Hay Cartagena de Indias 'International Communications Overview,' 2017, Add MS 89482/1/243.

⁴ Michael Moss and David Thomas, *Archival Silences: Missing, Loss, and Uncreated Archives* (Oxford: Routledge, 2021), 6, 11.

traces other than material. This makes the archive not fully accessible. As the festival began to go digital in the 2000s, the volume of materials thinned and instead of handwritten letters between authors and festival workers, a select number of email chains are printed off – though due to the missing linking email chains and small number, it can be presumed that not all emails were deposited into the archive.⁵ As the festival began to expand internationally, many documents from the 2010s are in Spanish, making them inaccessible to non-Spanish speakers. I acknowledge these gaps in the archive and attempt to fill the empty space with research interviews and other archival work to narrate as full a history of Hay Festival as possible. This thesis looks at the degree to which Hay Festival's archival deposit to the British Library demonstrates the festival's growth from small community arts festival to an internationally successful institution.

When the archive was first opened, dust and dirt was settled on each folder and paper after years of being untended to. Glaister describes his trip to the Hay Festival office in 2017 where the archive was kept before being deposited. The archive was housed down 'a rickety wooden staircase' where 'the giant really does seem to be asleep, if not obscured by a morass of cardboard boxes, plastic crates, box files, bunting, posters and all manner of festival paraphernalia, all doused in a musty aroma. It is much like any other damp office basement'.⁶ These poor conditions led to some of the older files being blotched with mould, some still damp, some photographs untouchable due to their spores, and some of the paper perforated with holes and the remnants of insects. With dirt and dust on hands, the archive feels old and fragile, the thirty-seven years since the festival began feeling longer while reading the type-written letters of invitation from its first years. Some papers from 1988 are more pristine than

⁵ Issues around data protection such as GDPR compliance were not explicitly stated in Hay Festival's the digital archiving policy with the British Library, however, in discussions with the British Library, certain documents have been redacted and left out of the publicly available materials due to GDPR issues.

⁶ Glaister, 'From Heaney's Poetry to Rushdie's Surprise Appearance.'

those from 2007, perhaps depending on how close they were to the damp in the basement. Faxes have also not fared well in the archive. Fax paper and ink from the 1990s has become so discoloured that the messages are almost illegible. The archive also contained hundreds of rusting staples before being removed for conservation. On removal, the staples would crumble as they were taken out, leaving an orange rust scar like the burn of a lighter. Discarded in one box containing correspondence about the early festivals in the 1990s, an ancient cigarette butt fell out; in another was an assortment of British and Spanish coins in an unmarked envelop; and in a separate box was an order list for fish and chips.

The detritus left by Hay Festival staff members over the decades breaks away from the sanctioned outwardly facing front of the organisation and instead unveils the more tangled and messy threads of people working on a literature festival. Personal doodles, loose Post-It notes, and scrawled phone messages populate the archive, going beyond Florence's claim that the archive is 'largely documentary,' and while certain artefacts are haphazard in their order, most of the archive is chronologically filed.⁷ Each Hay Festival programme is also kept in the archive and the copy of the first programme in 1988 is signed by the attending authors.

Running through the core of Hay Festival's history, with his name appearing on almost every document up until the mid-2000s when the festival goes international, is Peter Florence. Almost all letters from authors, agents, publishers, audiences, sponsors, and accountants are addressed to Florence. As the authors' voices begin to fade from the archive in the late 1990s when writing became more professionalised and agents and publishers take over communications, Florence's voice prevails. His invitations form the programme of

⁷ Glaister, 'From Heaney's Poetry to Rushdie's Surprise Appearance.'

events at Hay.⁸ The archive shows Florence's close relationships with publishers and authors, with interjected personal details reading like an archive of his own life.

The Hay Festival archive provides an opportunity to examine the festival's accomplishments and the mechanisms used to achieve them. In the following three chapters, I trace Hay Festival's history through the archive in three eras: the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s to today. I primarily use the materials I catalogued within the archive to answer questions such as: what can the physical materials and documents from the literary festival tell us about an event that is inherently temporary, transient, and ephemeral in its nature? What story does the archive tell about the Hay Festival? And what kind of story is the festival trying to tell?

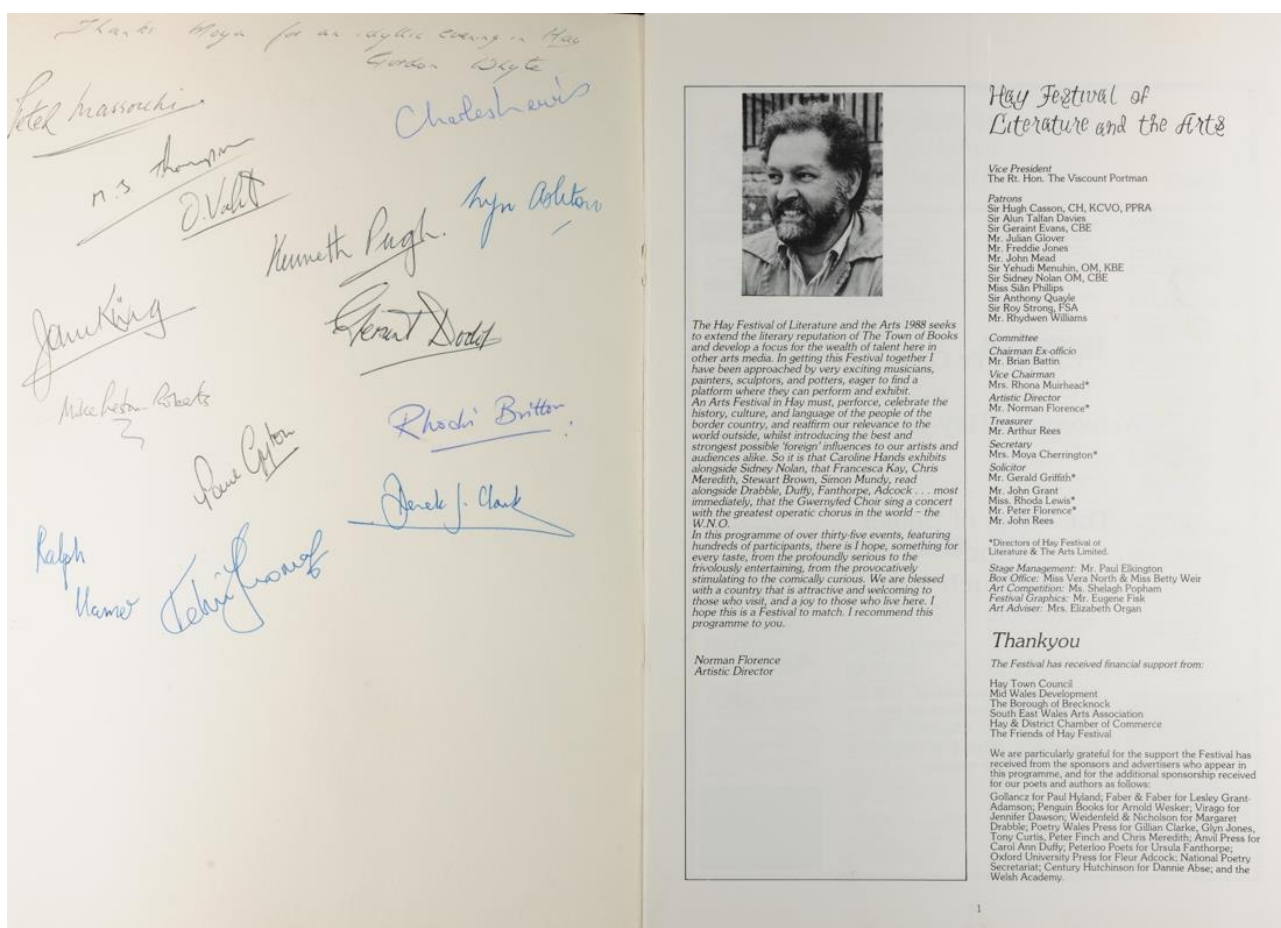


Figure 2: The inside of the Hay Festival 1988 programme, signed by authors and with Norman Florence's director's letter, Add MS 89482/4/32. © Hay Festival.

⁸ Peter Florence to Umberto Eco, June 29, 1994, Add MS 89482/1/3.

1 The kitchen table: Domestic and utopian beginnings, 1987—1989

'In August 1987, a bunch of us got together around my mother's kitchen table. My father had the idea of inviting friends and some people he really admired up for the weekend to talk, play and hang out. Flo's [Norman Florence] plan was that the gathering should be informal, international and great fun. He figured that we had two amazing advantages in trying to get this off the ground – the staggering beauty of the Brecon Beacons National Park where we live, and the people of Hay, whose generosity and imagination make this town so exciting. Twenty festivals on it's pretty much worked out how he envisioned it.'

Peter Florence (2007).¹

In the beginning of Hay Festival, there is a kitchen table and a family sitting around it. They are the Florences: son Peter, father Norman, and mother Rhoda Lewis. They are a family working in the arts, all actors before Norman and Peter Florence began to produce theatre productions. At the table, the Florences are discussing the possibilities of live literature, where books can be experienced collectively, and conversations can be staged where they live in the border country of Wales. In 1987, the Florences choose a nearby small local town known for its abundant bookshops as the place to host a literary festival. In 2007, Peter Florence recalls Hay Festival's beginning and the family's hopes for the festival to be 'informal, international and great fun' in his programme notes.² Nine years later, in an interview, Peter Florence would again recollect the festival's inception at his mother's kitchen table:

Everything around here starts around a kitchen table ... we thought well we should do something at home. So I invited a bunch of mates. My parents invited their friends and the idea was to be together. To talk about some stuff. To have a few laughs. Have

¹ Hay Festival programme, 2007, Add MS 89482/4/36, 4.

² Hay Festival programme, 2007, Add MS 89482/4/36, 4.

a few drinks and that would be enough for a weekend. And actually, that spirit is exactly what we do now.³

At this table, the Florences hoped to create a literary festival that would be a communal, celebratory event involving the landscape of the Welsh border country and the arts.

Retrospectively locating the festival's origins at the kitchen table with the Florence family sat around it, Peter Florence underlines the importance of the relationship between domestic spaces and social gathering as Hay Festival's main inspiration. The story of the kitchen table would be one that the festival would return to throughout its history, though any mention of the kitchen table is absent in archival materials from the 1980s. Commemorating the festival's early improvisatory spirit as the key to its success, Florence foregrounds the intimacy of Hay Festival in the description of it simply as 'a bunch of us got together' with an aim of 'inviting friends' to 'talk, play and hang out,' in turn downplaying the professional funding applications and procedures required to begin an organised literary festival.⁴ Instead, the collective and recreational is acknowledged as key to Hay Festival's beginning, in keeping with Murray's definition of literary festivals as 'public celebrations of literature'.⁵ Revel Guest, Hay Festival's Chair Emeritus, characterises the first years of Hay Festival specifically as a celebratory and informal gathering, describing it as 'very small, almost like a little *party* in the beginning,' echoing Rhoda Lewis's only requirement for the festival 'to be a party'.⁶ Florence's claim that Hay Festival today has the same informal 'spirit' as when it began suggests that his father Norman Florence's ambitious and precise hopes for the festival were realised, generating the well-known Hay Festival story of small arts festival to global success.

³ Florence, 'Hay Festival Hopes to Be in Tehran in 10 Years' Time,' interview by Blizzard.

⁴ Hay Festival programme, 2007, Add MS 89482/4/36, 4.

⁵ Murray, *The Digital Literary Sphere*, 83.

⁶ Revel Guest, 'Live Literature and Cultural Value,' interview by Ellen Wiles, 126; Peter Florence, 'Welcome to Hay,' Hay Festival Programme, 2012, Add MS 89482/4/34, 2.

Despite its rural setting and domestic kitchen table beginning, the Florences had high hopes for Hay Festival to be an international festival from the outset, with Norman Florence writing in his inaugural director's letter in 1988 that the festival must introduce 'the best and strongest possible "foreign" influences to our artists and audiences alike'.⁷ The Florences' internationalism was a perspective shared by other literary festivals of the period, with Cheltenham Literature Festival programming international authors at its festival for the ten years previous.⁸ The influence of this internationalism led Hay Festival to be, in Peter Florence's words, an 'intensely local mixture of tribalism and globalism,' rooted in the Welsh border countryside.⁹ Hay Festival's kitchen table origin story represents the domestic, intimate, and collaborative imperatives of the Florences' hopes for the festival, complicating the rapid international growth of the festival. In fact, the retelling of the kitchen table story has made it mythical, a legend inextricable from accounts of Hay Festival's beginning, with profiles and articles about the festival including this modest origin story about how it was 'dreamt up'.¹⁰ A potent symbol, the kitchen table is shorthand in the story of Hay Festival for its inception and extraordinary growth, with the 2019 Hay Festival report marking its ascendancy with a section titled '[f]rom kitchen table to literary village' – referring to the festival's expansion of offshoot international festivals and it becoming an assortment of communal gatherings.¹¹

⁷ Norman Florence, Hay Festival programme, 1988, Add MS 89482/4/32, 1.

⁸ In 1978, Cheltenham Literature Festival featured Tom Stoppard and Allen Ginsberg. 'The Times and The Sunday Times Cheltenham Literature Festival 2019 Brochure,' Cheltenham Festivals, August 5, 2019, 12-13, https://issuu.com/cheltenhamfestivals/docs/clf_2019_high_res_singles.

⁹ Peter Florence, 'Peter Florence, Director of the Hay Festival: Interview,' interview by Dylan Moore, *Wales Arts Review*, September 4, 2012, <https://www.walesartsreview.org/interview-peter-florence-director-of-the-hay-festival/>.

¹⁰ 'Count Down to Hay Festival Wales,' *British Council*, May 19, 2017, <https://literature.britishcouncil.org/blog/2017/count-down-to-hay/>; Price, 'A Conversation: Celebrating the Donation of the Hay Festival Archive.' I am told that a photograph of the Florences sitting around the kitchen table exists, but I could not find it in the archive, turning it yet more into a myth.

¹¹ 'Hay Festival 2019 Report,' *Hay Festival*, accessed March 17, 2022, 5, <https://cloud.hayfestival.com/hay-on-wye/reports/Hay-Festival-2019-Report.pdf>.

As Hay Festival has gained more international recognition, the image of the kitchen table has become more corporate, mirroring the wider festival's move towards a general commercialisation and growing tensions as it has required more funding to support its expansion and move into an international network of festivals. In the festival's first year, it held thirty-four events over one weekend, relying upon £20,000 funding from the Florences themselves, local sponsorships, and grant aid from local councils and Welsh government-run boards.¹² By its tenth year, the festival held 173 events over ten days, with multifarious corporate and governmental funders supporting its £300,000 budget.¹³ In the 2010s, Hay Festival began to capitalise 'Kitchen Table,' implementing the table itself as the main character of its origin story to profit financially, with the story and the symbol also becoming a part of the festival's commercial strategy. Now, the 'Kitchen Table' denotes an exclusive area at the summer festival; a private space to relax between events, with a concierge desk service and cloakroom facilities, all for the price of £10,000 to become a Hay Festival Benefactor.¹⁴ From kitchen table to the Kitchen Table, the simple origin story of the festival has transformed into a trailblazing and globally successful charity, one that has become arguably increasingly professional as its success has grown. In the following three chapters, I narrate the progression of the Hay Festival kitchen table story into an exclusive dining table in the 1990s, before becoming a more corporate and professional platform in the 2000s.

This first chapter explores Hay Festival's origin and early aims. Despite its professionalism, loyal following, global offshoot festivals, and charity status, I argue that the absence of the kitchen table in archival materials from the 1980s reveals the retrospective fashioning of an origin story. I investigate the festival's unfolding chronology from the

¹² Moya Cherrington to Wales Tourist Board, January 6, 1988, Add MS 89482/2/11.

¹³ 'Hay Festival of Literature and the Arts Limited Report and Accounts,' August 31, 1997, Add MS 89482/3/11.

¹⁴ 'Become a Hay Festival Benefactor,' *Hay Festival*, accessed March 17, 2022.

<https://www.hayfestival.com/wales/benefactors>.

archive to understand how Hay Festival grapples to retroactively narrate the story of its early domesticity and informality through the image of the kitchen table.¹⁵ The chapter focuses on the programme notes and letters in the Hay Festival archive and research interviews with both Hay Festival staff and audiences to explore the division between Hay Festival's appearance as a community-driven literary festival concerned with the authentic 'spirit' of the arts and conversations, and the bureaucratic backroom work responsible for the festival itself.¹⁶

My goal in doing so is to track Hay Festival's history from its inception to be able to compare its beginnings to Hay Festival in 2024, offering new insight into the early utopian aims of the festival and trace how far they have been achieved. While in later discussions I foreground the matter of the festival's audience, this chapter focuses primarily on the festival's first years, 1987-1989, looking at its creation, mission statement, funding, and its relationship with the local town in these years. I argue that the culmination of Hay Festival's aims, and the means by which it achieved these, forms the foundation for its remarkable growth in the 1990s and 2000s and its influence on the wider literary culture in the UK today. I first set Hay Festival amid other successful rural family-run festivals to understand how the origin story that these festivals tell impacts and narrates their successes. I go on to argue that Hay Festival's hope to 'be informal, international and great fun' in 1988 was predictive of its contemporary work today, and that its other aims were a utopian imagining of the arts that enabled the festival to build a textual community within the Welsh borderlands through the programming of literary events.¹⁷

¹⁵ Charles Williams, 'Hay Festival, One of the World's Biggest and Best Literary Festivals,' *Visit Wales*, accessed February 19, 2024, <https://www.visitwales.com/things-do/events/festivals/introducing-hay>.

¹⁶ Florence, 'Hay Festival Hopes to Be in Tehran in 10 Years' Time,' interview by Blizzard.

¹⁷ Hay Festival programme, 2007, Add MS 89482/4/36, 4.

Family-run festivals

At Hay Festival, the story of its conception is capitalised upon for the purpose of establishing what Hay's former technical director Joe Fletcher describes as the 'family feel' brand for the festival.¹⁸ Many successful arts festivals in the UK have similar small family-run beginnings. Two notable family-run festivals are the Eavis family's Glastonbury Festival, with the founder Michael Eavis sharing responsibility for the festival with his daughter Emily Eavis in 1999, and the Glyndebourne Festival, a global opera festival in East Sussex founded in 1934 by John Christie and his wife Audrey Mildmay that continues to be headed by the Christie family today.¹⁹ Looking more closely at the similarities in the stories that Glastonbury Festival and Hay Festival tell illustrates a common pathway for small-scale festivals to those that are globally successful.

Glastonbury Festival chronicles its history and increasing success with a timeline on its website. On this timeline, it cites its small beginnings, where the first festival in 1970 was held at the Eavis's Worthy Farm in Somerset, the site still used today, and was attended by just 1,500 people, costing '£1 including free milk from the farm'.²⁰ By 2019, the weekend tickets cost £248, and the capacity had risen to 203,000, showcasing an impressive growth in scale.²¹ Much like Glastonbury's makeshift initial years, the first Hay Festival took place in various venues around the book town, in pub car parks and function rooms, churches, the library, the local parish hall, and British Legion, and was attended by around 1,000 visitors.²²

¹⁸ Joe Fletcher, interview by Rebecca Roach, Zoom, October 4, 2021.

¹⁹ 'A Brief History of Glyndebourne,' Glyndebourne, accessed July 12, 2022, <https://www.glyndebourne.com/about-us/a-brief-history-of-glyndebourne/>.

²⁰ 'Glastonbury Festival - 1970,' Glastonbury Festival, accessed July 12, 2022, <https://www.glastonburyfestivals.co.uk/history/history-1970/>.

²¹ 'Glastonbury Festival - 2019,' Glastonbury Festival; Anushka Asthana, 'Like Father, like Daughter: Emily Eavis Helps Run the Glastonbury Festival,' *Guardian* (London), April 25, 2009, <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2009/apr/26/glastonbury-festival-emily-eavis>.

²² Map of Hay Festival venues, 1988, Add MS 89482/1/165; Andrea Collins, Dimitris Potoglou, Andy Fryers, *Reducing the Impact of Visitor Travel: Reflections on Hay Festival Hay-on-Wye, Wales* (Cardiff: Cardiff University, 2016), 7.

In 2016, Peter Florence described Hay Festival's early days as a community coming together, though art or literature is not mentioned when discussing the festival, and the conversations forming the majority of festival events are minimised to 'talk[ing] about some stuff'.²³ At both Glastonbury and Hay, the exponential growth from small family-run operation to globally successful has become the story of the festivals themselves.

In its written evidence for the DCMS report, Hay Festival cites this growth in sophistication, scale, and reach, as its main cultural influence, writing: 'Hay Festival is one of the world's leading arts and literature festivals. Founded in 1987, the festival has grown from a small event to a series of major international festivals that take place annually across the globe'.²⁴ Hay Festival takes advantage of its growth to narrate a story of success, where the localised kitchen table beginning is deliberately in tension with the global organisation that the festival has become. Florence's statement that the 'spirit' of the festival in 1988 'is exactly what we do now' attempts to preserve the original image of the festival and promote a feeling of accessibility and relatability despite its reach.²⁵ This attempt is only partly successful, as the festival struggles between images of it being 'the last unreconstructed hippy bastion,' and a professional, world-renowned festival for the leading literary discussions.²⁶ Hay Festival's £20,000 budget for its first year tripled to £60,000 in 1989.²⁷ By the mid-2000s, festival accounts show that the budget was close to £1,000,000, while the DCMS Committee written evidence forecasts that Hay Festival's 2020 budget would have been close

²³ Florence, 'Hay Festival Hopes to Be in Tehran in 10 Years' Time,' interview by Blizzard.

²⁴ The report evaluates the impact of the coronavirus pandemic of UK festivals, including the literary festival Hay Festival. Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 'Written evidence submitted by the Hay Festival.'

²⁵ Florence, 'Hay Festival Hopes to Be in Tehran in 10 Years' Time,' interview by Blizzard.

²⁶ Rex Fontaine, 'Hay, It's A Happy Hippy Place,' *Independent* (London), May 30, 1998, <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/hay-it-s-a-happy-hippy-place-1156361.html>.

²⁷ Peter Dunn, 'King Leads Shopkeepers' Revolt in the Town of Books,' *Independent* (London), May 26, 1989, Add MS 89482/4/7.

to £2,700,000.²⁸ The festival's success, demonstrated by the festival accounts and inclusion in the DCMS report, disrupts the intimate kitchen table beginning evoked by Hay Festival's storytelling, and instead reveals an innately professional and large arts organisation in its full success, always aspiring towards this success.

The first Hay Festival

The frontmatter of the programme of the first Hay Festival is largely plain. In the centre, framed like a painting, is a navy rectangle with a landscape scribbled in white and the words 'Hay Festival of Literature and the Arts' underneath. The scribbled outline is of Hay-on-Wye's castle, hills, and fields. Underneath the framed picture is a short quotation:

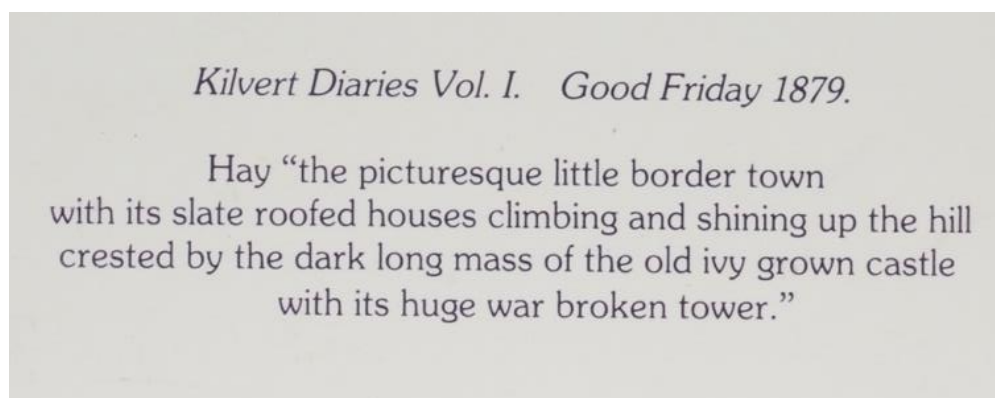


Figure 3: Hay Festival programme frontmatter, 1988, Add MS 89482/4/32.
© Hay Festival.

²⁸ Hay Festival audited accounts, 2004, Add MS 89482/2/26; Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 'Written evidence submitted by the Hay Festival.'

Introducing the festival with a quotation from the Victorian curate Francis Kilvert who detailed rural life in the borders in the 1870s through his voluminous diaries, Hay Festival binds itself within the literary and cultural history of the border landscape from its very genesis. Noting its border location, Kilvert describes Hay-on-Wye in 1879 as a provincial town, with identifiably Welsh features in its slate roofs. The buildings are of their surrounding environment; they blend into the landscape, with the overgrown ivy castle and houses ‘climbing and shining’ from the hills that the town is nestled in. In chapter four, I will investigate further the influence of Kilvert on Hay Festival and the festival’s conception of the border country. Coupled with the sketch of Hay-on-Wye, Kilvert’s quotation strengthens Hay Festival’s union with its surrounding landscape. Marrying festival with town, the first Hay Festival foregrounded Hay-on-Wye’s landscape and literary history to establish a local arts festival in the Welsh borders, making each synonymous with the other.

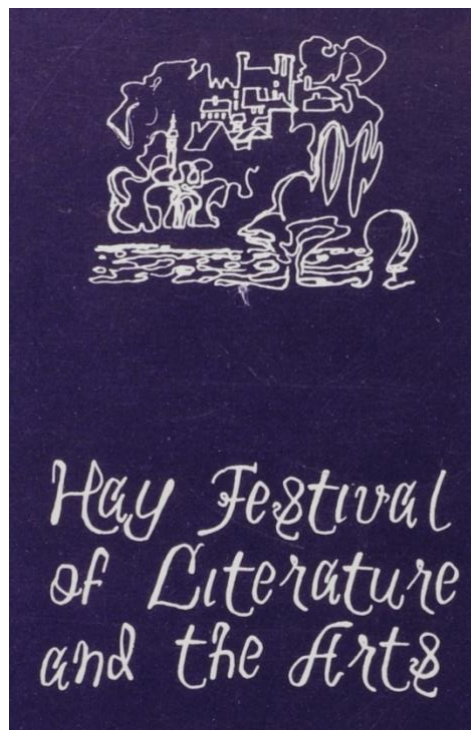


Figure 4: Hay Festival logo on the frontmatter of the programme, 1988, Add MS 89482/4/32. © Hay Festival.

On the same 1988 programme's backmatter is a quotation from the German composer Robert Schumann:

Every age has a society of congenial spirits. Draw the circle tighter, you who belong to one another, that the truth of art may shine ever more clearly, spreading joy and blessings everywhere.

*Schumann, 1853.*²⁹

The quotation is taken from Schumann's short essay 'New Paths' wherein he praises the new burgeoning talent of his friend Johannes Brahms, a part of a new 'small circle' of young artists.³⁰ In using this quotation from Schumann reflecting ideas of the Romantic sublime and alluding to the context of a coterie of 'important new talents' in exceptional musicians and composers such as Brahms whose music provides 'wonderful insights into the secret of the spiritual world,' Hay Festival stakes a claim for creating a new communal gathering of creative and imaginative 'congenial spirits' in the form of a literary festival.³¹ In fact, throughout its history, the word 'spirit' runs through the festival. It is used again by Peter Florence in 2016 to argue that the original 'spirit' of the festival has persisted and generates a sense of the numinous.³² The festival is founded on the early legend of the kitchen table and its first programme is presented bookended by lofty quotations from a clergyman and a Romantic composer using words like 'shining' and 'blessings' to introduce an event which is promised to be spiritual, divine, and inspiring. By referencing the composer, Hay Festival turns to the German tradition of the high culture festival, making it also disparate from the homely kitchen table image used retroactively by the festival.

²⁹ Hay Festival programme backmatter, 1988, Add MS 89482/4/32.

³⁰ Robert Schumann, 'New Paths (1853),' in *Schumann on Music: A Selection from the Writings*, ed. Henry Pleasants (New York: Dover Books, 1988), 199-200.

³¹ Schumann, 'New Paths (1853),' 199-200.

³² Florence, 'Hay Festival Hopes to Be in Tehran in 10 Years' Time,' interview by Blizzard.

Hay Festival's homage to the German tradition of the high culture festival also takes inspiration from the history of rural community drama in interwar England. Rural community drama between the wars, such as that put on at Dartington Hall and that Neima investigates, presented an idealised vision of England's pre-industrial past, reconciling the modernist idea of single-authorship with communal art.³³ Hay Festival, like Dartington Hall, is set in the countryside, a key symbolic locale for social reform and 'a connection to a lamented past state of perfect communitarian harmony – a harmony that was frequently seen as embodied in the non-individualistic, non-profit-oriented medieval village'.³⁴ Hay Festival's allusions to Kilvert and Schumann in the inaugural festival's programme emphasise an idealised imagining of its rural setting, evincing a nostalgia for Britain's pre-industrial and pastoral past. Moreover, Hay Festival's first festival programmed multiple one-man drama productions, with actor Timothy Davies playing Kilvert after his role in the BBC adaptation of *Kilvert's Diary* and Peter Florence in one-man drama *War Music* by Christopher Logue.³⁵ Unlike at Dartington Hall, Hay Festival's drama productions were not the product of community comradeship but instead individual productions; however, Davies's Kilvert performances work as homage to the local area and the rural past that the curate depicts in his diary.

Bookending the first Hay Festival programme with Schumann, the Florences invoked the composer's interest in the wider arts – he frequently added references to literature and created character motifs in his compositions – perhaps alluding to the variety of events that Hay Festival would exhibit, not limited to literature. By responding to Schumann's wish to 'draw the circle tighter' in the festival's inaugural programme, Hay Festival portray the

³³ Neima, 'The Politics of Community Drama in Interwar England,' 174.

³⁴ Ibid, 174.

³⁵ Hay Festival programme, 1988, Add MS 89482/4/32.

idyllic rural community that it wishes to create from its beginning, one in which discussions of literature and art can bring people together in a joyful and positive, albeit in a potentially quixotic, way. Though idealistic, the two quotations from Kilvert and Schumann reflect an imagining of what a literary festival could be, connected to both the spiritual, pastoral landscape and the utopian belief that the conversation and communal gathering of a festival binds people together. In reading this archival printed material intended for audiences to the first festival, the purpose and outwardly image of the festival are clear. Florence, Kilvert, and Schumann draw a picture of luminosity, equating the arts to lightness and otherworldliness and the boundless possibilities of a literary festival.

With grand artistic ambitions focused on the spiritually fulfilling potential of the arts, Hay Festival's early years were marked by a hope for what live literature could bring to a rural community. On the first page of the 1988 Hay Festival programme is a director's letter from Norman Florence, the festival's then artistic director. Akin to a mission statement, the letter outlines the festival's aims from its inception as Norman Florence describes how Hay Festival 'seeks to extend the literary reputation of The Town of Books and develop a focus for the wealth of talent in other arts media'.³⁶ From the start, the Florences coupled the festival with the local town, promoting it as a site for an artistic gathering and their intentions to enrich Hay-on-Wye's existing literary identity rather than the rural community itself. Crucially, by wishing to feature 'other arts media,' Hay Festival did not limit itself to literature but embraced other artists such as 'musicians, painters, sculptors, and potters, eager to find a platform where they can perform and exhibit'.³⁷ The inaugural festival was also not limited to author interviews, and held workshops in poetry, sculpture, shadow plays, and

³⁶ Norman Florence, Hay Festival programme, 1988, Add MS 89482/4/32, 1.

³⁷ Ibid, 1.

exhibited local artist ceramics, children's art, and photography. The early variety of Hay Festival is seen as a benefit by one audience member who recalls the first time they attended the festival when it began: 'I think it was better than I expected, which is partly why I still come: the range of subjects. It's not just novels and fiction, it's all sort of things'.³⁸

The general arts-focused festival departs from Hay Festival's reputation today as mainly a literary festival. The clear goal of celebrating local voices and talent is underscored, and Norman Florence's desire to extend this presence to the outside world, nationally and internationally, foretells not only of the non-Welsh artists that the festival attracts over the years, but also its future international editions. As Norman Florence's letter continues, he explicitly lays out Hay Festival's aims:

An Arts Festival in Hay must, perforce, celebrate the history, culture, and language of the people of the border country, and reaffirm our relevance to the world outside, whilst introducing the best and strongest possible "foreign" influences to our artists and audiences alike.³⁹

It is the festival's location in the book town of Hay that represents the 'Literature' in the early nomenclature 'Hay Festival of Literature and the Arts'. Outwardly focused from the outset, Norman Florence's letter depicts Hay Festival's aim to work with and for the landscape to bring audiences to the area. However, the programme for the inaugural festival contained few international artists – Rani and Jugnu Singh's Children's Theatre Company from India; the remainder were Welsh, Irish, Scottish or English. The ambitious international scope, though contrasting with the ad hoc and improvisatory spirit of the kitchen table, would come to be fulfilled in later years.

³⁸ Speaker 3, Focus group 2, interview by Ellen Addis and Jennifer Tegg, May 27, 2023, Hay Festival, Hay-on-Wye.

³⁹ Norman Florence, Hay Festival programme, 1988, Add MS 89482/4/32, 1.



Hay Festival of Literature and the Arts

Diary

Friday 27 May

6pm
Exhibitions open
(see separate list)

6.30pm Buttermarket
OFFICIAL OPENING
Mr Mathew Pritchard
and The Rt. Hon.
The Viscount Portman
7pm Community Centre
Art Competition prizegiving by
Lord Crickhowell

7.30pm St Mary's Church £5
A Concert by the world famous
WELSH NATIONAL OPERA
MALE VOICE CHOIR (2)
9.30pm Clyro Court £4
The Raving Beauties in
TEA AT THE RITZ
Anna Carteret, Sue
Jones-Davies & Fanny Viner

Saturday 28 May

10am-12noon
Community Centre £1
Children's
INSTANT SCULPTURE
WORKSHOP
Using a variety of mediums with
Artist **Caroline Hands**.
(Ages 8-16).

10.30am Community Centre £1
Children's
POETRY WORKSHOP
Francesca Kay uses story-telling
techniques, props, and songs to
entertain and encourage
creativity. (Ages 6-9)

11am Parish Hall £2
MEET THE AUTHOR
Author of 'Lady of Hay' **Barbara**
Erskine and **Jennifer Dawson**
author of 'The Ha Ha' with
Nicola Heywood-Thomas

12noon British Legion £3
POETRY AT NOON
U. A. Fanthorpe, Carol Ann
Duffy and Fleur Adcock. Three
of our leading women poets.

12.2pm Community Centre £1
Children's
SHADOW PLAY WORKSHOP
by **Jane Phillips, Caricature**
Puppet Co. (1)

2.4pm Community Centre £1
Children's
POETRY WORKSHOP
Gillian Clarke
Practical Workshop session for
children to write with a poet.
(Ages 8+)

PREVIEW

Thursday 26 May
7.30pm St Mary's Church *£4
A Concert by the world famous
WELSH NATIONAL OPERA
MALE VOICE CHOIR (1)
with The Festival Choir

2pm Parish Hall £2
BYRON
Owen Dudley Edwards on
Byron and the Age of the
Democratic Revolution
Peter Florence reads Byron.

4pm Clyro Church £3.50
Timothy Davies as
FRANCIS KILVERT (1)
A return to Clyro for Actor
Timothy Davies

4.30pm Parish Hall £2
MEET THE AUTHOR
Lesley Grant Adamson
discusses Modern Crime Fiction
with **Owen Dudley Edwards**.

6pm Clyro Court *£3.50
POETRY AT DUSK
Dannie and Joan Abse
Dannie Abse, President, Poetry
Society, reads his own and other
poetry.

8.30pm St Mary's Church *£4.50
IN CONCERT
Geoffrey Buckley - Piano
John Field Sonata no. 4 in B
Beethoven Sonata in A
Bartók Suite opus 14
Schumann Arabesque opus 18
Schumann Carnaval

10pm Lions Corner House £7.50
SUPPER CABARET
Francesca Kay, a performance
poet and 'alternative' cabaret
artist. *Tickets include supper.*

Sunday 29 May

10am-12noon
Community Centre £1
Children's
PAINTING ON FABRIC
WORKSHOP
by **Caroline Hands** (Ages 6-14)

12.2pm
Community Centre £1
Children's
SHADOW PLAY WORKSHOP
with **Jane Phillips (2)**

12noon British Legion £2.50
POETRY AT NOON
Glyn Jones, Tony Curtis,
Paul Hyland.
Three of Britain's leading poets.

2pm Community Centre £1.50
Children's
CHILDREN'S THEATRE
COMPANY
Dressing up in spectacular Indian
costumes: folk dancing, masks
and team games.

2.30pm Clyro Court *£3.50
Peter Florence in
WAR MUSIC by Christopher
Logue. An account of Homer's
Iliad, books 16-19.

5.30pm Clyro Court £2.50
THE RAYMOND WILLIAMS
LECTURE
Arnold Wesker, celebrated
playwright, gives the lecture
'INTERPRETATION - TO
EXPLAIN OR IMPOSE'

8.30pm Clyro Court £4
A SONG IN THE NIGHT
Freddie Jones as John Clare
Currently filming 'Consuming
Passions' with Vanessa Redgrave,
Freddie Jones is one of our
best-loved actors. As poet John
Clare he is unforgettable!

10.30pm
Lions Corner House £7.50
SUPPER CABARET
Jenny Eclair. A performance
poet and 'alternative' cabaret
artist. *Tickets include supper.*

Monday 30 May

10am-11.30am
Community Centre £1
Children's
MULTI MEDIA WORKSHOP
Explore different ideas and
methods with artist **Caroline**
Hands (Ages 6-16)

11am Clyro Church *£3.50
Timothy Davies as
FRANCIS KILVERT (2)

11.30am-1.30pm
Community Centre £1
Children's
SHADOW PLAY WORKSHOP
with **Jane Phillips (3)**

12noon British Legion £2.50
POETRY AT NOON
Horse's Mouth
Peter Finch, Ifor Thomas and
Chris Mills.
Three Performance Poets in
Cabaret.

12noon Community Centre £1.50
Peter Florence spouting
Ronald Dahl's
'REVOLTING RHYMES'
Fairy tales of the unexpected.

2pm Parish Hall £2.50
MEET THE AUTHOR
Margaret Drabble who, in 1980,
was awarded the CBE for her
services to English Literature.

4.30pm Clyro Court £2.50
HOLMES & HOUND -
Background for a
Detective Epic
Owen Dudley Edwards

6pm British Legion £2
POETRY AT DUSK
Poets Chris Meredith, Simon
Mundy and Stewart Brown

8.30pm St Mary's Church *£7.50
GALA CONCERT
by **Vivaldi Concertante**
Joseph Pilbery - Conductor
Yvonne Cheng - Soprano
Vivaldi Concerto for Strings
Albinoni Oboe Concerto in
D minor Op. 9
Vivaldi 'Summer' from the
Four Seasons
Greig Cowkeeper's Tune & Air
Mozart Motet: Exultate Jubilate
Handel Arrival of the Queen of
Sheba
Vivaldi Concerto a la Rustica
Bach Air on a G String
Haydn Symphony No. 45 in
F sharp minor

EXHIBITIONS

All exhibitions are open from 10am
each day, including Sunday.

10am-8pm St Mary's Church
Gerald of Wales
A celebration of the 800th
Anniversary of the journey of
Geraldus Cambrensis.

10am-8pm Clyro Court
Sir Sidney Nolan
Artist, Poet, and Theatre Designer

10am-8pm Clyro Court
Ceramics & Sculpture
An exhibition by artists of
international repute.

10am-5pm Ashbrook House, Clyro
Kilvert: The Spirit of the Place
An Exhibition by Artists
connected with Kilvert country.

10am-4pm Community Centre
Children's Art Competition
An exhibition of the entries,
ages: 6 to 18 years.
Prizegiving at 7pm on Friday
by Lord Crickhowell.

10am-8pm Granary Gallerv
Fruits of the Spirit
An exhibition by artists from the
border country.

10am-4pm Community Centre
Lights & Shadows
An exhibition to show the art of
modern shadow puppet theatres.

10am-5pm Hay Library
The Art of Wales
An exciting exhibition of the best of
Welsh art.

10am-5pm Cheese Market
The Art of Photography
Hay Photographic Society presents
a varied and skilful exhibition.

10am-8pm Like's Showroom
Caroline Hands
This talented artist will exhibit her
own work.

10am-8pm Parish Hall
The Spirit of Youth
The much-acclaimed exhibition
from Cardiff College of Art.

10am-5pm Parish Hall, Cusop
Border Camera Club
An exhibition of photographs of
the border country.

BOOKING INFORMATION
Details of facilities for the disabled
available on request.
Festival brochure and Booking
form from
Box Office Manager,
Hay Festival,
Top Floor, Council Office,
Hay-on-Wye, Wales via
Hereford HR3 5BX
Monday Saturday 10am-4pm
Sunday 10am-2pm
TELEPHONE: 0497 821217.
Telephone bookings must be paid
for within 48 hours.

*All details correct at time of going to
press. We reserve the right to change
programmes and artists if circumstances
dictate. Tickets cannot be accepted for
refund or resale. The management also
reserves the right to refuse admission.*

*Indicates concessions.

Figure 5: Hay Festival 'Diary,' 1988, Add MS 89482/4/32, 3. © Hay Festival.

As discussed, for the Florences, the parameters for a literary festival were broad, and included not only literature, but music, fine art, and theatre. Norman Florence closes his 1988 letter by detailing the events of the first festival, including 'Poetry at Noon' with 'leading women poets,' U.A. Fanthorpe, Fleur Adcock, and future poet laureate at the beginning of her

career, Carol Ann Duffy.⁴⁰ The inaugural Hay Festival was localised and shared more similarities with a community arts festival than the global festival it is today. The festival featured literature by writers and artists early in their careers, with many partaking in multiple events over the weekend, and the various creative workshops given by artists Caroline Hands and Jane Philips.⁴¹ Following the Florences' chance encounter with Arnold Wesker at a local pub in the town, the first Raymond Williams Lecture, an event that is still a stalwart event for the festival today and that I will explore in detail in my fourth chapter, was given by the playwright who lived on Hay Bluff, near Hay-on-Wye.⁴² Programming writers and artists from the local environment as well as those at the beginning of their careers, Hay Festival showed innovation and the literary foresight that has enabled it to attract audiences and have the success that it has today.

The initial audience of Hay Festival was also extremely localised. In terms of early Hay Festival demographics, in 1988, 80% of the festival audience were from local counties Powys and Herefordshire.⁴³ In the following year, the local audience decreased to 50% as the festival's popularity spread, with 80% visiting overnight from Wales and the Midlands in 1989, and 20% 'tourists from all over Britain and beyond'.⁴⁴ The festival's overall attendance also increased from 1,000 attendees in 1988 to 4,000 in 1989.⁴⁵ Already by the festival's second year, the local population was becoming diluted by people outside of the border country, swiftly fulfilling Norman Florence's wish to 'reaffirm our relevance to the world

⁴⁰ Hay Festival programme, 1988, Add MS 89482/4/32, 3.

⁴¹ Ibid, 3.

⁴² Abbie Wightwick, 'Sir Arnold Wesker Remembered by Friends at Hay Festival,' *Wales Online*, April 13, 2016, accessed February 28, 2024, <https://www.walesonline.co.uk/whats-on/whats-on-news/hay-festival-director-peter-florence-11180251>.

⁴³ Correspondence between Hay Festival and West Midlands Arts, 1990, Add MS 89482/2/12.

⁴⁴ Correspondence between Hay Festival and West Midlands Arts, 1990, Add MS 89482/2/12; 'Literary Festival Hailed a Success', *Western Daily Press* (Bristol), June 6, 1989, Add MS 89482/4/7.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

outside'.⁴⁶ This expansion was aided in 1989 by the festival boasting a 'glittering package of sponsors and names' including the major title sponsor of £10,000 from Rupert Murdoch's *Sunday Times*.⁴⁷ The *Sunday Times* gave 20% discount on festival tickets to its readers and described Hay as a destination festival, encouraging readers to travel and 'take a literary break in Hay-on-Wye,' the 'one living bookshop'.⁴⁸ The festival's growth in national recognition between 1988 and 1989 and the early fulfilment of its aim to bring audiences to the border country foreshadows the festival's exponential growth in the 1990s.

Funding the festival

In order to achieve its early success, the Florences used their artistic connections to gain the leverage to establish their literary festival in Hay-on-Wye. In the archive, there are invitation letters for Hay Festival's first year, foretelling the festival's early intended audience. The letters are addressed to aristocracy, sponsors, and local government officials, showcasing the influence of an upper-class literati and relationship with influential local figures on the early Hay Festival. Invitees to the reception and Opening Ceremony in 1988 included the Mayor of Kington, Agatha Christie's grandson Mathew Prichard, the Bishop of Swansea and Brecon, and Lord Crickhowell. A letter from the festival's vice chair Rhona Muirhead to one invitee describes the reception's aim as to 'thank our sponsors for their generosity and interest'.⁴⁹

Inviting these officials and artistic connections to the festival's events, Hay Festival creates an exclusive circle of attendees, similar to Schumann's coterie. The programme for the 1988 Hay Festival also lists the team behind Hay Festival, demonstrating again the

⁴⁶ Norman Florence, Hay Festival programme, 1988, Add MS 89482/4/32, 1.

⁴⁷ Dunn, 'King Leads Shopkeepers' Revolt in the Town of Books,' Add MS 89482/4/7.

⁴⁸ 'Book Yourself a Festival,' *Sunday Times* (London), March 12, 1989, Add MS 89482/4/7.

⁴⁹ Rhona Muirhead to Alan Black, April 26, 1988, Add MS 89482/1/165.

festival's close links with aristocracy and influential figures in the arts who had been given life peers in the House of Lords. The vice president of the festival was Viscount Portman, British Peer, and seven out of twelve of the festival's patrons and benefactors are knighted 'Sirs,' including Yehudi Menuhin, the acclaimed violinist, British architect Hugh Casson, Welsh judge Alun Talfan Davies, and Australian artist Sidney Nolan, a connection derived from Nolan's proximity to the festival – he lived and set up the Sidney Nolan Trust in Presteigne, twenty miles north of Hay.⁵⁰ These patrons attach the festival in its early years within the upper-class world of highbrow arts such as classical music, art, and theatre. Out of these patrons, only one is a writer, with the majority of patrons being actors, reflecting the Florences' theatre background. Funding and supporting Hay Festival, these patrons represent the Florences' relationships that enabled the small arts festival in the Welsh border country to begin and grow early on.

At its beginning, the Hay Festival staff was small. Comprised of a committee of ten, including 'Chairman Ex-officio' Brain Battin, vice chair Rhona Muirhead, Norman Florence as artistic director, Arthur Rees as treasurer, Moya Cherrington as secretary, and Gerald Griffin as the festival's solicitor. The other four people – John Grant, John Rees, Peter Florence, and Rhoda Lewis – were untitled, hinting towards the non-professional nature of the inaugural festival. The director role was shared by Muirhead, Cherrington, Griffith, Lewis, and Peter and Norman Florence. The remainder of the six staff members included Paul Elkington as stage manager, who would stay at the festival for the next thirty years, and staff working in box office, 'art competition,' festival graphics, and an art advisor. In 1988, Hay Festival had few formal titles, though the presence of a committee and board of directors

⁵⁰ Hay Festival programme, 1988, Add MS 89482/4/32, 1.

indicates the festival's early ambitions and the relationships the Florences used to start the festival.

While the Florences' artistic and aristocratic connections helped to establish Hay Festival and draw in writers and artists, the symbiotic relationship between festival and Hay-on-Wye aided the festival economically, shown in initial funding applications to the Welsh Tourist Board (WTB). The WTB was founded in 1969 as a result of the Development of Tourism Act 1969 and its role was enhanced following the Tourism (Overseas promotion) (Wales) Act 1992.⁵¹ On January 6, 1988, the earliest dated correspondence in the Hay Festival archive, the festival's secretary, Cherrington, wrote a letter to the WTB detailing a new 'four day Festival that is to be held in Hay-on-Wye from 27 May to 30 May 1988'.⁵² It is worthwhile to spend more time looking at this funding correspondence to understand how Hay Festival presented itself in early official contexts.

In her letter to the WTB, Cherrington included a model programme, naming Hay Festival's patron Menuhin and vice president Portman, and assured the funders that 'Norman Florence has been successful in attracting many noted performers to the Festival and it is expected that these household names will attract a wide audience'.⁵³ The inclusion of Menuhin and Portman indicates the festival's tactic to convince funders to invest in a new and unknown event by citing esteemed and recognisable people connected to the festival and create a reputation of reliability for funders to trust and support. Cherrington's letter then noted that instead of filling in typical grant application forms, they 'will be holding a meeting ... when our Director and Vice-Chairman of the Festival Board will be presenting the

⁵¹ 'FAQ about Visit Wales and This Website,' *Visit Wales*, accessed March 15, 2022, <https://www.visitwales.com/faq-about-visit-wales-and-website>. The WTB is now known as 'Visit Wales' following an 'Abolition Order' passed by the National Assembly for Wales on November 23, 2005, where full transfer of functions into the Welsh Assembly Government was made on April 1, 2006.

⁵² Moya Cherrington to the Welsh Tourist Board (WTB), January 6, 1988, Add MS 89482/2/11.

⁵³ Cherrington to WTB, January 6, 1988, Add MS 89482/2/11.

finalised programme and asking for assistance towards the cost of mounting this project'.⁵⁴

The lack of funding applications in the festival's first two years speaks to the informality of the festival, with the Florences novices in festival coordination, something that can be now be seen as reminiscent of the kitchen table beginnings. The early Hay Festival relied upon goodwill and word of mouth, using pre-established relationships to help secure the small amount of funding needed.

The WTB's response to Cherrington's letter divulges an existing 'Festival and Events Support Scheme' to help festivals with marketing costs for their events but show that Hay Festival's letter arrived too late to receive the funding. However, the WTB also note that this budget is 'under severe pressure because of increasing media costs,' providing insight into the economic strains that local funders were under from the 1980s onwards.⁵⁵ The 1980s saw a shift in how arts were funded as Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government cut the arts budget and 'made it a condition of public funding that arts organisations themselves looked for money from sponsorship, corporate giving, and charitable trusts'.⁵⁶ As a consequence, most arts organisations set up 'fundraising' or 'development' departments, enticing donors and sponsors with catered events and complimentary tickets. Hay Festival's large guest list to its opening ceremony in 1988 reads as a list of potential donors. Mark Ravenhill argues that this move towards fundraising and development departments by Thatcher's government has subsequently led to larger arts organisations benefitting, while smaller and medium-sized organisations 'are barely bringing in enough money to pay for their own existence'.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Elen Pierce to Moya Cherrington, January 28, 1988, Add MS 89482/2/11.

⁵⁶ Mark Ravenhill, 'Let's Cut the Arts Budget,' *Guardian* (London), July 25, 2010, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2010/jul/25/arts-funding-cuts-theatre-galleries>.

⁵⁷ Ravenhill, 'Let's Cut the Arts Budget.'

The next letter from the WTB to Hay Festival arrived in February 1989 and confirmed a grant agreement for £2,000 in marketing support.⁵⁸ Providing only marketing support to Welsh festivals illustrates the WTB's keenness to promote a perceived image of a cultural Wales instead of helping directly with the costs of the festival, but also implies its financial limitations as a government-funded body. In September 1989, after one year of financial support, the WTB withdrew their Festival and Events Support Scheme due to 'increased competition within the marketplace, dramatic increases in media rates, and a reduction, in real terms, of our marketing budget'.⁵⁹ Exemplifying the decreased local funding budgets of the late 1980s and early 1990s that resulted in the festival having to turn to other national and international funding partnerships as the government cut arts spending, Hay Festival's early collaboration with the WTB shows a reliance on national Welsh funders, something that would drastically change in the following decade as Hay-on-Wye's border position brought complications for the festival.

Hay-on-Wye: The first book town

The location of Hay-on-Wye as the location for Hay Festival had a large influence on the festival, not only due to the role of the border impacting funding, but also due to the town's identity as primarily a book town. In his director's letter describing the aim of Hay Festival 'to extend the literary reputation of The Town of Books,' Norman Florence highlights from the outset that the local book town was influential in the festival's creation. To understand the area that inspired the Florences to set up the festival in the first place, the book town of Hay-on-Wye must be described.

⁵⁸ Contract between the WTB and Hay Festival, February 22, 1989, Add MS 89482/2/11.

⁵⁹ Wyn Mears to Hay Festival, September 12, 1989, Add MS 89482/2/11.

The road into the town passes a toll bridge over the River Wye before winding down to the main street lined with pubs, terraced houses, raised pavements, and a nineteenth-century clock tower. During Hay's annual literary festival, it welcomes some 150,000 tourists, bunting is hung, and the doors of the bookshops are opened. For most of the nineteenth-century it was an agricultural market town, and, like many other rural places, it began to decline in the twentieth century. Between the wars, Hay-on-Wye was a halfway place for the other more popular towns in the Wye Valley – Rhayader, Builth Wells, and Llandrindod.⁶⁰ By the mid-1950s, the number of shops in Hay was dwindling. Then, in 1961, seizing the opportunity of cheap real-estate, Richard Booth, a local man who inherited estate from his uncle, opened the town's first secondhand bookshop in its old fire station. Booth's first bookshop was successful and allowed him to buy more declining property in the town: a former cinema, an old warehouse, and the decrepit Hay Castle – filling them all with books. By the late 1970s, the multiplying bookshops caused Booth to declare Hay-on-Wye 'the world's first book town'.⁶¹ Over the next half a century, Booth would become an eccentric local secondhand bookseller and self-proclaimed 'King of Hay' who declared the town 'independent of the British Isles in 1977' before petitioning to be an MP for Brecon and Radnor for his own created party, the Rural Revival party.⁶² In the decades following, the book town established by Booth 'changed Hay completely' and has become an exemplary model for struggling rural towns to boost their economic and cultural status through bookselling.⁶³

⁶⁰ A. V. Seaton, 'Book Towns as Tourism Development in Peripheral Areas,' *The International Journal of Tourism Research* 1, no. 5, (1999): 390, [https://doi.org/10.1002/\(SICI\)1522-1970\(199909/10\)1:5<389::AID-JTR204>3.0.CO;2-0](https://doi.org/10.1002/(SICI)1522-1970(199909/10)1:5<389::AID-JTR204>3.0.CO;2-0).

⁶¹ Seaton, 'Book Towns as Tourism Development in Peripheral Areas,' 391.

⁶² 'Horsepower Manifesto by Eccentric Bookman,' *The Daily Telegraph*, May 23, 1983, quoted in Paul Jackson, 'The Hay Festival,' *The National Library of Wales*, May 29, 2023, <https://www.library.wales/news/the-hay-festival>.

⁶³ Adrian Lambert, interview by Ellen Addis, Zoom, August 12, 2021.

Booth's bookshops in Hay-on-Wye created an opportunity for what Finkelstein and Squires call 'targeted rural tourism,' wherein the unique character of Booth's bookshops encouraged more to open in the area, making it a nucleus for secondhand bookselling.⁶⁴ By the 1990s, the town's success was clear: half a million tourists were estimated to visit each year, with one in twenty visitors to Wales visiting Hay.⁶⁵ Between 1980s and 2022, there have been a shifting number of bookshops in the town, ranging from anywhere between thirty and forty-one, and the town must be credited with not only providing the incentive and inspiration for the Florences to set up Hay Festival on a site of already existing literary and cultural capital near where they lived, but also for sustaining the festival's growth.⁶⁶ Despite the tandem success, the geographer Ian Jenkins contends that while the book town provided 'the impetus to the Hay Festival ... little acknowledgement is made of this by the Hay Festival, perhaps resulting in a growth of cultural dislocation'.⁶⁷ In my research interviews with Hay Festival staff, they provide no evidence of Jenkins's claim, suggesting that the contemporary relationship between town and festival is convivial. Many staff members praise the town, with one calling it 'our success ... it's the town that makes us. I've got no doubt that a big reason of why people want to come to Hay [Festival] is because they want to come to the town'.⁶⁸ Other staff members note that the town and the festival 'both benefit each other,' and that Booth's bookshops 'changed Hay completely,' helping the Florences draw initial interest to the festival because of its pre-existing literary reputation.⁶⁹ However, while contemporary

⁶⁴ Finkelstein and Squires, 675.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 675.

⁶⁶ Throughout the years the Hay Festival programmes detail a different number of bookshops. In the 1998 programme, it is thirty-six bookshops (Add MS 89482/4/32). In the 2000 programme, it is thirty-eight bookshops (Add MS 89482/4/35). In the 2005 programme, it is thirty-nine bookshops (Add MS 89482/4/33). In the 2006 programme, it is forty-one bookshops (Add MS 89482/4/35).

⁶⁷ Ian Jenkins, 'The Hay Festival: Sustainable Impacts on a Small Welsh Town,' 130.

⁶⁸ Penny Compton, interview by Ellen Addis, Zoom, October 6, 2021.

⁶⁹ Andy Fryers, interview by Ellen Addis, Zoom, September 29, 2021; Adrian Lambert, interview by Ellen Addis, Zoom, August 12, 2021.

staff do acknowledge the book town's role in Hay Festival's success, historically, the booksellers and the festival had a fractured relationship which I will turn to in the next section. In choosing an established book town for the basis of its festival, Hay Festival in 1988 partook in cultural tourism and contributed to the economic development of Hay and the borderland region.

A.V. Seaton details the history and development of book towns in the late 1990s through examining the case studies of Hay, Redu in Belgium, Becherel in Brittany, Montolieu in France, Bredevoort in the Netherlands, Fjaerland in Norway, and Sysma in Finland. Seaton defines book towns as 'peripheral' locations, found in rural, small populous areas, as well as being often geographically peripheral in the literal sense in that they are 'located on the borders, or in marginal regions'.⁷⁰ Analogously, Hay Festival is defined by Stewart as a 'peripheral' literary festival because of its location in a small town outside of the international centres of literary production and circulation.⁷¹ Remote from urban centres, book town locations often manifest 'high unemployment rates; retail losses; low tourist visitation; and low property prices' and create a 'unique destination identity' for these towns.⁷² The book town initiative is primarily directed at economic renewal, but, as Driscoll argues, 'this transformation is also "cultural"' and book towns 'depend upon and contribute to the status of print books, combining this with their regional locations to produce a specific form of 21st century cultural activity'.⁷³ Driscoll utilises a Bourdieusian framework to demonstrate that book towns are places where different forms of capital – economic, cultural, symbolic, social

⁷⁰ Seaton, 'Book Towns as Tourism Development in Peripheral Areas,' 390.

⁷¹ Stewart, 'The Culture of Contemporary Writers' Festivals,' 6.

⁷² Seaton, 'Book Towns as Tourism Development in Peripheral Areas,' 390; A. V. Seaton, 'Hay on Wye, the Mouse That Roared: Book Towns and Rural Tourism,' *Tourism Management* 17, no. 5, (1996): 379, [https://doi.org/10.1016/0261-5177\(96\)84078-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/0261-5177(96)84078-7).

⁷³ Beth Driscoll, 'Local Places and Cultural Distinction: The Booktown Model,' *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 21, no. 4 (2016): 402, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367549416656856>.

– are ‘sought and traded by a multitude of agents in a concentrated, place-bounded and thus particularly visible form’.⁷⁴ The secondhand bookshops in book towns provide the unique experience of searching and finding a book that the reader has been looking for, and the relationship between commerce and culture displayed within book towns such as Hay, helps to form what Driscoll calls ‘middlebrow cultural formations’ where book towns work to displace the cultural capital from urban centres to local areas by cultural tourism hubs.⁷⁵ Located outside of urban centres, Hay-on-Wye and Hay Festival are place-specific and supportive of print books, meshing both literary and commercial practices. Therefore, both the book town and the literary festival intervene in the literary field by their creation of temporary communities harboured through entanglements between culture and capital.

Though its success as a book town initially owed more to Booth’s entrepreneurial drive than to regional funding or tourism policy, Hay-on-Wye has become a model for other struggling small towns since the 1990s and there are now twenty members of the International Organisation of Book Towns (IOB).⁷⁶ The IOB was founded in 1998 following a research project between the Western Norway Research Institute and the University of Strathclyde which brought together book towns from across the world.⁷⁷ The Scottish Tourism Research Unit (STRU) at the University of Strathclyde subsequently created a project to investigate the economic influence of book towns in rural areas. Their research demonstrated the huge economic effect that the bookshops have on Hay-on-Wye in particular, finding that at one point in 1985, 17% of the town’s population was employed within the trade.⁷⁸ Following this research, the STRU and Scottish Enterprise launched a search for

⁷⁴ Driscoll, ‘Local Places and Cultural Distinction: The Booktown Model,’ 403.

⁷⁵ Driscoll, *The New Literary Middlebrow*, 159.

⁷⁶ Finkelstein and Squires, 675.

⁷⁷ ‘International Book Towns, History,’ International Book Towns, accessed March 29, 2023, <http://www.booktown.net/history.html>.

⁷⁸ Quoted in Seaton, ‘Book Towns as Tourism Development in Peripheral Areas,’ 391.

Scotland's National Book Town in an effort to regenerate a struggling rural community, nominating Wigtown, a former county town within the Dumfries and Galloway region in South-West Scotland that had with one of the highest levels of unemployment in Scotland but boasted a beautiful setting and a rich history.⁷⁹ Wigtown now has sixteen bookshops and, similar to Hay, has a population of around 1,500, is near a national border (in Wigtown's case, it is the border between England and Scotland), is rurally located, some eighty miles to its closest city of Glasgow, and has its own successful book festival which was set up in conjunction with the book town. In 2019, Wigtown Book Festival welcomed 13,775 unique visitors and was deemed to be worth £4.2 million to the region's economy, showing the success that book towns and book festivals can have when working together to revitalise declining rural towns.⁸⁰

Book towns exist separately from other forms of literary tourism, a type of cultural tourism that rose in prominence in the eighteenth-century and practices the visiting of places associated with particular books and authors. Literary tourism situates 'canonical literary texts in equally canonical landscapes' and is 'designed to link text to place by supplementing reading with travel'.⁸¹ As a cultural practice that changes over time, literary tourism reinvents whole regions on the national map as 'Wordsworth's Lake District,' 'Hardy's Wessex,' 'Shakespeare country,' 'Scott-land,' 'Brontë country,' and so on.⁸² However, book festivals and book towns are significant in the identity of places more widely, connecting them more

⁷⁹ 'Wigtown Book Town,' Wigtown Book Festival, accessed April 5, 2023, <https://www.wigtownbookfestival.com/about/wigtown-book-town>.

⁸⁰ 'Trustee's Report: The Wigtown Festival Company Annual Report and Unaudited Financial Statements for the year ended 31 March 2020,' Wigtown Book Festival, December 17, 2020, <https://www.wigtownbookfestival.com/uploads/WFC-2019-2020-draft-accounts-for-auditor.pdf>, 2.

⁸¹ Nicola J. Watson, *The Literary Tourist: Readers and Places in Romantic and Victorian Britain*. (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 1-5.

⁸² Watson, *The Literary Tourist*, 5.

broadly to ‘literature’ and print books through events.⁸³ Finkelstein and Squires argue that the harnessing of literature to local economies in the service of rural sustainability, such as through the book town model, ‘links book events and environments to a reading of literature within a creative economy’.⁸⁴ Consequently, from its beginning, Hay Festival worked with the book town to replicate and extend the cultural heritage and interests of the borderland, contributing to the regeneration of the area through cultural tourism.

The town and the dispute

Despite the now largely harmonious relationship between book town and festival, in the 1980s, this was not always the case and the early exclusivity of the festival extended towards hostility from the town of Hay-on-Wye. When the festival began, it relied upon bringing audiences and the London publishing circuit to Hay-on-Wye. Due to Hay’s rural location – the closest train station Hereford is located twenty miles away – most guests and authors must travel and stay overnight. This division between the town and Hay Festival is shown in a 1989 article in the *Independent* by Peter Dunn recounting a disagreement between bookseller Richard Booth and the Florences. The article recalls the ‘mounting acrimony’ between the festival, ‘now attracting the cream of London’s renta-literati’ in its second year and the town’s booksellers who ‘boycotted’ the festival.⁸⁵ Dunn’s article depicts an animosity and deep resentment between booksellers and festival makers fissuring the people of the border country with the world outside, including the Florence family who Dunn describes as a ‘theatrical family who moved to the area three years ago’.⁸⁶

⁸³ Katrín Anna Lund, ‘Part 1: Theory Relating to Literature and the Tourist Experience,’ *Literary Tourism: Theories, Practice and Case Studies*, eds. Ian Jenkins and Katrín Anna Lund (CABI, 2019), 1.

⁸⁴ Finkelstein and Squires, 677-678.

⁸⁵ Dunn, ‘King Leads Shopkeepers’ Revolt in the Town of Books,’ Add MS 89482/4/7.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

In 1989, the tension between town and festival was stoked by a signed letter, led by Booth, from twenty-five booksellers to the WTB protesting that the bookshops' 'reputation has been used and their expertise rejected'.⁸⁷ The signed letter by disgruntled booksellers in Hay paints the Florences as 'insensitive newcomers' who use the secondhand bookshops, as well as the town's celebrity and resources for the festival's success.⁸⁸ However, Dunn's article speculates that the source of the disagreement derives also from a clash of personalities between the 'deceptively vague and rumpled' Booth and the 'flamboyant with a penchant for dropping names' Peter Florence.⁸⁹ The letter arises from a distrust of the commercialisation that Hay Festival's quick success is bringing to the previously independent booksellers' economy of Hay. In particular, the addition of the *Sunday Times* sponsorship in 1989 points towards the increasing commercialisation of Hay Festival, as well as its broadening audiences. In a national newspaper, the advertisement would have reached further afield in Britain, and with the marketing resources of the WTB, the festival is marketed to a much wider audience than the sponsors of the 1988 festival which included local clothes shop 'Pin Up', (described as 'the shop behind the clock'), various pubs in the town, and Hay Town Council.⁹⁰ Coupled with the *Sunday Times* sponsorship, the WTB grant enabled Hay Festival to grow in its second year and represent its ambitious plans for growth.

Dunn's article details the town's eccentricities, depicting a place dubious of newcomers and rife with local rivalries, opposing Florence's picture of a 'welcoming' Hay-on-Wye.⁹¹ One such rivalry described is between booksellers Booth and Leon Morelli of the Cinema Bookshop arising from a dispute of 'lavish publicity' and spiralling into petty insults

⁸⁷ Ibid. The booksellers' signed letter is absent from the Hay Festival archive.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Hay Festival programme, 1988, Add MS 89482/4/32, 6.

⁹¹ Dunn, 'King Leads Shopkeepers' Revolt in the Town of Books,' Add MS 89482/4/7.

and campaigns involving pictures of Booth attached to a darts board.⁹² This spite is reflected in the Hay Festival dispute, as Booth notifies the council to dissuade them from supporting the festival, and has the police investigate the festival finances. A letter from S.F. Alexander accountant on January 19, 1989 describes a meeting with various booksellers in the town where he was quoted as saying that ‘the detailed profit and loss account should not be made public’.⁹³ Alexander calls this quote ‘a mis-representation,’ but that ‘[w]hat I did make clear to the directors, is that *legally* [Hay Festival] are under no obligation to disclose the detailed profit and loss account to the public’.⁹⁴ This letter, showing a financial disagreement between the booksellers and the festival, also reveals the insular politics of a small rural town. However, Booth does not represent all the views of the town. In another letter from this same year, the then-President of the Hay and District Chamber of Commerce, Morelli, writes to the festival, congratulating it for the ‘tremendous success and brilliant organisation of the recent *Sunday Times* Festival of Literature. Your Festival is of great benefit to the Town of Hay and the Chamber hopes that the Festival will continue for many years to come’.⁹⁵ Whether Morelli’s intention was to be contrarian is unknown.

Peter Florence, festival director at twenty-four, describes his viewpoint of the festival in Dunn’s article in total contrast to Booth: ‘[t]his is not a festival for boosting the book trade. It’s a celebration of the way people use words. Selling books is not important to the general populace’.⁹⁶ Detaching Hay Festival from the commercial prioritisation that it is accused of by Booth, Florence portrays the festival as anti-capitalist, not about commerce or books, but vaguely about ‘words,’ prioritising the ‘general populace’ over the small minority of

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ S. F. Alexander to Norman Florence, January 19, 1989, Add MS 89482/3/8.

⁹⁴ S. F. Alexander to Norman Florence, Add MS 89482/3/8.

⁹⁵ Leon Morelli to the Board of Hay Festival, June 20, 1989, Add MS 89482/1/163.

⁹⁶ Dunn, ‘King Leads Shopkeepers’ Revolt in the Town of Books,’ Add MS 89482/4/7.

booksellers who are against the festival.⁹⁷ Florence would still be recalling in 2016 that the early work of the festival is ‘that spirit is exactly what we do now’.⁹⁸ His response to the Booth dispute indicates how Hay Festival’s outward projection of ‘congenial spirits’ and the whimsical pursuit of artistic connections is incongruous with the town itself and its mostly secondhand booksellers, established by Booth in the 1960s. The quotation from Florence does, however, show the consistency of Hay Festival’s imagination of literature as storytelling from its outset, a topic that will be returned to in the next chapter. The *Independent* article unveils the challenging relationship of the festival and the town to show that the bureaucracy that Hay Festival has had to manage extends to their relationship with the book town itself and the protection of its rich history and large personalities.

Alexander’s letter is not the only reference to the dispute in the archive, though all other materials appear in the form of press cuttings. Relying upon newspaper sources and one internal festival letter in the archive to understand the relationship with the booksellers and the town shows the lack of materials in the archive from this period. To understand this relationship more, I look forward to the 1990s, where archival materials of letters and press cuttings show the continuation of the animosity between booksellers and festival. By 1990, the feud between the town and Hay Festival had become farcical. In a follow-up article from the previous year, Dunn reports how Booth decorated Hay Castle ‘with a neon sign saying “ARTS”. In front of the word, flashing on and off, [is] the letter “F”’. If anyone objected, Booth would ‘tell them it stands for Fine Arts’.⁹⁹ The eccentric figure of Booth called Hay Festival ‘a festival of authoritarian bureaucracy and Murdoch sponsorship, with eminent

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Florence, ‘Hay Festival Hopes to Be in Tehran in 10 Years’ Time,’ interview by Blizzard; Hay Festival programme backmatter, 1988, Add MS 89482/4/32.

⁹⁹ Peter Dunn, ‘Bookselling “King” in War of Words over Rival Festival,’ *Independent* (London), May 19, 1990, Add MS 89482/4/8.

socialists coming down here to give it credibility'.¹⁰⁰ Norman Florence rebuked Booth's strong criticisms, and said simply, '[w]e aren't selling books; we're celebrating literature,' echoing his son's claim from the previous year.¹⁰¹ During this dispute, however, to festival guests, the relationship between town and festival appeared cordial, with BBC director-general John Birt writing to Peter Florence in 1990 to congratulate the festival and note that 'it was pleasing to see the wholly harmonious impact on a town of which I am most fond of'.¹⁰²

Despite this exterior, Hay Town Council meeting minutes and correspondence with Hay Festival reveal the mounting discordant relationship. The Florences are noticeably absent from discussions and meetings concerning the festival's use of the town's carpark and festival site, with the clerk to the council Cherrington, formerly the festival's secretary, telling Norman Florence in a 1992 letter that 'Booth does not want any public money spent on anything that might benefit the Festival'.¹⁰³ There is a distinct split between the festival and the town, with Leon Morelli, once a supporter of the festival, warning Peter Florence that he 'must be community players not aloof from the community,' an indication towards how the town perceived the festival to have acted up to this point.¹⁰⁴

Reconciliation did arrive between the festival and the town, at least in part, with a truce declared in 1994. Writing for the *Independent* as part of the publicity for the festival that year, John Windsor described the town as 'permanently knee-deep in polemics and pamphlets' into the mid-1990s, but he minimised these, explaining that 'Hay-ites have

¹⁰⁰ Dunn, 'Bookselling "King" in War of Words over Rival Festival,' Add MS 89482/4/8.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² John Birt to Peter Florence, July 23, 1990, Add MS 89482/1/167.

¹⁰³ Moya Cherrington Day to Norman Florence, October 6, 1992, Add MS 89482/1/163.

¹⁰⁴ Leon Morelli to Peter Florence, June 17, 1994, Add MS 89482/1/163.

witnessed so much comical combat that, nowadays, no one takes insults seriously'.¹⁰⁵ The absurd insults were not, Windsor believed, serious, and, in fact, the contradiction of a rural old market town cultivating bookworms, paired with a spoof independence movement, had the levity that was sometimes at odds with the festival's wish to 'become another kind of market too: an Ideas Exchange'.¹⁰⁶ Windsor reported that a reconciliation took place between Peter Florence and Booth in a meeting about winter employment which ended in 'buying each other drinks, planning a town brochure and swapping names of likely sponsors'.¹⁰⁷ It must be noted that Booth ended his festival qualms so much so that he appeared at the 1999 festival, ten years after the initial dispute, capitalising upon the festival's success for his own gains and profile to promote his autobiography, *My Kingdom of Books*.¹⁰⁸

In the 1980s, Hay Festival narrated its story using words like 'spirit' and 'shining' to herald a new utopian age of arts and literature in the borderlands.¹⁰⁹ The festival's archive at the British Library uncovers the foundations of its early and hopeful stages, revealing the Schumann-like ambitions of 'spreading joy and blessings everywhere'.¹¹⁰ The bureaucracy and local politics of funding applications and rivalries with booksellers undermines the picture of domestic harmony and creativity that the 1988 programme and the kitchen table story create. Juxtaposing the outwardly projection of the festival through its public printed material with the private festival documents and stories colours the festival as improvisatory and informal, reflecting, especially in its early years, the kitchen table story. In the next

¹⁰⁵ John Windsor, 'Truce declared in the war of words: Hay-on-Wye is as full of comical conflict as it is of secondhand books,' *Independent* (London), April 22, 1994, <https://www.independent.co.uk/money/collecting-truce-declared-in-the-war-of-words-hayonwe-is-as-full-of-comical-conflict-as-it-is-of-secondhand-books-john-windsor-listened-laughed-and-then-gave-peace-a-chance-1371960.html>

¹⁰⁶ Peter Florence, Hay Festival programme, 1998, Add MS 89482/4/32.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Hay Festival programme, 1999, Add MS 89482/4/32.

¹⁰⁹ Hay Festival programme frontmatter, 1988, Add MS 89482/4/32; Hay Festival programme backmatter, 1988, Add MS 89482/4/32.

¹¹⁰ Hay Festival programme backmatter, 1988, Add MS 89482/4/32.

chapter, I will explore how the symbol of the kitchen table in Hay Festival folklore transformed into a dinner table as the work and the festival's narration of this work became more formalised, successful, and therefore corporate, with commercial funding and sponsorships becoming a necessity to produce the event with bigger literary names in the 1990s. The tussle between the festival as a place of elevated discussion of literature as opposed to the selling of books in the town, and the festival's domestic, folksy collaborative creativity and its corporate growth illustrates an attempt to control the narrative, something that becomes harder as the years pass and it tries to replicate this same space with the festival itself.

2 The dinner table: Expanding Hay Festival, 1990—1999

‘A festival fulfils a double purpose. It allows the people of a place to see the best of the rest of the world and it allows the rest of the world to see the best of a place. By this simple formula, places disadvantaged by transport, infrastructure and media attention can improve all three (over a period of time) and artists can demonstrate their universal relevance however local their inspiration.’

Simon Mundy (1994).¹

By the mid-1990s, the domestic intimacy of the kitchen table that had marked Hay Festival’s first years was transformed into a more professional and prestigious event that gathered literary stars, fast becoming a permanent fixture on the literary calendar in Britain. In a 1995 letter congratulating Peter Florence for the success of the festival, the dramatist Arnold Wesker, who had appeared at the first Hay Festival, remarked upon this change: ‘it was as though Peter Florence had invited this array of stimulating writers and intellects to his dinner table and given us the privilege of sharing in their company’.² Wesker’s imagining of Hay Festival as a dinner table portrays the festival as a ceremonial space, more formal than the humble kitchen table of the 1980s, but still assembling people to have lively conversation, debate, and celebration. Present at the centre of this dinner table is Peter Florence, holding court with his guests, choosing the invitees, the menu, and the seating plan. In a 1990 letter to the Welsh Arts Council (WAC) clarifying funding, Norman Florence explained the key aim for the festival in this period to programme both Welsh and ‘imported’ international authors alongside each other.³ I argue that in this decade, the Florences targeted four objectives to expand Hay Festival, leading to Wesker’s ‘dinner table’ label: to create strong personal relationships with authors; to receive and act on audience feedback; to increase local funding

¹ Simon Mundy, The European Festivals Association’s 1994 conference, ‘European Cultural Interaction,’ Add MS 89482/1/178.

² Arnold Wesker to Peter Florence, June 7, 1995, Add MS 89482/1/11.

³ Norman Florence to Welsh Arts Council, November 1, 1990, Add MS 89482/2/11, 1.

and develop the rural borderland area; and to raise its national profile and reach through newspaper and new media sponsorships. Evidence for the four objectives is found within the archive through Peter Florence's personal letter correspondence with festival authors, audience letters to the festival, funding applications to local funders such as Powys County Council, Welsh Arts Council, and West Midlands Arts, and sponsorship agreements with the *Sunday Times* and the *Independent*.

Hay Festival cultivated personal relationships with authors and audiences in the 1990s to expand the festival's remit and publicity. The letters corresponding with authors in the Hay Festival archive reveal the growth of literary celebrities in the decade, the increasing presence of the voice of the publisher, and the controversial form of author payment that the festival used. On the other hand, the audience letters provide insight into feedback communications, revealing the audience's sometimes parasocial, and often venerable relationships with authors, as well as the visceral realities of a rural literary festival. Together, they showcase Robert Darnton's 'communication circuit' – an influential diagram that has been expanded and adapted to other contexts and a common reference in book history, tracing how intellectual property circulates in eighteenth century France and the path a book takes from author to publisher, printer, shipper, bookseller, and then to reader.⁴ In Darnton's model, a dotted line links author and reader, perceiving their interactivity. Hay Festival's archival letters reveal the informal relationships and arrangements that led to the festival's expansion, with the rise of the literary celebrity coinciding with the rise of Hay Festival, and the author-audience relationships at play.

⁴ Robert Darnton, 'What Is the History of Books?' *Daedalus* 111, no. 3 (1982): <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:3403038>. Padmini Ray Murray and Claire Squires propose a re-drawing of the communications circuit for the twenty-first century to account for changes in digital technologies and the publishing industry in Padmini Ray Murray and Claire Squires, 'The Digital Publishing Communications Circuit,' *Book 2.0* 3 (2013): 1, https://doi.org/10.1386/btwo.3.1.3_1.

The funding and sponsorship of the Florences' literary festival would enable it to realise Norman Florence's aim for Hay Festival to celebrate the local area and attract attention from 'the world outside'.⁵ Norman Florence's ambition echoes the president of Culture Action Europe, Simon Mundy's, argument, laid out in an extract from his speech at the European Festivals Association's 1994 conference that opened this chapter: that a festival should be concurrently local and universal. Mundy highlights the importance of festivals to not only bring the world to them, but also to take the festival to the rest of the world, arguing that they can transform rural places' 'transport, infrastructure and media attention'.⁶ The international aspirations of the early Hay Festival, however, resulted in a conflict for the festival. The local government funding routes that the festival had relied upon in 1988 and 1989 introduced new strict funding guidelines in the 1990s that prioritised local communities, causing Hay Festival to balance both local and national projects in order to gain funding. As a result, the festival established educational projects, bi-lingual events, and literary prizes to ensure its survival, and began to turn to commercial sponsorship alternatives. Aided in part by Hay Festival's new 'national profile' created by media coverage from Channel 4, BBC Wales, and newspaper title sponsorships from the *Sunday Times* and the *Independent*, the festival entered the nation's living rooms.⁷ With commercial sponsors on its side, within the space of a decade, Hay Festival increased its income, made up of ticket sales, sponsorship, and funding, from £124,662 in 1990 to £360,586 in 1999.⁸ The Florences' ambition to 'reaffirm our relevance' to the outside world was made a priority in this decade, as the festival

⁵ Norman Florence, Hay Festival programme, 1988, Add MS 89482/4/32, 1.

⁶ Mundy, The European Festivals Association's 1994 conference, 'European Cultural Interaction,' Add MS 89482/1/178.

⁷ Norman Florence to Welsh Arts Council, November 1, 1990, Add MS 89482/2/11, 1.

⁸ Hay Festival financial accounts, 1990, Add MS 89482/3/7; Hay Festival financial accounts, 1999, Add MS 89482/2/42.

foregrounded the landscape of the Black Mountains as a tourist spot to attract audiences from further afield.⁹

Combining national sponsorships with strong author and audience relationships, Hay Festival elevated the domestic kitchen table of its beginnings to a dinner table that was simultaneously exclusive in invite yet extensive in reception. This paradox and the multiple expansions in this decade resulted in the festival propelling from small rural arts festival to renowned national literary festival. Exploring Hay Festival's decade of exponential growth in the 1990s is crucial because it illuminates the ways in which literary festivals utilise author and audience relationships, and local and national sponsorships and funding, in order to establish themselves as important players within the literary circuit. As Wesker's letter underlines, Hay Festival invited an 'array' of writers and intellectuals to its event, including those that were ideologically opposed, curating an atmosphere of plasticity and progressiveness.¹⁰ As such, this chapter offers a demonstration of a festival negotiating both commercial and cultural imperatives to place the border country on the literary map and the festival on the literary calendar.

The author: Literary celebrities, the publishing circuit, and payments in wine

Terry Pratchett is reluctant. 'Now, personally, I think it would be advisable to hold a contemporary literature festival without me – but Judy Turner tells me that the idea that the Festival is a club for chums is no longer the case if, indeed, it ever was true,' he writes.¹¹ Pratchett maintains, however, 'I don't *read*. I've never understood the attraction of listening

⁹ Norman Florence, Hay Festival programme, 1988, Add MS 89482/4/32, 1.

¹⁰ Arnold Wesker to Peter Florence, June 7, 1995, Add MS 89482/1/11.

¹¹ Terry Pratchett to Peter Florence, May 21, 1998, Add MS 89482/1/28.

to an author read their own work. I imagine you stage a variety of events, however, so perhaps we can agree on some other format'.¹²

In the space of five lines, despite his reservations, Pratchett relents, gives way to his curiosity about Hay Festival, and agrees to attend. As a guest, Pratchett, a bestselling fantasy-genre author, represents Hay Festival's move away from the literary fiction programming that characterised its early years. Following this, successful genre writers such as Pratchett (who would go on to appear at Hay Festival five times) and the historical and romantic fiction writer Judy Turner were programmed to attract crowds.

Pratchett's letter implies that pre-1998, Hay Festival had a reputation as 'a club for chums'.¹³ This section investigates Pratchett's claim that the festival was an exclusive clique in its first years. By the end of the 1990s, the festival invited literary celebrities and bestsellers, combining prestige and commercial culture to form the new middlebrow character of the literary festival.¹⁴ Pratchett's term 'a club for chums' and Wesker's 'dinner table' not only divulges the writers' positions – Pratchett as a genre author and Wesker as a dramatist – but it also highlights this increasing tension in the 1990s for Hay Festival between culture and commerce.

In the 1990s, Hay Festival attracted starry literary figures and solidified itself as a popular literary festival for authors to attend. The growing popularity of Hay Festival is measurable in the barrage of publisher's and author's letters and correspondence during the decade found in the archive. In the final decades of the twentieth and continuing into the first decades of the twenty-first century, the rise of globalisation, transnational circuits of book promotional events, and the development of global annual, reader-focused cultural initiatives became 'central to the narrative of book events and environments'.¹⁵ At the crux of this

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Driscoll, *The New Literary Middlebrow*, 159-160.

¹⁵ Finkelstein and Squires, 676.

narrative is the rise of the literary celebrity, which Hay Festival's own expansion coincided with. In a 1990 'artist policy' segment of Norman Florence's letter to the WAC clarifying a submitted grant application, the festival provided an overview of its previous work and future plans, writing that it 'will continue to invite important and inspirational writers from abroad to Wales, who would not otherwise visit. We must develop the unique opportunity to meet major "stars" away from the obvious metropolitan centres in London, Edinburgh, and Glasgow'.¹⁶ From its third year, Hay Festival was concerned about literary celebrities and aimed to attract stars to the festival in order to entice audiences from further afield to its rural and peripheral location.

This new interest in literary celebrities resulted in the festival programming authors in the 1990s such as Arthur Miller in 1990, Toni Morrison and Derek Walcott in 1991, Muriel Spark in 1998, and Harold Pinter in 1999.¹⁷ At times in the decade, the lines blurred between literary celebrities and celebrities – Lauren Bacall was the Hollywood name in the 1991 programme, and Ralph Fiennes's 1997 festival appearance resulted in the *Cardiff Western Mail* claiming that '[w]ith so much star-gazing going on there was a sense that [Hay] festival is in serious jeopardy of becoming a celebration of celebrity, and not of culture and the arts'.¹⁸ Moran defines literary celebrities, what he calls 'star authors,' as 'those who are reviewed and discussed in the media at length, who win literary prizes, whose books are studied in universities ... usually "crossover" successes who emphasize both marketability and traditional cultural hierarchies'.¹⁹ These literary celebrities represent the inherently unstable connection between the two cultural and commercial value systems, marking the interplay in Bourdieu's literary field, with elite actors possessing a monopoly on symbolic

¹⁶ Norman Florence to Welsh Arts Council, November 1, 1990, Add MS 89482/2/11, 11.

¹⁷ Toni Morrison also appeared at Hay Festival in 1998 and 2014.

¹⁸ Darren Waters, 'Hay Festival: The Final Flourish. In Danger of Becoming a Celebration of Celebrity,' *Cardiff Western Mail*, June 2, 1997, Add MS 89482/4/11.

¹⁹ Moran, *Star Authors*, 6.

capital in the form of publications, literary prizes, appearances at festivals, and critical praise.²⁰ In framing events around literary celebrities, Hay Festival becomes part of the media circuit promoting a book's publication and enters the author into what Moran calls the 'star system,' a cycle that both validates the author's work and their figure as a literary celebrity, and the festival as one in which literary celebrities attend.²¹ At literary festivals in the 1990s, the literary sphere and celebrity entertainment world fuse, with Hay Festival and the books it featured becoming market figures propelling forward the image of the author.

This turn towards literary celebrities at once perpetuates the popularity of such authors and tries to create new celebrities by programming events to promote authorial performativity and market literature. However, literary celebrities play a vital role in attracting crowds to literary festivals and the creation of strong relationships with these authors is vital for the longevity of festivals. Recurring in most author and publisher's letters in the archive from the 1990s are comments about the comfortable and friendly atmosphere of the festival, showcasing the personal, symbiotic relationship the festival nurtures and continues today. 'Would you send me a large drum of whatever it was you were all taking to stay so calm?' Bill Bryson asked.²² One author celebrated how 'each author was made to feel like a visiting dignitary,' another 'how relaxed and sociable we found the atmosphere, how delightful the setting, and how smoothly and with such little fuss you organised and looked after every body'.²³ These letters all have the same tone of praise for the festival team for their seemingly hidden work, presenting the festival as one enjoyable to attend, with the Hay Festival staff hardworking, and a generally jovial, atmosphere to be in. The praise shows the

²⁰ Murray, *The Digital Literary Sphere*, 18. In chapter 5, I explore the role of the digital in relation to this literary celebrity, using Murray's work to understand how Bourdieu's literary field is rendered more transparent and documentable in the digital literary sphere.

²¹ Moran, *Star Authors*, 154.

²² Bill Bryson to Peter Florence, May 31, 1997, Add MS 89482/1/15.

²³ Josephine Hart to Coralie Rogers, June 3, 1998, Add MS 89482/1/25; Anthony Clare to Peter Florence, June 1, 1998, Add MS 89482/1/24.

importance of the festival to authors themselves, giving them a platform for their work and way to speak to audiences, akin to a dinner table, as well as the way that Hay Festival cultivate its relationships with literary celebrities to sustain the festival. It is important to note that of the author letters within the festival archive, the majority speak overwhelmingly positive about the festival. The criticisms are scant as the archive is selected by the staff that work there. They include one postcard from the literary critic George Steiner rejecting an invitation from Florence to appear at the festival due to ‘the truly sorrowful theme of Israel and the Festival,’ alluding to Hay Festival’s partnership with the Embassy of Israel to support international writers at the festival, and the Germaine Greer’s boycott of the festival due to its sponsorship ties to Nestlé, which I explore in detail in the following chapter.²⁴

Personal correspondence in the archive divulges the labour of Hay Festival staff to sustain the festival, inviting authors to appear even if they have no book to promote. In the 1990s, the Hay Festival team expanded to seven permanent staff, with new roles in PR and publicity, and a membership group called the ‘Friends of Hay Festival’.²⁵ The festival is described as a ‘non-profit’ and ‘run by a small board of management’ including the festival director (Peter Florence), administrator (Norman Florence), co-ordinator (Moya Cherrington), and then, more vaguely ‘a treasurer, a programme advisor, a lawyer, the local Parish Vicar, and a prominent member of the community’.²⁶ By 1998, the core staff members had risen to fourteen, with PR done out of house, suggesting a move towards the professionalisation that would become more marked in the following decade.²⁷

Despite the growing staff members, Peter Florence sent personal invitations to authors, all beginning with the insistence that his invitations are a sign of ‘devotion, not

²⁴ George Steiner to Peter Florence, November 3, 1997, Add MS 89482/1/18; Hay Festival programme, 1994, Add MS 89482/4/32, 1.

²⁵ Norman Florence to Welsh Arts Council, November 1, 1990, Add MS 89482/2/11, 19.

²⁶ Norman Florence to Welsh Arts Council, November 1, 1990, Add MS 89482/2/11, 17-18.

²⁷ Hay Festival programme, 1998, Add MS 89482/4/32, 4.

harassment’ as he describes Hay-on-Wye, the ‘tiny market town in the Black Mountains of the Welsh Marches’ and the ‘relaxed and easy’ festival in an effort to entice authors to visit.²⁸ The letters exhibit the festival’s newly renowned reputation, shifting from a small arts festival to one of national importance. This wider recognition was noted emphatically in the philosopher Bryan Magee’s card of thanks in 1997 as he praised ‘how smoothly everything seems in the end,’ advocating that it has ‘become a great British institution’.²⁹ The nomenclature of a ‘British institution’ placed Hay Festival’s name amongst hugely successful arts organisations in the UK, such as the BBC, the Royal Society, the British Library, the Tate; all of which, it must be said, eclipsed Hay Festival’s reach and popularity at this moment in the late 1990s as the festival was still gaining popularity.

The central role of the publishing industry is seen in its collaboration with literary festivals such as Hay Festival. The number of literary agents in the UK rose rapidly from the 1970s, and Andrew Nash and Squires argue that in the 1980s, ‘the literary agent came to reign over the trade publishing in the UK,’ becoming central to the business of authorship in the late twentieth- and early twenty-first centuries.³⁰ From this period on, the professionalisation of the author became enmeshed with the literary festival circuit, propelled by the work of the literary agent. Agents represent authors to publishers and at literary festivals, while publishers represent authors’ works to festivals. The role of the publishing industry is demonstrated by Hay Festival’s chief of staff Adrian Lambert as he breaks down the three ways that the festival programmes its events: one part is the literature programming that is ‘governed by what is coming out in the publishing world;’ another is the creation of

²⁸ Peter Florence to Umberto Eco, June 29, 1994, Add MS 89482/1/3; Peter Florence to Finley Quaye, March 18, 1998, Add MS 89482/1/24.

²⁹ Bryan Magee to Peter Florence, June 6, 1997, Add MS 89482/1/20.

³⁰ Andrew Nash and Claire Squires, ‘Authorship,’ in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain, Vol. 7*, eds. Andrew Nash, Claire Squires and I. R. Willison (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 132.

themes for the festival and finding relevant speakers; and the final way is recognising themes, ‘looking around you and thinking what is happening in the world’.³¹

In the 1990s, the symbiotic relationship between festival and the publishing industry is revealed through the flattery that characterises letters from publicists and publishers. Tania Rice, a publicity manager at Bloomsbury, praised the festival in 1994, calling it ‘magical’ before proceeding to suggest one of the authors that she manages for the festival who ‘read at Edinburgh [Book Festival] last year’ and ‘was brilliant’.³² While another publicity manager, Susan Sandon at Random House, stated that she ‘wanted to put in a special plea’ for an author ‘to be included in next year’s festival programme if at all possible’.³³ In her study about the literary celebrity Margaret Atwood, Lorraine York describes authors as ‘the product of the labour of many other agents in dialogue with a celebrated individual ... editors, agents, office staff, publishers, publicists, and the like’ that ‘enable and reproduce literary celebrity, rather than diffusing or erasing the labour of the artists’.³⁴ Rice and Sandon’s letters represent the enabling and reproducing role of the publisher within the literary circuit to pitch authors for publicity events and show the move towards literary festivals becoming one step on the author’s promotional book tour. By opening with a compliment about the festival and then promoting the author that they manage, Rice and Sandon’s correspondence utilises adulation in a bid to benefit in book sales and publicity from Hay Festival’s increasing popularity with the media and with readers. The rise of the publishing professional in the 1990s, promoting literary celebrities to have a platform at the literary festival, is the embodiment of the irresolvable tension between literary culture and popular (and celebrity) culture at the literary festival, merging ‘promotion and publicity of life and work’ in the figure of the author within

³¹ Adrian Lambert, interview by Ellen Addis, Zoom, August 12, 2021.

³² Tania Rice to Peter Florence, April 15, 1994, Add MS 89482/1/117.

³³ Susan Sandon to Peter Florence, n.d., Add MS 89482/1/16.

³⁴ Lorraine York, *Margaret Atwood and the Labour of Literary Celebrity* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 8.

Bourdieu's wider literary field.³⁵ By the end of the decade, the role of the author had changed due to the distance created between the festival and the author, with the publisher coming to stand-in as middleman.

Author appearances shape the festival, but there is a price attached to them. It was well-known in the 1990s that the author fee for appearing at a literary festival was low, exemplified by Pratchett noting that he 'understand[s] the convention that an author bringing in a four-figure sum in ticket sales will nevertheless receive a nominal fee, for the greater good of the aforesaid Literature'.³⁶ Pratchett underlines the complex relationship between culture and commerce at literary festivals by explaining the reasoning for why many authors appear at literary festivals despite the low payment: for the love of the literature. However, Hay Festival skips the awkward convention of underpaying authors numerically by instead, and infamously, offering payment in wine or champagne. This form of payment, Pratchett wrote 'intrigued' him, and he asked, 'what a box of champagne is – clearly more than a bottle, but less than a crate?'.³⁷

The payment in wine is seemingly in the model of the Poet Laureate of the UK's accustomed payment of a 'butt of sherry,' equalling 720 bottles today.³⁸ By replicating a prestigious literary tradition, Hay Festival imbues itself with the same cultural capital and harnesses the author's romantic notion of the 'greater good' of 'Literature' and their desire to appear at the festival due to it being 'a valuable forum for ideas and expression'.³⁹ Imparting the same form of payment as Poet Laureate suggests a level of British artistic tradition and

³⁵ Weber, *Literary Festivals and Contemporary Book Culture*, 9, 27.

³⁶ Terry Pratchett to Peter Florence, May 21, 1998, Add MS 89482/1/28.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ 'The Poet Laureate and the Gift of Sherry,' Royal Collection Trust, accessed June 24, 2022, <https://www.rct.uk/collection/themes/exhibitions/poetry-for-the-palace/the-queens-gallery-palace-of-holyroodhouse/the-poet-laureate-and-the-gift-of-sherry>.

³⁹ Norman Florence to Welsh Arts Council, November 1, 1990, Add MS 89482/2/11.

connections with the establishment in an attempt to affirm Magee's claims that the festival has become 'a British institution' itself.⁴⁰

The homage is not only economical but exclusionary, but it creates a sense of exclusion and elitism attached to the lofty appointment of Poet Laureate. Hay Festival programme manager Heather Salisbury discloses in her interview the concerned effort that the festival today takes to 'try and get away from [the festival] feeling elite' and 'for the very educated middle classes,' claiming that the current team want to 'crack open and broaden [the festival] out and make it younger and more diverse and appeal to a far wider audience,' departing from the payment in wine, and as a consequence, also distancing itself from Wesker's 'dinner table' and the aristocratic links the festival established in the 1990s.⁴¹ Ultimately, Hay Festival's payment in wine in this period suggests conviviality, sociality, and dinner tables, but it also amplifies the question of the value of the arts. Payment in wine in place of actual payment is not only informal, but it also reaches back to literary history in a subversive effort to disrupt the assumption that literary festivals are a purely promotional activity that generate book sales and royalties for the authors.

Literary festivals, however, do function within the promotional literary circuit for authors, with author's appearances at festivals helping to boost public persona and profile, leading, in theory, to more book sales. In her investigation into the conditions and contexts of publishing contemporary writing in Britain, Squires argues that the 'authorial role is expanded far beyond that of writer of the text' through 'a culture of increasing commodification of the novel' where 'authors give readings in bookshops, attend events at literary festivals, appear in the media and embark on promotional tours that can last months'.⁴² Literary festivals such as Hay Festival are a part of the promotional circuit of a

⁴⁰ Bryan Magee to Peter Florence, June 6, 1997, Add MS 89482/1/20.

⁴¹ Heather Salisbury, interview by Rebecca Roach, Zoom, September 20, 2021.

⁴² Claire Squires, *Marketing Literature: The Making of Contemporary Writing in Britain* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 37.

book, where author-centred promotional events stand in the place of traditional payment structures. This creates a tension between books within a marketplace, which, as Squires observes, ‘in addition to the demands of commerce, incorporates the values enshrined in cultural activity’.⁴³ The publishing industry, therefore, is placed between the restraints of commerce and its role in promoting and producing culture. The literary event and its perilous payment is an example of this tension, where the author’s promotional activity at a literary festival is poised between art and business, and work and pleasure.⁴⁴ Pratchett’s letter to Florence in the 1990s and his belief that the author receives a ‘nominal fee, for the greater good of the aforesaid Literature’ emphasises the interplay between commerce and art present at the literary festival, as well as the element of charity expected from authors at festivals seen as ‘for the greater good’.⁴⁵ In this decade, Hay Festival and other literary festivals relied upon the author’s goodwill, financial position, and the hope that the event will produce sales for the book in order to programme an author.

Hay Festival was not the only literary festival to pay authors a ‘nominal fee’ for their appearances. While this chapter focuses on the 1990s, I will briefly skip forward two decades to the 2010s when the author payment method of literary festivals was publicly challenged. In 2016, children’s author Philip Pullman resigned from his role as patron to Oxford Literary Festival due to the lack of pay for authors who speak at the festival. In a statement, Pullman explained his decision:

The principle is very simple: a festival pays the people who supply the marquees, it pays the printers who print the brochure, it pays the rent for the lecture halls and other places, it pays the people who run the administration and the publicity, it pays for the electricity it uses, it pays for the drinks and dinners it lays on: why is it that the authors, the very people at the centre of the whole thing, the only reason customers

⁴³ Squires, *Marketing Literature*, 40.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 40.

⁴⁵ Terry Pratchett to Peter Florence, May 21, 1998, Add MS 89482/1/28.

come along and buy their tickets in the first place, are the only ones who are expected to work for nothing?⁴⁶

Pullman's remarks illuminate the chasm between the perceived value of the author's appearance and the economics of the event itself. A study carried out by the Authors' Licensing and Collecting Society found that in 2015, the average salary of a professional full-time author was £11,000 per year.⁴⁷ As freelance workers, authors who appear at literary festivals have an opportunity to gain publicity and connections, but it is also a working environment, and one where payment should be given. The trade union for professional authors, the Society of Authors, has a policy for payment for festivals, teaching, and appearances, stating that '[p]eople deserve to be paid for the work they do – so why are authors so often expected to work for free?'.⁴⁸ It asks that fees are based on the annual salary an author would expect to earn as a freelancer.

The reality of inadequate author payment is shown at Hay Festival in a letter from the author Richard Graves where he asks, 'do I get a free lunch?' before explaining, 'I am very poor at present and would much have preferred payment in cash, as I shall be losing a day's pay in the call-centre where I am compelled to work at present, but I understand that (apart from travel expenses) only champagne is on offer'.⁴⁹ Graves's letter illustrates the precarity for less well-known authors when appearing at literary festivals without a traditional fee. The strict contrast between Graves's insecure financial position, having to work to supplement his author income, with the luxuriant payment in champagne, indicates the gulf in economic expectations and realities between author and festival. The frivolity of the form of payment is

⁴⁶ Alison Flood, 'Philip Pullman Resigns as Oxford Literary Festival Patron over Lack of Pay for Authors,' *Guardian* (London), January 14, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/jan/14/philip-pullman-resigns-oxford-literary-festival-patron-pay-authors>.

⁴⁷ Alison Flood, 'Median Earnings of Professional Authors Fall below the Minimum Wage,' *Guardian* (London), April 20, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/apr/20/earnings-authors-below-minimum-wage>.

⁴⁸ 'Where We Stand: Festivals, teaching & appearances,' The Society of Authors, accessed May 10, 2024, <https://www2.societyofauthors.org/where-we-stand/festivals-teaching-appearances/>.

⁴⁹ Richard Graves to Clare Purcell, May 18, 2000, Add MS 89482/1/37.

illuminated by Graves, portraying the festival to be the prestigious dinner table in the 1990s, assuming a level of financial stability for authors to not have to be paid nominally for work. Though literary festivals can boost book sales and the profiles of authors, by not paying authors, their work is devalued. Hay Festival's unorthodox payment in cases of wine and champagne shows an attempt to keep a sense of tradition to the festival as well as fun, while also sidestepping criticism over lack of payment. However, the payment in wine is culturally loaded and carries assumptions about who writers are. Muslim writers, for example, are excluded by this, as well as other who cannot or choose not to drink, and those that need to be paid for their appearances as they miss out on other work.

Whilst it is true that cases of wine were a common form of payment since Hay Festival's beginning, they were not the only payment and the festival paid speakers in varying scales. The price of a speaker at times fluctuated depending on their status, and a breakdown of fees in 1992 betrays these discrepancies. For the inaugural PEN lecture, William Golding was paid £1,000, Joseph Heller was paid £500 for his appearance, Tony Benn £200, Leslie Norris £1,000 for a day's 'Masterclass' poetry workshop, and John Osborne, Peter Ackroyd and Martin Amis were all paid in cases of wine.⁵⁰ Whilst the payment did change at times according to a writer's fame, this was not always true, as seen with Pratchett, who was the bestselling author of the 1990s, yet was still offered cases of wine as opposed to money, perhaps pointing to the arbitrariness of payment at Hay Festival.⁵¹ However, as a very successful genre fiction writer, Pratchett is able to be critical in ways others could not as he is not reliant upon the festival or other literary institutions for profile or payment, unlike authors such as Richard Graves, for example. Though Pratchett does say that he appears at festivals

⁵⁰ Contracts with speakers for the 1992 festival, Add MS 89482/2/1.

⁵¹ Sally Weale, 'Life on Planet Pratchett,' *Guardian*, November 8, 2002, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2002/nov/08/sciencefictionfantasyandhorror.terrypratchett>.

‘for charity anyway,’ perhaps the payment in wine was a common courtesy to those that the Florences invited to their ‘dinner table’ and believed would not accept a fee.⁵²

Personal letters in the Hay Festival archive disclose that the payment in wine was a decision made out of seeming low finances and necessity for Hay Festival. ‘I hope a case of wine would be acceptable as a fee,’ Peter Florence feebly asked Tom Sharpe in his invitation to the festival.⁵³ Florence apologised once more to Jonathan Miles, conceding ‘I am sorry we’re not richer. We do have better vintner though’.⁵⁴ These exchanges display the informality of the payment and the expectation that authors would accept this as payment, as there is not a long-established expectation for money in the literary festival circuit and Hay Festival had perilous finances, making only very small profits in the decade, around £1,000, or losing anywhere between £2,000 and £27,000.⁵⁵ The payment in wine also creates a gift and cuisine economy, replicating the space of the dinner table that Wesker likens Hay Festival to. Giorgi notes the trend in successful literary festivals, which often begin as small-scale, ‘with little attention paid to accounting, employment contracts, and the like,’ and then as they grow, continue to run on a non-profit or charitable basis.⁵⁶ In the letters, Florence imparts Hay Festival’s alternative value system. In rejecting the norms of economics, the festival speaks literary traditions like the Poet Laureate, and conveys how the arts and people’s service to the arts is treated. The payment reveals the tension between culture and commerce that Hay Festival experience, its exclusive dinner table setting, struggling to keep informal and cultured image with the reality of having little available income to pay its main attractions: the authors.

⁵² Terry Pratchett to Peter Florence, May 21, 1998, Add MS 89482/1/28.

⁵³ Peter Florence to Tom Sharpe, January 22, 1994, Add MS 89482/1/2.

⁵⁴ Peter Florence to Jonathan Miles, 1995, Add MS 89482/1/8.

⁵⁵ Hay Festival directors’ report and financial accounts, 1994-1997, Add MS 89482/3/11; Hay Festival directors’ report and financial accounts, 1999, Add MS 89482/2/42. Hay Festival historically has always been a not-for-profit organisation.

⁵⁶ Giorgi, ‘Between Tradition, Vision and Imagination,’ 41-42.

Audience letters: Feedback, signatures, and intimacy

Baarn, 1994. An audience member sends a letter to Peter Florence with a few suggestions for his literary festival. She asks if Florence ‘had already thought of a performance of *L’homme aux Semelles de Vent* by the Kronos Quartet (or some other quartet) to accompany items on Bruce Chatwin ... I am sure I am not the only one who would love to hear and see it performed’.⁵⁷ Suggesting an event to showcase the work of Chatwin, a writer who wrote about the Welsh borderlands in his 1982 novel *On the Black Hill*, this letter is a striking example of the dialogue between Hay Festival and its audience in the production of the festival programme.⁵⁸ It is this powerful mode of communication with the audience that forms the focus of this section. I will analyse these letters in an attempt to illustrate the festival’s growing success in the 1990s, the desire for audience-author connection, and the festival’s approachability and collaboration with its audience, ultimately giving the audience a seat at the festival’s ‘dinner table’ in the 1990s. The personal letters coupled with the author correspondence show a festival that still retains the domesticity and approachability of its beginning, becoming a place for audiences to see and potentially interact with authors. The audience’s voice permeates the archive, suffusing the papers with notes on what they enjoy, what they want improved, and what they represent about Hay Festival itself.

The audience letters are few but diverse, with some criticising the festival and others commending it. The Hay Festival archive contains nine letters from the audience in 1994, 1998, and 1999, all giving feedback to the festival, as well as eight letters responding to the festival’s request for audience to send questions in advance of Stephen Hawking’s appearance in 1998. In one letter, an audience member recalls how the previous year, she ‘wrote and

⁵⁷ [REDACTED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS] to Peter Florence, August 1, 1994, Add MS 89482/1/3.

⁵⁸ I will return to Chatwin’s *On the Black Hill* in chapter four.

complained about the lack of amplification in the presentation of the *Baa Baa Black Sheep* item. This year I want to send a big thank you to you for the excellent sound arrangements at the three lectures we attended ... It was delightful to be able to hear this so easily!’⁵⁹ In sending this letter, the audience member shows the chain reaction of a complaint being considered and action taken by the festival. In other words, the letter unveils Hay Festival’s attentiveness to audience feedback. Letters like these give the staff an unseen insight into the festival from the audience’s perspective, one they would never experience themselves, as one member of staff explains that during the festival, ‘to decompress enough to be focused on an event is sometimes a bit of a challenge’.⁶⁰

Audience letters reveal the practical realities of a festival in a rural location. In addressing them to the director of the festival, the letters indicate the feeling of familiarity and intimacy audiences have towards the festival, perhaps due to the small scale of Hay Festival in the 1990s. In the same *Cardiff Western Mail* article that criticises the programming of Ralph Fiennes in 1997 and the celebritisation of Hay Festival, the writer commends ‘the organisers’ ability to retain a sense of intimacy in proceedings which marks it out as so successful’.⁶¹ The intimate relationship between festival and audience creates opportunities for criticism too, with the personal letters addressed to Florence providing insights into the festival environment and areas that its audience wish it to improve. For example, one audience letter complains about ‘having to queue to get in when we buy our tickets as soon as the box office opens several weeks in advance ... It is really undignified and inconvenient’.⁶² Another festivalgoer expresses concern about car parking in the field next to the festival area, recounting how he found himself ‘bogged down in sludge’ and ‘was towed off by a kind

⁵⁹ [REDACTED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS] to Peter Florence, June 18, 1994, Add MS 89482/1/3.

⁶⁰ Jo Rodell-Jones, interview by Rebecca Roach, Zoom, September 13, 2021.

⁶¹ Waters, ‘Hay Festival: The Final Flourish. In Danger of Becoming a Celebration of Celebrity,’ Add MS 89482/4/11.

⁶² [REDACTED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS] to Hay Festival, August 13, 1994, Add MS 89482/1/3.

farmer along with many others some time later, covered in mud – clothes filthy and shoes ruined’.⁶³ In these archival letters, audience criticisms of the festival are often about things it cannot control.

To send letters to the festival calling the act of queuing ‘undignified’ and complaining about the effects of weather on rural car parking to the festival portrays the high expectations that a small portion of the Hay Festival audience has on the cultural events that they attend, replicating the assumptions of elite versus mass culture that literary festivals such as Hay Festival house. The complaints also make visible the often unavoidable realities of rural literary festivals, and are vital in understanding the real lived experience of Hay Festival audiences in the 1990s. Altogether, they weave the texture of the festival experience through the words of the audience, as one that is challenged by its countryside location, but with a critical and familiar audience that want the festival to improve, opening out the other side of the festival experience from the audience’s perspective. These complaint letters stand-in for the audience surveys that appear in the archive in the 2000s and testify to the awareness of Hay Festival to its changing audience in the transitional period of the 1990s.

The letter about car parking is sent in 1999, some four months after the May festival, and is ‘in addition to the completed survey form,’ suggesting the importance of the parking issue to the audience member.⁶⁴ However, in the archive, no survey forms are found from 1999, only surveys from 2005-2006, evidencing the claim that the archive has been haphazardly kept and collected by Hay Festival staff members throughout the years. The lack of audience surveys before 2005 in the archive could imply either the festival’s poor recordkeeping or indifference to audience feedback. But in keeping letters from audience members critiquing the festival, Hay Festival does collect some negative records about the

⁶³ [REDACTED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS] to Peter Florence, September 8, 1999, Add MS 89482/1/3.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

festival. As a researcher, I can only analyse the festival from the materials present in the archive, and hence, much weight is placed upon these audience letters.

The audience's desire to connect with authors drew in the crowds to Hay Festival in the 1990s and created the sense of the festival as a dinner table. Pullman's comments in 2016 that authors are 'the only reason customers come along and buy their tickets in the first place' is true in part for Hay Festival, with letters representing the importance of the author appearances to the audience.⁶⁵ Two corresponding letters depict the impact of author appearances on fans of novelists and the rise of literary celebrity, where the author's signature becomes a sought-after souvenir. In the first, a mother wrote to the festival explaining that her daughter would like Pratchett's signature as they were due to miss his 1998 event and her daughter 'was very disappointed, as she loves his books. Please could you forward [her] letter to him'.⁶⁶ In the child's letter to Pratchett, she wrote, 'I love your Diskworld novels ... I think they are all great. I am very disappointed that I cannot come to see you at the Hay Festival 98. Could you please send me your autograph instead?'⁶⁷

These letters represent the importance of access to authors and the author's signature typically received at the book signing after a festival event with the festival acting as a conduit providing access to authors. The child's request for a signature as substitute for attending Pratchett's talk complicates the traditional role of the author at the literary festival to 'celebrate and promote the best use of the English Language'.⁶⁸ The signature is a stamp of intimacy, a memento to illustrate a fleeting moment of connection with the author, despite not being physically present with them at the festival or the book signing. The signature also represents what Driscoll calls a 'personal act which adds meaning to the object of the book and creates a permanent record of a reader's festival experience' and usually signifies 'the

⁶⁵ Flood, 'Philip Pullman Resigns as Oxford Literary Festival Patron over Lack of Pay for Authors.'

⁶⁶ [REDACTED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS] to Hay Festival, May 21, 1998, Add MS 89482/1/28.

⁶⁷ [REDACTED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS] to Terry Pratchett, May 21, 1998, Add MS 89482/1/28.

⁶⁸ Peter Florence, Hay Festival programme, 1991, Add MS 89482/4/32, 2.

commercial machinery of festivals, prompting readers to buy new books'.⁶⁹ Murray also argues that at literary festivals, 'the length and fervour of book-signing queues function[s] as brutally shorthand indicators of an author's relative standing in the world republic of letters,' or, I would add, an author's standing within the particular demographic and location of the literary festival.⁷⁰ However, in this case, by not being able to attend the event yet requesting a signature, the letter denotes the intimate yet ephemeral connection between idolised author and loyal reader. Acting as authorial embodiment and performativity, the signature signals the importance of the role of the author persona to the festival in driving publicity and ticket sales. At Hay Festival, there are eight signings at any one time, and Gareth Howell-Jones, Hay Festival bookseller, recalls that 'everybody who comes to Hay expects to do the signing – and they love it, they love the sense of bustle'.⁷¹ In these corresponding letters from 1998, the signature is a token in replacement of attendance to the festival event, showcasing the status of a literary celebrity such as Pratchett and the pull of the literary celebrity at the literary festival.

Author appearances at literary festivals, while concerned with access to literary celebrities, do also have the deeper purpose to connect readers with those authors that inspire them, relating the power of literature to forge relationships, where literary figures play large parts in the reader's life. This relates to Barthes' 'Death of the Author' and suggests the difference that literary festivals highlight between connecting with the work – as readers predominantly used to do – and connecting with the author at festivals. One particular letter to Hay Festival searches for this author-reader connection by wishing to go even further than an author signature. [REDACTED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS] wrote in 1998 that he had maintained 'steady, if infrequent correspondence' with the author Muriel Spark since 1979,

⁶⁹ Driscoll, *The New Literary Middlebrow*, 168.

⁷⁰ Murray, *The Digital Literary Sphere*, 97.

⁷¹ Gareth Howell-Jones, interview by Rebecca Roach, Zoom, September 8, 2021.

and asked the festival a ‘rather impertinent request’ to meet Spark as he ‘would never dream of approaching her directly, but she doesn’t come to Britain very often and she’s gone 80 now. Time is passing so this may be my last chance’.⁷² [REDACTED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS]’s letter has no response in the archive, so it is unknown whether his request was fulfilled, but what it does provide a peak behind the literary curtain to witness readers’ admiration of and relationship with certain authors. Authors like Spark deeply affect the lives of readers and this letter shows the reader’s hope to get closer and to ‘let her know who I am’.⁷³ Hay Festival acts as a channel for these connections through the events, audience questions, and book signings that it facilitates. Throughout Hay Festival’s history, the desire for author-audience connection motivates attendance and is promised through its events, where, however briefly, the gulf between reader and author is bridged.

From these three letters, it is clear that literary festivals are reliant on the author-audience relationship for their success. The interaction between author and audience represents Chris Rojek’s concept of ‘presumed intimacy’ wherein people form relationships with mediated others founded on the assumption of personal disclosure, ranging from online friends to celebrities.⁷⁴ Through book signings, Q&As at the end of events, and audience letters found in the archive, the audience can aspire to feel close to authors. There is an implied communication between author and audience, and at Hay Festival, the author is cast as a storyteller, shaping interactions with the audience. Though using the different context of politics in the USA, Weber, Fuller, and Rehberg Sedo creatively apply Berlant’s concept of the ‘intimate public sphere’ to social reading practices, including literary festivals. They take the theoretical basis of intimate publics, meaning a public created by the consumption of ‘common texts and things’ to articulate a shared emotional knowledge between readers, and

⁷² [REDACTED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS] to Hay Festival, May 12, 1998, Add MS 89482/1/28.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Chris Rojek, *Presumed Intimacy: Parasocial Interaction in Media, Society and Celebrity Culture* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015).

thus proffer the fantasy of ‘emotional contact’ with others.⁷⁵ When readers attend literary festivals inspired by a book or an author, they are often searching for what Fuller and Rehberg Sedo call ‘a more embodied version of an intimate public’ to extend their experience of reading through an expectation of intimacy with the author.⁷⁶ Literary festivals capitalise upon the reader’s yearning for both an intimate and emotional relationship, binding their experience of books to authors and consequently to festival events.

The affective relationship of the literary festival audience, book, and author was capitalised upon by Hay Festival in the 1990s to achieve its success. In order to gain this audience initially, however, the festival collaborated with other, more established literary festivals. In Norman Florence’s 1990 correspondence with the WAC detailing the festival’s partnerships, he explained that it had ‘access to Cheltenham [Literature] Festival mailing list of 14,000. We are the only major literature festival in the Spring. We share audiences with Cheltenham and Cardiff and proliferation is still to everyone’s benefit’.⁷⁷ This collaboration is surprising in that Hay Festival and Cheltenham Literature Festival today are seen as competitors, despite, as detailed in this letter, the festivals still falling at different times of the year and therefore not having competition for audiences. Hay Festival’s suggestion that the relationship is ‘*still* to everyone’s benefit’ marks a premonition that in the future there will be less space for collaboration as Hay Festival would grow into a success.⁷⁸ The collaborative nature between festivals is demonstrated further by a postcard from author Philippa Gregory in which she thanks Florence ‘for recommending me to Oxford Lit Fest,’ hinting at the network of connections at play within literary festivals in the UK.⁷⁹ Five years after this correspondence with WAC, in 1995, the Hay Festival’s audience increased by 20% in just one

⁷⁵ Berlant, *The Female Complaint*, viii, quoted in Fuller and Rehberg Sedo, *Reading Beyond the Book*, 212.

⁷⁶ Fuller and Rehberg Sedo, *Reading Beyond the Book*, 213.

⁷⁷ Norman Florence to the Welsh Arts Council, November 1, 1990, Add MS 89482/2/11.

⁷⁸ My emphasis.

⁷⁹ Philippa Gregory to Peter Florence, 1999, Add MS 89482/1/30.

year through ‘direct marketing,’ and the following year in 1996, attendance was 28,000.⁸⁰

This quick growth is an example of the festival’s increasing success in the decade, achieved through capitalising upon the existing mailing lists of Cheltenham Literature Festival and providing platforms for popular authors to attend the festival and entice readers.

Even as Hay Festival grew and reached more audiences and the kitchen table morphed into a dinner table, it was a space of occasion, as well as conversation, collaboration, and connection, inviting audience members to sit. Later on in the 2000s, this table became a platform as the festival became more commercially minded, beginning to contradict Florence’s claim in 1989 that Hay was ‘not a festival for boosting the book trade’ as the festival became more entwined with the publishing industry.⁸¹ Hay Festival in the 1990s worked to be an approachable space for its audience and believed itself that ‘the joy and success of the Festival is in fostering exchanges and collaborations and making introductions’.⁸² The audience became an integral part of the fabric of the festival, much like the location itself in border country, as their input influenced the output of the festival. The letters give voice to the festivalgoers who are absent from all other communications in the archive, giving them a seat at the dinner table populated with their favourite literary celebrities.

Local funding: National boundaries, literary prizes, and bi-lingualism

In an audience profile sent to WAC, Norman Florence describes Hay Festival’s demographic specifically through geographic location:

We serve a catchment area extending across Wales and the West Midlands and attract an increasing number of tourists. With the promotion in *The Sunday Times* and our BBC Radio and Television coverage ... we are able to reach the ‘literary’ market in Britain. The challenge now is to motivate our local, commuting audience to come and

⁸⁰ Hay Festival report of 1994 festival to Arts Council of Wales, 1995, Add MS 89482/2/20.

⁸¹ Dunn, ‘King Leads Shopkeepers’ Revolt in the Town of Books,’ Add MS 89482/4/7.

⁸² Norman Florence to Welsh Arts Council, November 1, 1990, Add MS 89482/2/11.

enjoy books and words and informed debate. To do this we must be imaginative in both programming and marketing – working with established community organisations: libraries, associations, institutes, churches, schools, bookshops.⁸³

As the festival entered into the broader UK literary market in the 1990s, a new challenge emerged to engage the local community and it utilised its location in order to gain funding. In this section, I explore how the objectives of local funders influenced Hay Festival's programming and how the festival targeted local community engagement in the 1990s, prioritising its goals through education events, Welsh language programming, and improving the infrastructure in Hay-on-Wye. In doing so, I provide a detailed account of the festival's struggle to secure vital local funding amid its attempt to reach a wider national market. I argue that in its attempt to create a large and broad-ranging festival, Hay Festival faced challenges to include its local community at the dinner table, which was becoming more and more exclusive, and I demonstrate the tension of hosting an ambitious festival in the rural, peripheral location of the Welsh Marches.

In 1993, Hay Festival received 25% of its revenue from the public sector, 40% from private sponsorship, and 35% from the box office.⁸⁴ The 25% from the public sector derived mainly from local government-funded bodies such as Powys County Council (PCC), the Development Board for Rural Wales, Brecknock Borough Council, West Midlands Arts (WMA), the WTB, and WAC.⁸⁵ Norman Florence revealed in his letter to WAC that the festival intended to expand its Welsh constituency in 1991, 'attending more to the promotion of bi-lingualism,' though he did ask 'to be released from the restrictive application of WAC funding to Welsh writers' fees and expenses' so that the festival would be able to 'exploit

⁸³ Ibid, 20.

⁸⁴ Peter Florence to John Rees, March 19, 1993, Add MS 89482/2/16.

⁸⁵ The WAC was changed to the Arts Council of Wales (ACW) in 1994 when the Arts Council of Great Britain devolved into the Arts Council of England (which became Arts Council England – ACE – in 2003), ACW, and the Scottish Arts Council (which became Creative Scotland in 2010). In 1994, the devolved move resulted in ACW receiving its funding from the Welsh Office (Arts Council of Wales to Norman Florence, November 30, 1993, Add MS 89482/2/13).

prospective sponsorship interest more beneficially’ and ‘be able to buy better “imported” authors’.⁸⁶ Florence’s letter shows the festival’s desire for freedom from the WAC, and the festival’s distinct split between Welsh and other ‘imported’ writers. Hay Festival wished to join the seemingly separate entities of Welsh and English through an explicit alignment with its border identity, professing that, ‘[i]n the Border Country we want to continue to examine the relationship between the Anglo-Welsh and English literary cultures’.⁸⁷ However, this commitment to a parity of Welsh and English in time would create difficulties for the festival.

In its attempt to achieve an equal representation of both Welsh and English writers and to gain funders from both countries, the festival encountered problems due to Hay-on-Wye’s unusual, bifurcated geography, with the Wales-England border splitting the town. In 1993, WMA, who had provided £3,000 to the festival in funding for three years prior, cut ties. WMA reasoned that due to a reduced level of government support for the arts, they could not see Hay Festival ‘as central to the implementation of WMA aims and objectives’.⁸⁸ While funding for the Arts Council of Great Britain, of which WMA was a regional arts board, had increased from £18.2 million in 1955/56 to £364.2 million in 1993/94, by the end of this period, funds to WMA had plateaued.⁸⁹ The reason for this severance was cited by WMA as ‘the geographical border situation you are in’ and that Hay Festival did not provide ‘continuing activity or structure locally or regionally outside of the festival calendar’.⁹⁰ WMA’s suspension of funding for Hay Festival demonstrates the direct impact an indeterminate border location had on the festival, not only on its ambiguous identity, but on its funding opportunities as it was either too Welsh and or not Welsh enough. Consequently,

⁸⁶ Norman Florence to Welsh Arts Council, November 1, 1990, Add MS 89482/2/11.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Belinda Kidd to Norman Florence, December 3, 1993, Add MS 89482/2/12.

⁸⁹ Noel Dempsey, ‘Arts Council of Great Britain Grant-in-Aid Income graph,’ *Arts Funding: Statistics* (House of Commons Briefing Paper, Number CBP 7655, April 27, 2016), 16. In the period between 1992/93 and 1993/94, the income in England had decreased by £1,000, but expenditure had increased by £6,000, (Dempsey, 24). In this period between 1994 to 1999, ACE grants to WMA stayed between £8,000 to £8,850, despite the increasing budget.

⁹⁰ Belinda Kidd to Norman Florence, December 3, 1993, Add MS 89482/2/12.

with Hay Festival's border location posing a threat to funding opportunities, securing local funding required the festival to choose either a dogmatic Welsh or English identity. In this period, the festival amplified its Welsh identity with specific education programmes and literary awards underlining its Welsh heritage to attract Welsh funders.

Hay Festival sought to legitimise its place in the Welsh literary world by introducing two literary prizes: the John Ederyn Hughes Award for rural literature, funded by the Development Board for Rural Wales, and the All Wales Young Writers Award for schoolchildren in Wales funded by PCC and WAC. Both prizes aimed to deepen Hay Festival's connection with Wales and Welsh literature, while also looking to attract talent and media attention to the festival. The John Edeyrn Hughes Award commemorated the early festival patron and the director of the Development Board for Rural Wales who was 'instrumental in the founding' of Hay Festival.⁹¹ The requirements for the prize were broadly that the literature had to have 'a rural theme,' consistent with the focus of the Development Board for Rural Wales and Hay Festival's rural location.⁹² In the prize's first year, Irish memoirist George O'Brien won for *The Village of Longing/Dancehall Days* (1990), followed by Welsh poet Leslie Norris, both writers whose main subject matter is the experience of rural life. However, the requirements changed in 1993 away from the 'narrow and vague restrictions ... as the description teetered on parochialism and became impractical' and it became 'The Rural Wales Literary Award in memory of John Hughes'.⁹³ The conditions for the prize opened out to include texts where '[l]anguage is the common currency of communication,' following the festival's aim to 'better recognise the fundamental idea of the Festival: of overriding and breaking down literary prejudices and misconceptions'.⁹⁴ This

⁹¹ News clipping, *Western Mail*, February 21, 1990, Add MS 89482/4/8.

⁹² Information sheet for 'The Rural Wales Literary Award in memory of John Hughes,' 1993, Add MS 89482/1/3.

⁹³ 'The Rural Wales Literary Award in memory of John Hughes,' 1993, Add MS 89482/1/3.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

expansion of the requirements for the Rural Wales Literary Award away from the location and landscape associated with the festival and the Welsh funder, to a general appreciation of ‘language’ allowed the prize to become ‘truly international,’ in line with Norman Florence’s aims in the decade to ‘buy better “imported” authors’.⁹⁵ While it is noted that prize was ‘invaluable in providing a publicity and thematic focus for the rest of the programme,’ in broadening its requirements to attract these international authors and bring more publicity to the prize and therefore the festival, the Rural Wales Literary Award lost its distinctiveness of literature with a rural theme and became an all-encompassing literary prize in a busy field of literary prizes.⁹⁶

The now-international prize was called ‘the set-piece highlight of the Festival’ in 1993, and in the subsequent years it was presented to popular writers such as Canadian literary star Margaret Atwood and British journalist Mark Tully, becoming a vessel indicating Hay Festival’s changing priorities festival in the 1990s.⁹⁷ Emphasising literature and language as ‘the common currency’ in Peter Florence’s first years as director enabled Hay Festival to extend its audience to further afield.⁹⁸ Introducing a preeminent literary prize, Hay Festival strengthened what Giorgi calls ‘both economic and symbolic gains’ for literary festivals, enabling their long-term sustainability, further funding, publicity, and a promotion of literature itself.⁹⁹ While prizes at literary festivals probe the limits of borders, boundaries, and tastes, James English argues in *The Economy of Prestige* (2005), that it would be premature to consider prizes as mainly indicative of the abrasive process of art commodification.¹⁰⁰ In hosting a literary prize financed by a Welsh funding body, Hay Festival showed its reliance

⁹⁵ Ibid; Norman Florence to Welsh Arts Council, November 1, 1990, Add MS 89482/2/11.

⁹⁶ ‘The Rural Wales Literary Award in memory of John Hughes,’ 1993, Add MS 89482/1/3.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Giorgi, ‘Between Tradition, Vision and Imagination,’ 35.

¹⁰⁰ James English, *The Economy of Prestige: Prizes, Awards, and the Circulation of Cultural Value* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 88.

upon government support. The Rural Wales Literary Award demonstrates how both cultural and commercial value are consecrated through the cultural mediators of literary prizes and literary festivals as Hay Festival stepped into the role of literary celebrity creator with the winners of its literary prize ‘forced to navigate the complex relationship between cultural and populist spheres’.¹⁰¹

Where the Rural Wales Literary Award became international in reach, the All Wales Young Writers Award worked to expand Hay Festival’s relationship with the local Welsh community in the 1990s. The All Wales Award was promoted in schools around Wales and had two separate prizes for those pieces written in Welsh and English, aiming to ‘recognise and promote the work of young writers in Wales,’ with a special prize for students from Powys.¹⁰² The young writer Owen Sheers, who would go on to attend the festival’s educational project for local teenagers, the Beacons Project, and become a successful poet, later appearing at his own Hay Festival events, won the first year of the prize in 1991 with his short story ‘Stepping on the Sky’.¹⁰³ When placed together with the Rural Wales Literary Award which was introduced the year, both prizes demonstrate the two strands of media attention the festival targeted: local and national. Both prizes exhibit the festival’s pursuit of literary legitimacy in the 1990s, as well as its attempt to celebrate particular kinds of literature and to have an influence on cultural opinion. As instruments of publicity, literary prizes such as the Rural Wales and All Wales prizes sought commercial success and wider

¹⁰¹ Weber, *Literary Festivals and Contemporary Book Culture*, 27.

¹⁰² All Wales Young Writers Award competition brochure, 1991, Add MS 89482/2/34.

¹⁰³ Peter Florence to Owen Sheers, May 17, 1991, Add MS 89482/1/3.

media attention for the writers, the funders of the literary prizes, and the literary festivals that hosted them.

Following the Welsh language – also known as ‘Cymraeg’ – targets of local funders, Hay Festival began to prioritise bi-lingualism at its festivals, with varying levels of success.¹⁰⁴ The decade saw the festival prioritise Welsh writers like Menna Elfyn, Glyn Maxwell, Bernice Rubens and Jan Morris in its programming, and at the 1993 festival there was a dedicated ‘Cymraeg Day,’ with £10,000 provided by the Welsh Office for organisation

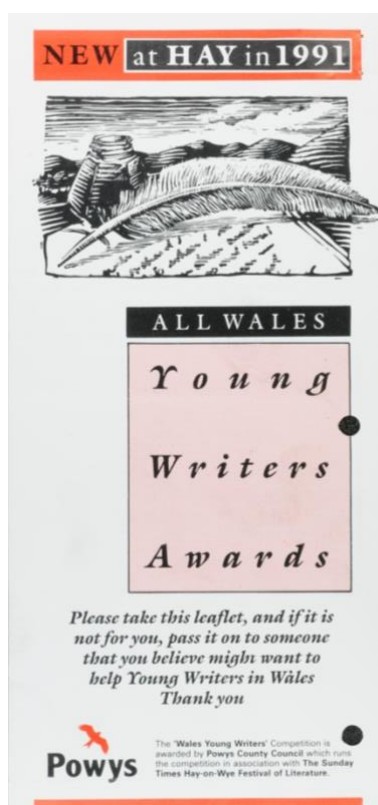


Figure 6: Leaflet for the All Wales Young Writers Award, Add MS 89482/1/3. © Hay Festival.

costs and the day promoted on the Cymraeg TV channel, S4C.¹⁰⁵ The Cymraeg Day at the festival was intended to ‘promote the Welsh language in this area of Powys where there is a resistance to it, prior to our neighbours in Llanelwedd hosting the National Eisteddfod’.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ The Welsh language will mainly be referred to from now as ‘Cymraeg’.

¹⁰⁵ Norman Florence to Welsh Arts Council, November 1, 1991, Add MS 89482/2/11; Norman Florence to G.R. Jones, June 7, 1993, Add MS 89482/2/16.

¹⁰⁶ Peter Florence to John Rees, June 22, 1993, Add MS 89482/2/16.

Aligning themselves with the National Eisteddfod, a hugely successful celebration of the culture and language in Wales steeped in traditions that go back to 1176, Hay Festival attempted to incorporate Welsh language and culture into its event.¹⁰⁷ However, the festival had no history of Welsh speakers in its core team, and the Florences themselves were from England, meaning that to be host a successful Welsh-language day, it would have to outsource and consult Welsh-language speakers from outside of the core staff, though there is little evidence that this happened in the archive. The Cymraeg Day sought to promote Welsh literature and authors, championing established Welsh texts and was seen as ‘a worthwhile event’ in a letter from Welsh novelist Emyr Humphreys.¹⁰⁸

In a letter to Peter Florence, Welsh-language author John Rowlands called the attendance to the festival’s Cymraeg Day events ‘sparse’, which, he said, ‘was a pity’.¹⁰⁹ In its festival report to the newly-styled Arts Council of Wales (ACW) the following year after its venture into bi-lingual programming, Hay Festival conceded that ‘[c]ontrary to advice and expectation the integration of the Cymraeg [Day] programming was not successful. The grant from the Welsh Office in 1993 was withdrawn despite the favourable ACW assessment undertaken by the Literature Officer’.¹¹⁰ The failure of the Cymraeg Day points towards Hay Festival’s inability to engage with the Welsh-speaking population adequately and the difficulty that its attempt to unite both Welsh and English identities in the festival posed, especially since the festival relied upon funding bodies for support. To be called a Welsh festival, it would appear that funders like the Welsh Office would want not only Welsh language programming, but also for these events to draw large audiences, a challenging task in Powys where only 20.7% of the population spoke Welsh in 1991.¹¹¹ Despite this,

¹⁰⁷ ‘About Us,’ National Eisteddfod, accessed June 23, 2022, <https://eisteddfod.wales/about-us>.

¹⁰⁸ Emyr Humphreys to Peter Florence, 1994, Add MS 89482/1/2.

¹⁰⁹ John Rowlands to Peter Florence, 1994, Add MS 89482/1/5.

¹¹⁰ Hay Festival report of 1994 festival to Arts Council of Wales, 1995, Add MS 89482/2/20.

¹¹¹ Hywel M. Jones, *A Statistical Overview of the Welsh Language* (Cardiff: Welsh Language Board, 2012), 16.

Rowlands advocated that ‘it’s worth circulating some such events, because they might have a wider impact than you might think’.¹¹² Rowlands’ letter suggests that despite a small audience, the impact of showcasing Cymraeg events at a primarily English language festival raises its visibility and the profile of the language as well as the importance of Welsh literature and Welsh authors to the festival. Though it did not showcase another dedicated Cymraeg Day, Hay Festival would later create dual-language programmes and special Cymraeg events, showing a commitment to bi-lingualism.

The low attendance to the Cymraeg events has been a perennial problem for Hay Festival and has resulted in the festival losing vital funding such as that from the Welsh Office. That bi-lingualism is still a difficult subject for the festival, some thirty years later, and is still governed by funding restraints, is reflected by current members of staff. Georgie Cooke, production director at Hay Festival, claims that the festival is ‘always trying’ to ‘promote and give the Welsh side equal opportunity,’ and as a large portion of the festival’s funding is from Visit Wales, formerly the Welsh Tourist Board, ‘90% of our signage is in both languages’.¹¹³ Similarly, Salisbury cites the festival’s border position and the majority of the festival’s audience based in England as reason for the bi-lingual issue and the festival’s Welsh identity being classified as ‘things we want to do better and improve now that we have the opportunity to do so’.¹¹⁴ In widening the remit of its festival and attempting a ‘catch-all’ method to woo Welsh funders and Welsh-speaking audiences, Hay Festival risked upsetting the very people it was trying to attract.

The Cymraeg Day is one example of Hay Festival programming events specifically to attract Welsh funding and bolster its Welsh identity. The archive shows the strain that the festival was under in the 1990s to secure funding, resulting in reliance upon letters directly

¹¹² John Rowlands to Peter Florence, 1994, Add MS 89482/1/5.

¹¹³ Georgie Cooke, interview by Rebecca Roach, Zoom, September 28, 2021.

¹¹⁴ Heather Salisbury, interview by Rebecca Roach, Zoom, September 20, 2021.

asking for financial aid, or moulding events to fit the funder's wishes, ultimately shaping its identity and history. In 1992, PCC announced that they 'decided to reduce expenditure on tourism activities,' cutting back general funding to festivals such as Hay Festival to 'sponsor activities aimed at young persons' in 'anticipation of a difficult year ahead'.¹¹⁵ This shift in funding to focus instead on education outreach can be seen to directly affect Hay Festival. The festival adjusted its programme to collaborate with PCC on an education programme fitting in with the local school curriculum, offering all Powys students the opportunity to attend festival events for free, as well as introducing the new All Wales Young Writers Award.¹¹⁶

Due to the strain on the festival's finances, relations with the PCC were unstable throughout the 1990s. For Peter Florence, it was 'embarrassing' that 'Herefordshire and Worcester have granted us £1,000 and our own County Council [PCC] have contributed nothing' to the festival in 1990.¹¹⁷ In 1992, Hay Festival's application for funding to the Community, Recreation and Leisure sub-committee was declined by Powys.¹¹⁸ This rejection was disputed in a lengthy letter from Florence to PCC. In this letter, Florence divulged that the theatre workshops that the festival applied to Powys for funding from 'were undertaken as a result of consultation with [PCC] English Adviser and county teachers,' showing the programme to be shaped at the bequest and the consultancy of the local funding body.¹¹⁹ Florence conceded that the festival still does 'intend to continue to pursue the policy of catering directly to the demands of our Powys students at the Festival'.¹²⁰ The correspondence shows the level of bureaucracy involved in local planning and how the

¹¹⁵ A.J. Barnish to Jonathan Evans, October 7, 1992, Add MS 89482/2/12.

¹¹⁶ Norman Florence to Robert Bevan, 1990, Add MS 89482/2/34.

¹¹⁷ Peter Florence to Gareth Jones, May 10, 1990, Add MS 89482/2/34; Robert Bevan to Peter Florence, June 24, 1992, Add MS 89482/2/34.

¹¹⁸ Ibid; Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Peter Florence to Robert Bevan, July 10, 1992, Add MS 89482/2/34.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

festival was required to change plans and its events at the request of PCC in line with local targets and cultures. In spite of the breakdown of relations between Hay Festival and PCC, the festival's intent to 'cater directly' to Powys students in arts education conveys an early commitment to education and local school communities. This educational commitment has continued to the contemporary festival with an expansive Schools Programme and the dedicated educational touring programme Scribblers Tour and Scribblers Cymraeg, which I will explore further in the next chapter.¹²¹

As the widespread popularity of Hay Festival grew, so did the tensions with local funders, demonstrating that the festival was not immune from policy environs. The festival became more outward-looking towards national and international agendas and media attention and struggled with its indeterminate border position which made it neither Welsh nor English in the eyes of funding bodies, resulting in the dinner table becoming more exclusive. The attempts to reconcile this split identity in initiatives such the Cymraeg Day and the two literary prizes, the Rural Wales Literary Award and the All Wales Young Writers Award, demonstrate Hay Festival's period of trial and error in the 1990s as it muddled the difficult balance between local and national priorities. Hay Festival subsequently relied upon the new ACW to secure its future, and turned to more commercial sponsorships to aid its development.

National sponsorships: Commercialisation, newspapers, and new media

Hay Festival's move towards commercial sponsorships came early and in the form of national newspaper title sponsorships. The festival's first title sponsorship from the *Sunday Times* continued from 1989 until 1992. In 1989, the newspaper sponsored the festival for £10,000,

¹²¹ Venables, interview by Roach; 'Hay Festival Scribblers Tour 2024,' Hay Festival, accessed July 17, 2024, www.hayfestival.com/the-scribblers-tour.

doubling to £20,000 in 1990.¹²² The *Sunday Times* sponsorship resulted in favourable and extensive coverage of the festival by the newspaper, with reports and large double-spreads containing maps of Hay-on-Wye, details of how to book, and descriptions of the festival's programme as a reflection of 'the festival's growing levels of clout among the international literati,' with ticket sales exceeding 20,000 by 1991.¹²³ In 1990, the festival credits the 'national profile' that the *Sunday Times* sponsorship provided for the festival's 'rapid expansion' which it says was 'dubbed its "Naissance" by the press,' and for other positive expansions, including: 'dramatically increasing' its funding and sponsorship, the extension of the festival from a long weekend to ten days resulting in being 'able to secure more attractive names and be more adventurous,' and gain other media attention.¹²⁴ Hay Festival's suggestion that the title sponsorship enabled it to 'reach the "literary" market in Britain,' and the involvement of the 'Murdoch Empire' drew media interest from HTV, Central TV, and Channel 4, bringing Hay Festival into the nation's living rooms, as well as other newspaper interest from the *Independent*, the *Guardian*, *Western Mail*, and *Wales on Sunday*.¹²⁵ The coverage resulted in BBC Wales securing the exclusive right to 'immortalise key moments' by recording and broadcasting festival in 1990 for £1,500, though the partnership ceased the following year.¹²⁶ In what follows, I trace the origins and evolution of Hay Festival's media sponsorships and explore how it turned to these to bypass the issues with local governmental funding, helping it to gain a presence in the national media.

Despite the national coverage it granted, the title sponsorship from the *Sunday Times* caused anxiety in its first years. The festival listed its main liability to WAC in its 1990

¹²² Sponsorship agreement with Sunday Times, 1990, Add MS 89482/3/6.

¹²³ 'A Whiff of Hay Fever,' *Sunday Times*, May 13, 1990, Add MS 89482/4/8; Polly Samson, 'The Darling Bods of Hay,' *Sunday Times*, June 2, 1991, Add MS 89482/4/9.

¹²⁴ Norman Florence to the Welsh Arts Council, November 1, 1990, Add MS 89482/2/11, 20.

¹²⁵ Ibid, 20.

¹²⁶ Agreement between BBC Wales and Hay Festival, March 20, 1990, Add MS 89482/1/167; 'A Whiff of Hay Fever,' *Sunday Times*, May 13, 1990, Add MS 89482/4/8; Barry Lynch to Peter Florence, January 17, 1991, Add MS 89482/1/167.

annual report as ‘the objections of necessary dissident writers and intellectuals to the political stance of the *Sunday Times*,’ fearing a potential boycott that would be ‘extremely damaging to the credibility of the Festival’.¹²⁷ The word ‘necessary’ suggests the festival’s sympathies with dissident writers and betrays its apparent unease towards the newspaper and its conservative politics. This thus underscores the main drawback of title sponsors – that by including the name of a newspaper in a festival’s title, it becomes associated and entangled with the newspaper’s reporting and political leanings, and it with the festival’s. Yet as Hay Festival struggled to establish stable funding streams in the early 1990s, the *Sunday Times* title sponsorship provided important income for its economic sustainability. Maggie Kerr, former development director at Hay Festival, notes the difficulty of newspaper sponsorship for the festival, and the festival would depart from newspaper sponsorships in 2016 because the team ‘felt like it discouraged other coverage’.¹²⁸ Kerr, however, disagrees with this decision, calling it ‘a mistake’ as ‘the newspapers did a great job and I think we benefited hugely,’ most likely referring to the subsequent national publicity and sponsorships that followed.¹²⁹

Weber argues that newspapers and their relation to literary festivals entwines cultural consumption with class.¹³⁰ She cites Tak Wing Chang and John H. Goldthorpe’s 2007 study into newspaper readerships and social class to understand this relationship. In their study, Chang and Goldthorpe find that there is still a ‘strong and systematic association between status and newspaper readership’ in the British context, with newspapers also signalling political views in that ‘readers of the *Guardian* or the *Mirror* are often taken to be supporters of the Labour Party, while readers of the *Daily Telegraph* or the *Daily Mail* are often taken to

¹²⁷ Norman Florence to the Welsh Arts Council, November 1, 1990, Add MS 89482/2/11.

¹²⁸ Maggie Kerr, interview by Ellen Addis, Zoom, September 27, 2021.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Weber, *Literary Festivals and Contemporary Book Culture*, 194.

be supporters of the Conservative Party'.¹³¹ Still, despite the *Sunday Times*' politics, more liberal authors appeared at the 1990 Hay Festival, including Tariq Ali, Germaine Greer, Roy Hattersley, and John Pilger, showing the compromises authors make to appear at festivals that help their own careers. Other literary festivals have followed Hay Festival's suite and also acquired newspaper title sponsorships, including Cheltenham Literature Festival's longstanding sponsorship with the *Times* and the *Sunday Times* beginning in 2005.

In 1993, Hay Festival departed from the *Sunday Times* and received title sponsorship from the *Independent*. This sponsorship deal was much akin to the *Sunday Times*, with editorials and press access. The partnership, however, came to a bitter end in 1995 when the festival lost the £35,000 in sponsorship money from the newspaper 'because their new owners, The Mirror Group, have revoked agreements and capped their spending'.¹³² Caught up in the internal politics of media conglomeration, the fallout from this loss, almost 10% of the actual costs for Hay Festival, left it in a financially precarious position, though it did retain the *Independent*'s media coverage.¹³³ For the first time since the festival began, its income decreased, and it had to scramble to receive funding from ACW, having already lost both WMA and WTB sponsorship in the previous two years. As a result, it turned to asking authors for favours. In a letter to Simon Schama that year, Peter Florence asked the historian 'may I crave your favour,' requesting that Schama take a later flight to his event so that the festival can save £1,500.¹³⁴ Schama apologised, writing that he cannot change his flight as 'a night flight means no sleep and jet lag. I never sleep on overnight flights. Which also means Schama would be extremely below par for Hay'.¹³⁵ Asking authors to cut back on expenses which they were promised reveals the impact of the lost *Independent* sponsorship, and the

¹³¹ Tak Wing Chang and John H. Goldthorpe, 'Social Status and Newspaper Readership,' *American Journal of Sociology* 112, no. 4 (2007): 1095, 1103, <https://doi.org/10.1086/508792>.

¹³² Peter Florence to Simon Schama, May 18, 1995, Add MS 89482/1/10.

¹³³ Hay Festival application to Arts Council of Wales, 1995, Add MS 89482/2/20.

¹³⁴ Peter Florence to Simon Schama, May 18, 1995, Add MS 89482/1/10.

¹³⁵ Simon Schama to Peter Florence, May 19, 1995, Add MS 89482/1/10.

insecure finances of the festival. By relying on the commercial sponsorship in the first place, the festival invited a certain level of precarity.

Following the fallout of the terminated *Independent* sponsorship, Hay Festival resumed the sponsorship deal with the *Sunday Times* in 1996, and this remained in place until 2001. During this moment, Hay Festival experienced a meteoric rise. In 1996, it saw a 29% increase in ticket sales from the previous year to £142,682, and in 1997 there was a further 35% rise in sales to £192,371, showing a huge growth year on year.¹³⁶ The period of extreme growth runs alongside the similar boom of other festivals such as SXSW in the USA which began in 1987, some short months before Hay's first festival. In 1994, SXSW added a component for film and other media, named the 'SXSW Film and Multimedia Conference' with Johnny Cash the keynote speaker, and by the following year, the festival was split into two separate events.¹³⁷ This comparison is important because it shows the rise of small-scale and independent cultural events like Hay Festival and SXSW gaining international scale and reputation in the mid to later years of the 1990s. In 1999, ten years after first becoming the festival's title sponsor, the *Sunday Times* ran a 'Hay Festival special,' featuring 'the writers who have made Hay so special. They are the reason why the *New York Times* has called it the most important literary festival in the English-speaking world'.¹³⁸ The *Sunday Times* piece expressed that '[w]e are immensely proud of our sponsorship of the festival, which has prospered and grown over the past 12 years ... The festival is now a key date in the literary calendar'.¹³⁹ In 1999, Hay Festival had used its media sponsors to establish its place within the national consciousness and the international literary scene.

¹³⁶ Hay Festival audited financial report, 1997, Add MS 89482/3/11.

¹³⁷ 'History: SXSW Conference & Festivals,' South by Southwest (SXSW), accessed August 4, 2021, <https://www.sxsw.com/about/history/>.

¹³⁸ *Sunday Times* Books section Hay Festival special, 1999, Add MS 89482/2/3.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

In 1999, Hay Festival also took up a second title sponsorship, heralding the changing media environ by partnering with bol.com, an e-Commerce website. The bol.com sponsorship lasted for two years and hosted the festival's website from 1999, as well as an advertising agreement and 'Internet bookselling' for an agreed £200,000.¹⁴⁰ In return, Hay Festival allowed bol.com to become a fully branded title sponsor and would provide content for the website. The sponsorship by bol.com put the festival online, pushing its reach past its small-scale and independent beginnings as well as the national confines of the national newspaper sponsorship, 'making sure that Hay goes global'.¹⁴¹ Yet the understanding of title sponsors is incomplete without looking at the difficulty in a festival having two different title sponsors. With Hay Festival's name bookended by the *Sunday Times* and bol.com in 1999 and 2000, the festival risked conflicts of interest, as well as losing its own identity and name in among the names of sponsors. By placing other brand names with its own, Hay Festival became imbued with its sponsor's image and output, with its own brand becoming less strong at the expense of increased reach. In the next chapter I will explore the development of Hay Festival's newspaper title sponsorships in the next two decades and how the complicated class and political associations of newspapers in the UK brought the end to Hay Festival's title sponsorships in 2016, providing a neoliberal model for other festivals.

Away from the political leanings of the newspapers sponsoring literary festivals, these title sponsorships signal a festival's turn to commercial income often due to the precarity of governmental funding streams. Rapidly, literary festivals such as Hay Festival had to change procedures to benefit from subsidies and sponsors. In attracting private sponsors such as newspapers and media outlets, Giorgi describes this as spreading the 'financial risk' that the festival might lose its financial basis from public subsidies, though newspapers are more

¹⁴⁰ Hay Festival and bol.com contract, 1999, Add MS 89482/2/21.

¹⁴¹ Peter Florence, Hay Festival programme, 1999, Add MS 89482/4/32.

likely to sponsor a festival where publicity is guaranteed, ultimately leading to the ‘pressure of commercialization, which often means “fewer events, more names”’.¹⁴² During the 1990s, Hay Festival’s originally idealistic event rapidly expanded due to its push towards literary celebrities and private sponsorship, resulting in the festival ‘combining public and commercial interests with the social event culture’ in order to continue to sustain and grow, which has led to the event being still criticised today by some for being more about celebrities and events than literary culture.¹⁴³ Repeatedly in the *Sunday Times*’ coverage of the festival is the mention of opportunities to ‘rub shoulders’ with ‘celebrity authors,’ gesturing towards star authors as the pull to the festival for the newspaper’s readership.¹⁴⁴ Part of middlebrow culture, Hay Festival’s blend of private sponsorship and public funding results in a democratisation of culture, where though commercialisation is ‘a fact,’ the opportunities enabled by the sponsorship results in a ‘joy in experimentation’ for literary festivals such as Hay.¹⁴⁵

In the 1990s, Hay Festival offered a space for literature and the wider arts to be discussed on a stage with a growing audience, where it would showcase the Welsh borderland area to the rest of the world. During this decade, the literary community came to Hay and the festival’s intimate kitchen table became the more formalised space of the dinner table. In a letter to Howard Marks, Peter Florence enthused that it would be ‘great to have more “international Welsh”,’ and explained the festival’s fee situation as ‘we’re not rich, but we’re fun,’ and instead of money, ‘how about a door-to-door limo, four-poster ease, a case of Dom Perignon and all the clean air you can breathe?’.¹⁴⁶ Florence’s term, ‘international Welsh,’ meaning those authors, such as Marks, who are internationally-renowned Welsh authors, is

¹⁴² Giorgi, ‘Between Tradition, Vision and Imagination,’ 42.

¹⁴³ Ibid, 42.

¹⁴⁴ ‘A Whiff of Hay Fever,’ *Sunday Times*, May 13, 1990, Add MS 89482/4/8.

¹⁴⁵ Giorgi, ‘Between Tradition, Vision and Imagination,’ 43.

¹⁴⁶ Peter Florence to Howard Marks, 1999, Add MS 89482/1/31.

what the festival was trying to achieve in the decade itself: being both Welsh in identity but globally-reaching. In this time, the foundation for the festival's national relevance was laid through title newspaper sponsorships and internationally acclaimed authors, which made way for the festival's own international expansion in the 2000s. Foretelling its future expansion into other festivals, by the end of the 1990s Hay Festival had expanded into its own London edition, known as 'The Word,' or the London Festival of Literature. The Word facilitated Hay Festival's broader development and described itself as 'a carnival celebration of language that revels in the diversity and plurality of London'.¹⁴⁷ The 1990s saw the festival solidify its place in the national consciousness, engage closer with its audience and author networks, and balance local sponsors and the difficulty of its border situation.

¹⁴⁷ Executive Summary of The Word, 2000, Add MS 89482/1/313.

3 The platform: Promoting literature, 2000—2024

In the new millennium, Hay Festival envisaged a new model for its events, taking the festival across the country and into the Spanish-speaking market with festivals in Spain, Colombia, and Mallorca. In 2021, Lambert describes the shift towards creating a professional ‘brand’ in order to flourish in the competitive contemporary literary festival market:

There were challenges for the festival in how it started and how it continues to find its place amongst a much bigger marketplace. Obviously, there’s far more literary festivals around now, you could throw a stone and you’ll probably find a literary festival somewhere, but it’s a very powerful brand still. Think about the Hay brand: it’s thirty-three years old, it’s very located in a place.¹

Lambert’s description of Hay Festival’s brand roots it in the festival’s history and its geographic location. The festival’s brand is also described by box office manager Penny Compton calling the success of the festival both ‘the place and brand,’ while Venables credits the popularity of the festival’s education programme to its events being ‘freely available’ and because ‘the Hay machine is so well known as a brand’.² The description of the festival as a sanitised ‘machine’ and its transformation into a brand signal towards a shift to commercialisation from the 2000s. In this chapter, I argue that the festival remodelled itself from the homely kitchen table and more formal dinner table into a platform for authors and speakers alike to reach audiences. Unlike the intimacy of the kitchen and dinner tables, the platform is more professional and corporate as Hay Festival’s history and creation of a recognisable brand resulted in the festival growing exponentially from the new millennia onwards.

In this chapter, I investigate Hay Festival’s relationship with literature and literary culture in the 2000s, the changes to the economies of writing, its pursuit of a permanent

¹ Adrian Lambert, interview by Ellen Addis, Zoom, August 12, 2021.

² Penny Compton, interview by Ellen Addis, Zoom, October 6, 2021; Aine Venables, interview by Rebecca Roach, Zoom, October 8, 2022.

festival site that it could call its own, and the ways the festival sought to expand through a new ‘storytelling’ programme and an international festival franchise. I will explore primarily how Hay Festival’s expansion, geographically and thematically, resulted in solidifying its place in the public’s consciousness and the creation of the festival’s ‘brand’ and platform. My discussion of Hay Festival’s newfound focus on its audience profile and the prioritisation of commercial sponsors against the backdrop of New Labour arts funding in this period generates new insights into the growth of an arts organisation while contributing significantly to the appeal and impact of Hay Festival’s later output, and its growing professionalisation and platform.

Hay Festival from the 2000s to today has morphed into an event that gives authors and other figures a platform to speak, sell books, and meet their readers, and readers a platform to participate in social reading practices, and meet their favourite authors and other readers. During this period, Hay Festival has professionalised as it has taken further commercial funding routes in order to survive, still grappling with the intimate and ad hoc methods of its early years. Hay Festival’s continued growth in the 2000s can be tracked by the number of events. In 2003, there were 249 events over ten days. Two years later in 2005, 359 festival events were programmed, and in 2018, there were more than 500 events over thirteen days.³ Hay Festival’s expansion and move towards commercialisation represents the wider growth of the literary festival market. In its 2004 programme celebrating its twenty-first birthday, Edinburgh International Book Festival director Catherine Lockerbie describes a growth similar to Hay Festival’s, as Edinburgh grew from ‘in 1983, a few tents and some bright-eyed energy popped up in a quiet Edinburgh garden,’ transforming in 2004 to a ‘glorious carnival’ of ‘over 500 authors in over 650 events’.⁴ But this expansion for literary

³ Hay Festival programme, 2003, Add MS 89482/4/33; Hay Festival programme, 2005, Add MS 89482/4/33; Hay Festival programme, 2018, Add MS 89482/4/42.

⁴ Catherine Lockerbie, ‘Welcome,’ Edinburgh International Book Festival Programme, 2004, <https://www.edbookfest.co.uk/about-us/past-programmes>, 2.

festivals did not come without backlash. Driscoll describes a ‘widespread and sustained media critique of the commerce at literary festivals,’ leading to festivals being described as ‘marketplaces’.⁵ While Andrew Riemer says that the demands that the marketplace puts on literary festivals leads to ‘a perceptible lowering of literary, imaginative and cultural tone,’ Driscoll pushes back, arguing that the presence of commerce at literary festivals does not make them ‘simply contradictory spaces that make both money and honour literature,’ but instead festivals ‘combine these goals with other middlebrow features’.⁶

Hay Festival expanded its programming both domestically and internationally in the 2000s, supplementing the May festival by franchising it into a myriad of festivals around the world, one-day forums, and stepping into the publishing market itself, launching Hay Festival Press to publish a ‘collectable series of special edition short stories written by leading contemporary authors’.⁷ Following the emergence of the festival’s online website and ticketing system via Web 1.0, and the eventual development of Web 2.0 in the mid-2000s with new social media technologies, Hay Festival’s communications moved mainly online and consequently, the printed documented correspondence with authors through typed and handwritten letters within the archive decreases, with the influx of born-digital records. Instead, the voice of the intermediary literary agent emerges.

Year-round programming: Storytelling, Winter Weekend, and education events

In the Hay Festival archive, a document lists the nineteen events the festival hosted from 2003-2005, as well as the ticket sales and number of performers. The events include the annual May festival and others: a ‘Gods & Monsters Storytelling Tour,’ ‘GlamLit,’ ‘Winter

⁵ Driscoll, *The New Literary Middlebrow*, 157.

⁶ Andrew Reimer, ‘Twinkle, Twinkle Lit Star,’ *AQ: Australian Quarterly* 72, no. 1 (2000): 29, <https://doi.org/10.2307/20637880>, quoted in Driscoll, *The New Literary Middlebrow*, 158; Driscoll, *The New Literary Middlebrow*, 160.

⁷ Hay Festival Segovia programme, 2006, Add MS 89482/1/263.

Weekend,’ ‘StoryQuest,’ and ‘Tertulia@Deia,’ among many more.⁸ This document provides insight into the expansion of Hay Festival’s programming to include events year-round, crucially building the platform of Hay Festival to be all-encompassing by using literature as its basis.

With the popularity of Hay Festival’s May festival, the festival costs increased and required year-round employment of festival staff and the income from other events to support the festival’s success and planning. In a funding agreement with ACW in 2003, Hay Festival rationalised the increase in events across the year as a way to ‘justify’ its employment of ‘a core staff of five people year round’ to ‘contribute more to the local and Welsh economy and to promote the arts’.⁹ In this period, the major presence of Hay Festival staff other than the Florences can be seen in the festival archive for the first time. Figures such as Clare Purcell, the newly appointed ‘Storytelling Programme Director,’ and festival administrator Lyndy Cooke feature heavily in the archive, pointing towards the festival’s further expansion as it increased its team following Norman Florence’s death in 1996. Hay Festival’s programming of one-off events provided further income to employ a small staff while also allowing the festival to continue to make its mark on the cultural landscape. Hay Festival subsequently applied to funding for these events to help stabilise its economic position, though by the mid-2000s, it took its own events on tour, and eventually, established international sister festivals.

This expansion in the 2000s by Hay Festival centred around the promotion of its new ‘storytelling’ programme. This programme represented the festival’s pervasive approach to literature where the broad term ‘storytelling’ is described as a ‘LOST artform that should appeal across the literary, theatre and music audience profiles,’ comparing it to the ‘Old Rock and Roll’.¹⁰ In this period, the festival created live literature events prioritising the

⁸ ‘Hay Festival events 2003-2005,’ 2006, Add MS 89482/1/219.

⁹ Hay Festival agreement with Arts Council of Wales, 2003, Add MS 89482/2/29.

¹⁰ Notes for funding applications for Hay Festival storytelling tour, 2001, Add MS 89482/1/298.

playfulness of language and interactive storytelling, encouraging literary thinking by targeting schools and local festival audiences with the introduction of its Winter Weekend mini-festival at the end of November 2001, first known as the Rhyme and Reason Storytelling Weekend,' and its new touring event, StoryQuest.



Figure 7: Programme for the Rhyme and Reason Storytelling Weekend, 2002, Add MS 89482/1/298.
© Hay Festival.

The broad theme of storytelling became Hay Festival's avenue to appeal to a wide range of audiences across the UK. The festival's hope that storytelling would attract 'literary, theatre and music audience[s]' represents Hay Festival's expansion not only in number of events, but in the content of events, moving away from the academic, literary fiction, drama, and poetry programming that marked its first years, featuring writers such as Eric Hobsbawm, Doris Lessing, and Umberto Eco, and into a more generalised and popular literary approach in the 2000s.

Storytelling was defined by Hay Festival explicitly in its relation to oral traditions, presenting literary festivals as the descendants of these oral storytelling traditions by linking them to classics and ancient Greece. Storytelling was explicitly *not* literature, with Purcell writing that '[s]ince storytelling does not fall within any clear category (it is not "art,"

“dance,” “theatre,” or “literature”) and often the subject material ventures into the imagination, the unknown, it requires the participant to be a little more adventurous’.¹¹ In the 2002 Rhyme and Reason Storytelling Weekend programme, Purcell calls the pleasure of storytelling as ‘becoming caught-up in the richness of the spoken word, in an ancient form of entertainment with a modern resonance’.¹² The oral storytelling anchor for the festival’s new programme of events is reminiscent of Wiles’s definition of live literature. As such, Hay Festival’s new storytelling season programmed performances by oral storytellers such as Daniel Morden, ‘Wales’s leading storyteller’ performing *The Luck Child* with musical accompaniment, Sally Pomme Clayton’s ‘intricate evening of stories, inside stories, inside stories,’ *Sheherazde’s Tales*, and ‘21st Century Troubadour’ Ben Haggarty and ‘cellist/composer’ Sherry Robinson presenting ‘an evening of dark love stories and music’ in *Beauty and the Beast & Other Tales*.¹³

In a planning document for the 2001 storytelling programming, Hay Festival emphasised the potential of the theme, suggesting that ‘there is no actual storytelling out there’ and asked whether it could expand its storytelling programme and ‘offer a weekend to Cheltenham? Oxford? Wigtown? The Orange Word? Ilkley? Is there a tent at Glastonbury?’.¹⁴ Convinced of storytelling’s underappreciation and its wide appeal, Hay Festival saw storytelling and its universality as offering a unique collaborative opportunity with other festivals, showing the splintering of Hay Festival outwards. Seeking to depart from traditional literary festival ventures and creatively focus on the events themselves and its output, Hay Festival prioritised the promotion of the ‘LOST artform’ of storytelling. Purcell’s

¹¹ Clare Purcell, ‘Rhyme and Reason Storytelling Season, Hay-on-Wye 23-25 November 2001,’ Add MS 89482/1/298.

¹² Rhyme and Reason Storytelling Weekend programme, 2002, Add MS 89482/1/299. The Rhyme and Reason Storytelling Weekend retroactively became a part of what is now known as the Hay Festival Winter Weekend festival, a three-day festival held annually in Hay-on-Wye in winter.

¹³ Rhyme and Reason Storytelling Weekend programme, 2002, Add MS 89482/1/299.

¹⁴ Notes for funding applications for Hay Festival storytelling tour, 2001, Add MS 89482/1/298.

promotion to a specific storytelling-focused role at Hay Festival also reflects the expansion of the festival in the 2000s between the annual May festival and the year-round programming that heralded in a new era for the festival, focusing on broadcasting its events further afield than Hay-on-Wye and promoting the performance of literature through storytelling and moving away from literary fiction and books.

Hay Festival's promotion of the more generalised concept of storytelling moved the festival into Murray's definition of the second concentric circles of literary festival: 'broadly conceived writers' festival,' including non-fiction, genre fiction, and graphic novelists, among others.¹⁵ Though the storytelling tour had its showcase at the Rhyme and Reason weekend, it then toured around the UK as the 'Gods & Monsters Storytelling Tour,' a name inspired by ancient and classical literature and oral forms. Hay Festival intended to embed storytelling 'deeply into the national arts programme,' and 'improve its status within the realm of live entertainment'.¹⁶ The Gods & Monsters tour was funded by Arts Council England (ACE) in collaboration with Crick Crack Club, a UK-based performance promoter programming tours public performances in theatres and art centres across the UK, and featured authors performing well-known, often mythological stories on stage.¹⁷ Performers at Gods & Monsters included Hugh Lupton and Daniel Morden bringing to life Homer's the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, Haggarty (who had also appeared at the Rhyme and Reason weekend), and musician Sianed Jones unearthing the 'feverish folklore' of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* 'to create an intense cinema of the living imagination,' and Shonaleigh Cumbers performing the *Golem*.¹⁸ Blending musical performance with oral storytelling, the tour aimed to commission

¹⁵ Simone Murray, *The Adaptation Industry: The Cultural Economy of Contemporary Literary Adaptation* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 99.

¹⁶ Clare Purcell mass letter sent to Haymarket Theatre, Phoenix Arts, Midlands Art Centre, Warwick Arts, Exeter Phoenix, Bath University Theatre and Bath Spa College, August 3, 2001, Add MS 89482/1/297.

¹⁷ 'About,' Crick Crack Club, accessed July 18, 2022, <https://crickcrackclub.com/about/>.

¹⁸ Gods & Monsters Storytelling Tour poster, 2002, Add MS 89482/1/297.

new work to bring to audiences a mix of live literature with performance, making classic literary texts accessible to its broad audience.

Live literature and storytelling formed the focus of the early Winter Weekend festivals which grew out of the Rhyme and Reason Storytelling Weekend. These festivals, occurring between the end of November and early December, began in 2000 and still run annually. In a 2001 letter to John Williams, the head of regional development at the Mid Wales Division, asking for funding for the Rhyme and Reason Storytelling Weekend (soon to be the Winter Weekend), Purcell cites the intention for expanding the festival's programming to year-round was 'to continue to support the local economy' by running two events in the autumn during 'the 'off season' for tourists'.¹⁹ Though Purcell does not provide evidence for this 'off season,' in her letter to Williams, she includes a table of seventy local businesses that supported the May festival in 2001 to represent those that 'will benefit from the October and November "mini festival" events should they go ahead'.²⁰ Eleven years later in a funding application to PCC, the festival would justify a funding application by emphasising the Winter Weekend as a boost to the local economy 'in the quiet winter months for Hay' that 'keep[s] Hay's profile high,' and avoid the 'similar issues other towns [have] in this economic downturn'.²¹

During this time, the festival received multiple letters from local businesses thanking it for putting on the event and boosting the economy. In a letter from 2001 after the first Winter Weekend, a representative from Kilvert's Hotel in Hay-on-Wye thanks the festival for putting on the weekend event, writing the mini-festival 'made a difference to our weekend trade ... there were a lot more people than normal'.²² Hay Festival used its mailing list from

¹⁹ Clare Purcell to John Williams, September 10, 2001, Add MS 89482/1/298.

²⁰ Clare Purcell to John Williams, 'Hay Festival Local Business Sponsors, May 2001,' September 10, 2001, Add MS 89482/1/298.

²¹ Hay Festival Application form for Powys Community Regeneration and Development Fund, 2012, Add MS 89482/2/55.

²² Colin Thomson to Lyndy Cooke, December 5, 2001, Add MS 89482/1/298.

the May festival to launch the Winter Weekend and promoted the town as ‘a wonderful Christmas shopping destination, where unique products can be purchased in a relaxing, friendly and lively town free from the hum drum of city centres and standardised high street shops’.²³ Highlighting the town’s independence and character, the Winter Weekend was commercially driven and aimed to draw people to the town as a tourist destination wherein attending the festival would also attract audiences to spend their money in the local shops and on books at the festival.

The words ‘intimate’ or ‘intimacy’ are used to describe festival in every programme for the Winter Weekend between 2000 to 2009.²⁴ The promotional copy emphasises comfort, using the imagery of ‘fireside and mulled wine’ and ‘big comfy armchairs, and inspiring conversation’.²⁵ Together, the programmes market the festival’s domesticity and rural setting and create an alluring picture of winter. Christmas shopping is highlighted in all programmes too, directly advertising the bookshops and various gift shops in the book town. In 2006, there even was a specific Hay ‘Christmas Happy Hour’ on the Saturday night of the festival, with a 10% discount offered to ticketholders, with Peter Florence encouraging for festivalgoers to ‘please support our friends’.²⁶

²³ Clare Purcell to John Williams, Add MS 89482/1/298.

²⁴ Hay Festival Winter Weekend programmes, 2003 and 2006 (Add MS 89482/4/33), 2007 (Add MS 89482/4/40), 2008 (Add MS 89482/4/36), 2009 (Add MS 89482/4/37).

²⁵ Hay Festival Winter Weekend programme, 2009, Add MS 89482/4/37. Winter Weekend programme, 2005, Add MS 89482/1/300.

²⁶ Hay Festival Winter Weekend, 2006, Add MS 89482/1/300.



Figure 8: Hay Festival Winter Weekend programme, 2006, Add MS 89482/4/33. © Hay Festival.

The incentive to boost the local economy with the Winter Weekend was an early success, and it also attracted local people to attend, an audience that had been decreasing at the main May festival. A survey of the 2002 Winter Weekend audience showed that the majority of the audience came from Wales, 36% in total (17% of the total audience came from Powys).²⁷ Salisbury describes the Winter Weekend as ‘geared towards a local audience, far more so than the May festival where we’re talking about that kind of academic middle class crowd that tend to come in’ and an event that ‘has always been a little bit lighter, more fun, it’s more festive’ and has ‘never been pushed as a big international event’.²⁸ The Winter

²⁷ Hay Festival application to Powys County Council’s Community Enablement Support Fund, August 27, 2004, Add MS 89482/2/26.

²⁸ Heather Salisbury, interview by Rebecca Roach, Zoom, September 20, 2021.

Weekend was described by Mark Westwood, chair of the Hay Chamber of Commerce, as not only bringing in extra revenue to local retailers, but keeping ‘Hay on Wye in the public mind throughout the year. That may even be of greater benefit to the town’.²⁹ Building on the success of the main festival and experimenting with new working methods and ideas, the Winter Weekend enables those that wish to attend a smaller event than the May festival to be able to experience Hay Festival.³⁰

The expansion of Hay Festival is also shown in the 2000s touring schedule which prioritised educational projects. Travelling around the UK and putting on events in community centres, theatres, and universities, Hay Festival brought events to the wider public, skipping the issue of its rural location. This expansion was driven by economic pressure but also the festival’s ambitions to, in Venables words, ‘flip the windows open and let the rest of the world in’.³¹ Examples of touring events includes GlamLit, a series of literary seminars, poetry and storytelling for teenagers run in collaboration with the University of Glamorgan, and StoryQuest, a ten-day national tour of Children’s storytelling events held in regional venues across the UK. These two events specifically targeted school children. GlamLit was billed as ‘bringing readers from South Wales together to enjoy working with some of the most exciting writers and artists in Britain’ and ran until 2008.³² Combining the space of the university, ‘a place to share ideas and stories’ with live literature, Hay Festival opened the university to young people as a place of storytelling, authors, ideas, and language to thrive.³³ The first GlamLit in 2002 featured authors Benjamin Zephaniah, Germaine Greer, and Michael Morpurgo to reach outside of its May festival and collaborate

²⁹ Mark Westwood, July 2003, quoted in Hay Festival application to Powys County Council’s Community Enablement Support Fund, August 27, 2004, Add MS 89482/2/26.

³⁰ Clare Purcell to Ron Anker, July 20, 2000, Add MS 89482/1/291.

³¹ Aine Venables, interview by Rebecca Roach, Zoom, October 8, 2022.

³² GlamLit 2006 programme, Add MS 89482/1/287.

³³ Ibid.

with other organisations, universities, and funders, all with an educational and storytelling focus.

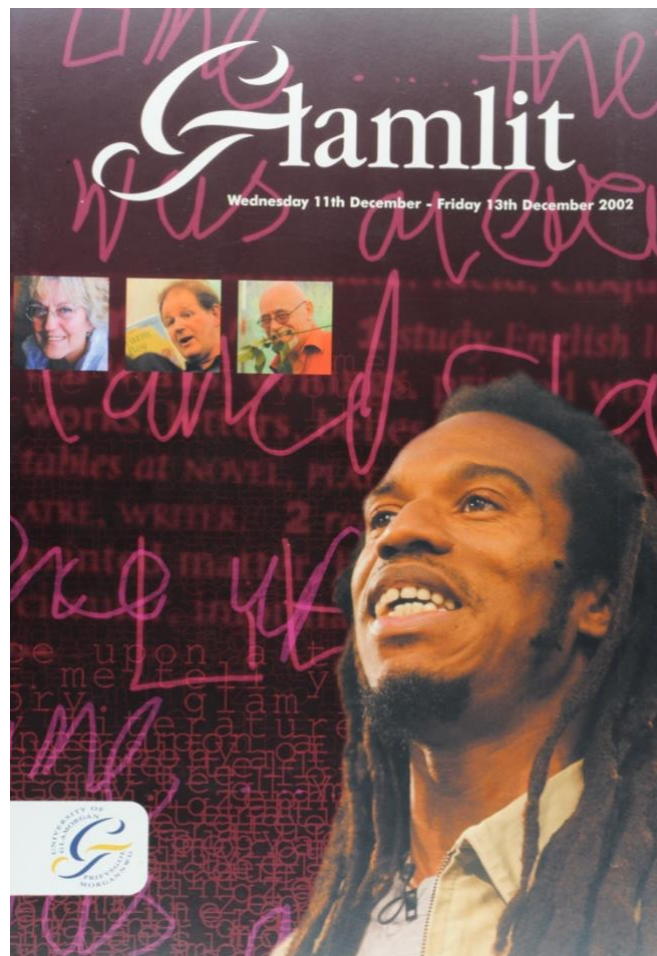


Figure 9: The cover of the first GlamLit programme, 2002, Add MS 89482/4/35. © Hay Festival.

In 2004, Hay Festival launched StoryQuest, a curated series of live literature events that was a large-scale event in its geographic reach. The national storytelling tour for ten to twelve-year-olds around Britain worked with different host venues in Cardiff, Oxford, Norwich, Belfast, Glasgow, Scarborough, and London. StoryQuest included creative storytelling techniques, including a ‘baton story’ where a new story was written especially for the tour by the authors performing on stage.³⁴ The events were illustrated to be quest-like, depicting images of young knights with Arthurian connotations, giving agency to the children. The project similarly was tasked with the quest of improving the ‘low levels of

³⁴ Phyllida Shaw, ‘The Evaluation of StoryQuest – A Proposed Approach,’ July 2, 2004, Add MS 89482/1/296.

literacy’ among children, seen as ‘essential to the future economic wellbeing of the UK’.³⁵ Targeting state schools, each event involved between 500 and 1,800 children in a day of readings and performances by writers, storytellers and musicians, and participatory sessions with writers and storytellers. The tour was promoted as ‘creating excitement and enthusiasm around reading and writing,’ and in commissioning new creative fiction for the events, StoryQuest not only brought new stories to the children, but also created unique content to expand the possibilities of storytelling and literature.³⁶ Ticket sales for StoryQuest were ‘fantastic’ with every venue sold out and schools on the waiting list.³⁷ However, there is little evidence in the archive that the project continued the following year. StoryQuest was an initiative of the Prince of Wales Arts and Kids Foundation and was sponsored by Cartoon Network. By collaborating with these charities and a popular children’s media partner, Hay Festival attempted to achieve its educational, creative, social, and economic goals.

StoryQuest and GlamLit are important in that though they only ran for a short time, they inspired Hay Festival’s venture into education and regional outreach work, an area which since then the festival has prioritised.³⁸ In 2024, Hay Festival has numerous education projects that brings literature to students for free. What began as StoryQuest and GlamLit has since transformed into the Hay Festival Scribblers Tour, an ‘outreach tour across universities’ in Wales that has separate Welsh and English language versions, and is funded by the Welsh government that brings five authors to pupils aged eleven to fifteen.³⁹ The children’s programming at the annual festival would go on to be called ‘Hay Fever’ in the mid-2000s and today, the festival also dedicates the first two days of the May festival with its Programme for Schools, inviting local school children from Wales and the West Midlands to

³⁵ Shaw, ‘The Evaluation of StoryQuest – A Proposed Approach’.

³⁶ StoryQuest 2004 programme, Add MS 89482/1/295.

³⁷ Clare Purcell to Liz (surname not included), n.d., Add MS 89482/1/296.

³⁸ StoryQuest only ran in 2004, and GlamLit for a relatively longer five years from 2002-2006.

³⁹ Aine Venables, interview by Rebecca Roach, Zoom, October 8, 2022; ‘Hay Festival Scribblers Tour 2022,’ Hay Festival, accessed July 18, 2022, <https://www.hayfestival.com/the-scribblers-tour>.

free specially curated events. Venables underlines the unique aspect of Hay Festival's Scribblers and wider education programmes in that they are free, (unlike Cheltenham Literature Festival's education work) and therefore, in her words, focus on outreach work to reach children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds who 'don't have access to culture'.⁴⁰

In this period, Hay Festival worked collaboratively with other arts organisations and charities with the common goal of the promotion of literature and storytelling, especially for educational purposes. Throughout the past three decades, the festival has expanded further in the local community including curating Brecon Theatre Children's Literature Day, a one-day live literature event for children in Powys in 2003, collaborating with the organisers of Powys LitFest in 2005, another event for schoolchildren akin to GlamLit with Southampton University, launching Merthyr Rock in 2011, a two-day indie and rock event, and taking over the ailing Brecon Jazz Festival in 2009. Primarily, Hay Festival's growth and diversification into other types of festivals such as music and live literature events enabled it to extend its remit to be economically secure. Solidifying its place in the local cultural economy, Hay Festival took its work and focus on storytelling to the rest of the country, and soon began to expand globally.

International festivals

The prolific Colombian writer Gabriel García Márquez had repeatedly refused invitations to appear at Hay Festival Wales, citing his dislike of speaking English and the bad Welsh weather.⁴¹ In response, Peter Florence brought Hay Festival to García Márquez. In 2005, Florence and the newly appointed international director of Hay Festival, Cristina Fuentes La Roche, set up Hay Festival Cartagena de Indias, a literary festival in the city that García

⁴⁰ Aine Venables, interview by Rebecca Roach, Zoom, October 8, 2022.

⁴¹ Cristina Fuentes La Roche, interview by Ellen Addis, Hay Festival, Hay-on-Wye, June 6, 2022.

Márquez had once told an interviewer ‘I completed my education as a writer’.⁴² For García Márquez, Cartagena was his literary inspiration and the place where his family lived, and he would return frequently. Though Fuentes La Roche calls this origin story ‘half myth, half true,’ she does say that García Márquez ‘couldn’t come, so we went to him’.⁴³ Initially inspired by the South American writer, Hay Festival Cartagena then built the foundations of its festival around the literary culture of the host locale; an approach that Hay Festival’s other international festivals would come to mirror.

In a fax sent in early spring 2005, more details about the beginning of Hay Festival Cartagena are divulged, with the Colombian writer Carlos Fuentes cast as instrumental to its happening. Replying to Florence’s invitation to create the new international festival, Fuentes commended the choice of location, and described Cartagena as ‘the most beautiful city in the Caribbean Sea. I can’t conceive of a more suitable setting for the celebration of a great literary festival. I will gladly participate in it’.⁴⁴ The following year, in 2006, Fuentes’ description of Cartagena as ‘the most beautiful city in the Caribbean Sea’ was used by Florence in the first Hay Festival Cartagena report, relaying the international festival’s success and writing that the ‘[f]iesta was born out of a conversation’ with Fuentes, ‘a regular guest at our Festival in Wales’.⁴⁵ Hay Festival Cartagena marked a substantial transition for Hay Festival into the international literary festival market, providing a platform for international writers to speak in their own countries, in their own language, to their own readers. By creating festivals around Spanish-speaking writers who are a part of the international canon and with large acclaim such as Fuentes and García Márquez, Hay Festival place its own name and brand alongside the celebrity of the authors and casts itself as a

⁴² Anand Giridharadas, ‘Love and Cartagena,’ *New York Times*, April 29, 2010, <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/02/travel/02cartagena.html>.

⁴³ Cristina Fuentes La Roche, interview by Ellen Addis, Hay Festival, Hay-on-Wye, June 6, 2022.

⁴⁴ Carlos Fuentes to Cristina Fuentes La Roche, March 2, 2005, Add MS 89482/1/242. Note that this is a rough translation from the original Spanish.

⁴⁵ Hay Festival Cartagena 2006 report, Add MS 89482/1/238.

festival with international standing. Hay Festival Cartagena was joined by Hay Festival Segovia in 2006, and both have run every year since. The first year of Hay Festival Cartagena was a success. 11,200 people attended, with 7,000 tickets sold, and forty writers of twelve different nationalities spoke at twenty events.⁴⁶ By 2008, these figures had risen to 30,000 visitors and 100 writers of nineteen different nationalities appearing, and with a further 13% rise in audience in 2009, replicating the simultaneous increasing popularity of Hay Festival Wales.⁴⁷

Since the mid-2000s, the international Hay Festivals embed a community of festivals across the world. They use community venues and invite local and internationally acclaimed authors to mix in these settings. Hay Festival Cartagena, however, was not the first international Hay Festival. The previous year, in 2004, Hay planted its international roots with a festival in Deià, a coastal village in Mallorca, inspired by the village's status as a 'genuine nest' for writers 'and other artists from all over the world,' including the British poet Robert Graves who wrote much of his work there.⁴⁸ The festival was influenced so much by Graves that his son Tomas Graves helped organise it, aiming to 'appeal to local residents as well as people from England who may fly over for the weekend'.⁴⁹ The proposal for the Deià festival, officially titled 'Tertulia@Deià' – 'tertulia' meaning 'an after-dinner gathering where people sit around a table and talk / discuss' – extended the metaphor of Hay Festival's kitchen and dinner table, with the international festival representing the relaxed and sociable post-dinner conversations.⁵⁰ Deià was set up as a 'small "sister" festival' to Hay Festival Wales with the aim of 'working very much with the local community' and featuring both Catalan

⁴⁶ Hay Festival Cartagena 2006 report, Add MS 89482/1/238.

⁴⁷ Hay Festival Cartagena 2008 report, Add MS 89482/1/238; Hay Festival Cartagena 2009 report, Add MS 89482/1/238.

⁴⁸ Juanjo Arzubialde to Clare Purcell, August 12, 2004, Add MS 89482/1/248.

⁴⁹ Clare Purcell and Lyndy Cooke proposal letter for Tertulia@Deià, Add MS 89482/1/248.

⁵⁰ Clare Purcell, 'Notes from Deià Trip 1-4 September 04,' Add MS 89482/1/248; Clare Purcell and Lyndy Cooke proposal letter for Tertulia@Deià, Add MS 89482/1/248.

and English language authors and a literary prize as ‘something else for the media to catch hold of’.⁵¹ For international Hay Festivals, the location of the festival site and surrounding area is arguably the most important feature. Local writers are integral to the imagining and curation of international festivals and their programmes. By choosing locations which have a particular cultural and literary history resonant to international audiences, the landscape influences the festivals, and community is emphasised. *Tertulia@Deià* only ran for two years, but it became a launching pad for the other international festivals, with its focus on creative communities forming the basis for Hay Festival’s international project.

Salisbury calls the period of international expansion in the 2000s ‘a golden era’ for Hay Festival, with the increasing ambition and size realising Norman Florence’s aim to introduce ‘the best and strongest possible “foreign” influences to our artists and audiences alike’.⁵² Much like the domestic year-round expansion, the new international festivals established from 2004 explicate Hay Festival’s desire for not only international standing but economic support for its exponential growth in the 1990s. Giorgi describes international festivals as ‘sibling’ or ‘satellite’ events, ‘driven by internationalization, but also, in part, by economic pressure’ as once ‘festivals grow into organizations with round-the-year employment their costs also sky-rocket, and these can hardly ever be covered by the organization of a single or short event’.⁵³ As with the Winter Weekend and storytelling tours, the international expansion was created to cover and support the mounting costs of running the festival. This new international circuit of festivals, however, Driscoll and Squires argue, ‘demands an extension of Bourdieu’s model to account for an uneven global distribution of prestige and access to resources, which recalls Pascale Casanova’s account of the “world

⁵¹ Clare Purcell, ‘Notes from Deià Trip 1-4 September 04,’ Add MS 89482/1/248; Clare Purcell and Lyndy Cooke proposal letter for *Tertulia@Deià*, Add MS 89482/1/248.

⁵² Heather Salisbury, interview by Rebecca Roach, Zoom, September 20, 2021; Norman Florence, Hay Festival programme, 1988, Add MS 89482/4/32, 1.

⁵³ Giorgi, ‘Between Tradition, Vision and Imagination,’ 42.

republic of letters” and the emergence and development of an autonomous international literary field in opposition to the instrumentalisation of literature for the construction of national identities.⁵⁴ This field is structured by unequal power relations between cultures according to their literary capital that can be measured through the number of works that entered the world literary canon. Hay Festival, however, disrupts this model. By choosing places outside of the international centres of global publishing to host its sister festivals, Hay Festival attempt to broaden the international power relations.⁵⁵

Unlike other literary festivals based in urban centres whose purported ‘internationalism’ is as a consequence of their location in large multicultural and metropolitan cities that attract international audiences, and all include ‘international’ in their titles (Toronto International Festival of Authors, Berlin International Literature Festival, Edinburgh International Book Festival), Hay Festival is unique in that its internationalism derives from its offshoot international projects and festivals. The festival’s international events are, in fact, extremely localised. Though they are able to ‘bring big speakers from all over the world’ due to Hay Festival’s preceding reputation, Fuentes La Roche underlines that ‘[i]n every place we create a local entity with a local team’ and ‘deliver real legacy in the city we operate’ as ‘part of the local community, and the festival, as well, serves as catalyst for many projects’ alongside it.⁵⁶ Therefore, Hay Festival’s international offshoots attempt to replicate in the 2000s the localised and peripheral identity that the original Welsh festival established, something I will explore further in the next chapter on place. Fuentes La Roche explicitly recalls that the decisions about where to host the international festivals ‘was on the place,’ always with the aim ‘of decentralising culture, getting out of the big cities’ and into smaller cities with their ‘own cultural wealth’.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Driscoll and Squires, ‘Serious Fun: Gaming the Book Festival,’ 3.

⁵⁵ Cristina Fuentes La Roche, interview by Ellen Addis, Hay Festival, Hay-on-Wye, June 6, 2022.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

One member of festival staff disputes the success of the sister festivals, and argues that the '[Hay Festival] model doesn't work well internationally' as 'Hay is a place, right, it's not just a festival, it's a place, and so it can't be exactly the same in another country ... I'd be much happier to see the local team create their own sense of identity and have the freedom to express that'.⁵⁸ However, these international festivals are unique from Hay Festival Wales and, I argue, draw on the identity of each host locale in their creation and programming. Kerr uses the example of the Storymoja Festival in Nairobi that 'started off trying to replicate what Hay looked like' as 'the publishers really wanted to import this sort of look and feel of the Hay Festival, and to them that meant tents in a field'.⁵⁹ This proved difficult, with the hot temperatures making the tented village that characterised the Welsh festival impossible to import to Nairobi. Instead, Storymoja utilised the pre-existing venues and resources available in the city.⁶⁰ Subsequently, the international festivals 'emulate this idea that you are on a site, but the site becomes the city centre or suburbia' and the festivals use 'community-based rooms with the idea of eventually creating the city' through venues such as theatres or university lecture rooms.⁶¹ Hay Festival's international festivals are therefore not akin to a franchising of the original Hay Festival Wales model. Each festival, as Fuentes La Roche and Kerr explain, is unique for the location that it is situated in, showcasing the importance of place to literary festivals.

By the end of the 2000s, Hay Festival had hosted international festivals in Spain, Colombia, the Maldives, Mexico, Peru, India and one-day forums in the USA and Chile. The festivals collaborated with local communities, such as Storymoja which ran from 2009 to 2014 in collaboration with the Kenyan publishers, and Hay Festival Kells in 2013 which went on to become the independently run Hinterland Festival. Hay Festival also produced a series

⁵⁸ Penny Compton, interview by Ellen Addis, Zoom, October 6, 2021.

⁵⁹ Maggie Kerr, interview by Ellen Addis, Zoom, September 27, 2021.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Cristina Fuentes La Roche, interview by Ellen Addis, Hay Festival, Hay-on-Wye, June 6, 2022.

of gatherings of thirty-nine emerging writers under the ages of forty to celebrate the UNESCO Creative Cities Network (CCN), UNESCO's flagship city programme launched in 2004 to promote transnational collaboration between cities specialising in the fields of literature, film, crafts and folk arts, design, gastronomy, and media arts in order to promote wider sustainable development.⁶² Hay Festival's projects celebrating UNESCO CCN included Bogotá³⁹ (2007, 2017), Beirut³⁹ (2010), Africa³⁹ (Port Harcourt 2014), Mexico²⁰ (2015), Aarhus³⁹ (2017).⁶³ The Hay Festival '39 Project' collaborated with the designated UNESCO Cities of Literature scheme, a part of the greater CCN, to produce 'four days of literature, debate and the love of books together, with an anthology published of writing by the authors'.⁶⁴ The thirty-nine writers were chosen by a panel of local writers from the area after being nominated by publishers, authors, and readers, and the project glimpsed at what was happening in each area, whether that was Latin American, Scandinavia, or Africa, promoting the work of young writers. Similar to the aims of the Cities of Literature which makes 'a claim to year-round literary activity, a strong publishing and book retailing infrastructure, and dynamic and diverse audience involvement in literary life,' the 39 Project celebrated the cultural producers within the wider area and identified the writers in the hope 'define the trends that will mark the future development of literature in a certain language or region'.⁶⁵ Writers in the Africa³⁹ celebrations in 2014 included Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, who at the time was already a literary superstar with the success of her novel *Americanah* (2013), and Lola Shoyenin, whose novel *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* (2010) was longlisted for the 2011 Orange Prize and founded the popular Aké Arts and Book Festival in

⁶² 'About Us – Creativity and Cities,' UNESCO, accessed May 29, 2024, <https://www.unesco.org/en/creative-cities/creativity-and-cities?hub=80094>.

⁶³ 'What Are the Hay Festival "39" Projects?' Hay Festival, accessed July 20, 2022, <https://www.hayfestival.com/festival-projects>.

⁶⁴ 'What Are the Hay Festival "39" Projects?' Hay Festival.

⁶⁵ Murray, *The Digital Literary Sphere*, 90. 'Africa³⁹,' Hay Festival, accessed July 22, 2022, <https://www.hayfestival.com/africa39>.

2013. These two writers were already successful and have since become household names, with Africa³⁹ identifying them as influential writers on the continent.

The UNESCO CCN promotes local culture for an international audience, and, according to Weber, ‘is a salient example of the perceived currency of this relationship between popular culture, cultural production, local markets, and globalisation’.⁶⁶ Hay Festival’s creation of international festivals within the UNESCO CCN solidifies its contemporary status as a platform, contributing to the economic development of peripheral places across the globe with its festivals. However, the network has been criticised as a group of cosmopolitan sites concentrating literary activity and constituting a ‘supranational literary network of their own,’ echoing ‘an existing circuit of prominent international Anglophone literary festivals,’ such as Hay Festival.⁶⁷ The efflorescence of Hay Festival in the 2000s and 2010s enabled them to make compelling arguments to governments and sponsors about its place within contemporary literary culture and the necessity of further funding and support for its survival, as shown in its written evidence for the ‘Future of Music Festivals’ select committee. Hay Festival proved throughout its history that it expanded audiences and extended the social life of literature with successful events, permitting them, Murray argues, to ‘lend their weight to local government pitches for UNESCO recognition of the host city’.⁶⁸ Hay Festival’s work with the UNESCO CCN, creating offshoot one-off international festivals prioritises urban centres and yokes together cultural, social, and economic goals.

Recently, Hay Festival has reduced its international festival output. While describing the 2010s as a ‘golden era,’ Salisbury also explains how the international festivals ‘slowly petered out,’ speculating that they were ‘probably unsustainably and financially [not] keeping us afloat’.⁶⁹ Despite this, in 2024, Hay Festival held ten festivals across the world, including

⁶⁶ Weber, *Literary Festivals and Contemporary Book Culture*, 25-26.

⁶⁷ Murray, *The Digital Literary Sphere*, 90, 15.

⁶⁸ Murray, *The Digital Literary Sphere*, 15.

⁶⁹ Heather Salisbury, interview by Rebecca Roach, Zoom, September 20, 2021.

global partnerships with Book Bunk, a charity that restores public libraries in Nairobi, to create NBO Litfest, and Lviv BookForum to programme the Ukrainian festival. Hay Festival's international expansion has opened new spaces for the exchange of ideas and also supported writers and the literary institutions in these countries. However, it has faced criticism. Ian Jenkins contends that the international expansions have caused 'some dislocation and distancing from the community of Hay and although the financial benefits are often eulogized and seem genuine, the social/ cultural changes are seen as secondary'.⁷⁰ Contradicting Salisbury's claim that the international festivals were economically unviable, Jenkins argues that these global sister events detract from the main Hay Festival Wales. I dispute this. Born out of economic necessity and social and literary interest in expanding the festival to include global literature, the international festivals reflect the wider globalisation of the literary world. Hay Festival's 'golden era' of international expansion is culturally significant, and its origins coincided with the rise of New Labour's 'Creative Britain,' which I will now turn to.

The influence of New Labour arts funding

In March 2007, Tony Blair stood in front of cultural leaders in the UK in the Turbine Hall of the Tate Modern and suggested that the ten years since he had come into office would be looked back on 'as a "golden age" for the arts'.⁷¹ In the period between 1997 and the time Blair's successor Gordon Brown left office in 2010, UK government spending on the arts had nearly doubled, with schemes including free national gallery and museum entry and increased

⁷⁰ Jenkins, 'The Hay Festival: A Longitudinal Study on its Attributes and the Sustainable Impacts on a Small Welsh Town,' 130.

⁷¹ Tony Blair, 'Blair's Speech on the Arts in Full,' *Guardian* (London), March 6, 2007, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2007/mar/06/politicsandthearts.uk1>.

National Lottery money to fund the arts.⁷² Hay Festival was directly affected by this increase in UK arts funding.

In *Cultural Capital: The Rise and Fall of Creative Britain* (2014), Robert Hewison questions whether Blair was correct to refer to his administration as the ‘golden age’ of the arts. He concludes that ‘despite all the rhetoric about a new dawn of national renewal,’ New Labour ‘continued the neoliberal programme established by the Conservatives’ that came before them.⁷³ Hewison explains how after the early 1990s recession, there was much hope and excitement about how the arts and cultural industries could be used for regeneration and growth. There was also relief after a protracted period of local authority decline under national Conservative rule, which coincided with New Labour’s election victory in 1997. The Department of National Heritage was swiftly renamed the Department for Culture, Media, and Sport, with Chris Smith serving as its Minister, a politician with a close connection with the arts scene in Britain and a PhD in English Literature from the University of Cambridge, an indication of how New Labour sought to distance itself from the previous Conservative government.⁷⁴ However, this culture-led regeneration hid a renewed determination to make culture profitable. New Labour’s ‘Creative Britain’ repackaged arts and heritage into the ‘cultural and creativity industries’ where ‘creativity’ was a buzzword with a masked use as a tool to aid the economy.⁷⁵ Hewison argues that ‘creativity’ escaped the associations of ‘culture,’ though the economic subtext was that culture was a commodity available to consumers.⁷⁶ Increasing state investment in the arts and culture through the National Lottery and Arts Councils, as well as increased funding from Europe (in the form of European Union

⁷² Robert Hewison, *Cultural Capital: The Rise and Fall of Creative Britain* (London: Verso, 2014), 10-11.

⁷³ Hewison, *Cultural Capital*, 12.

⁷⁴ Gillian Allard, ‘Imagined Diversity: Cultural Policy in Wales, 1997-2001,’ *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 13, no.1 (2007): 71-72, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10286630701201871>.

⁷⁵ Hewison, *Cultural Capital*, 47.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 47.

Structural Funds), supported a reimagining of what a ‘creative’ UK would look like.⁷⁷ For Hay Festival, the government’s increased interest in culture as profitable resulted in shaping its funding applications to fulfil governmental targets, but ultimately pushed it towards more commercial funding avenues.

The period of New Labour’s first term of ‘Creative Britain’ also saw the transition of power from the Welsh Office to a newly elected National Assembly for Wales with devolved powers.⁷⁸ In early 2001, the National Assembly published *A Culture in Common*, its first statement of cultural policy in Wales. *A Culture in Common* reported that culture and the arts would play a role in developing communities, make an economic contribution, and would be integral to building a national identity for Wales inside and outside of the border.⁷⁹ The National Assembly complemented British cultural policy, signalling the importance of cultural policy in its New Labour mission. In response to this, ACW wrote a report, called *Creative Nation* arguing that culture ‘has the potential to perform a number of vital economic roles’ by generating employment and innovation, promoting social cohesion, and reinforcing Wales’s international profile.⁸⁰ One way in which ACW proposed that a Welsh cultural identity was to be built was through the Welsh language, seen as a tool for economic regeneration. Showing the balance needed between the economic value of arts in Wales, ACW rooted Welsh cultural identity in economics. Gillian Allard argues that both the National Assembly and ACW moved away from the lived experience of the ‘diverse citizenry of contemporary Wales’ in the 2000s and did not illustrate a set of cultural values because of its appearance in a global cultural economy.⁸¹

⁷⁷ Mark Banks and Justin O’Connor, ‘Inside the Whale (and How to Get Out of There): Moving on from Two Decades of Creative Industries Research,’ *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 20, no. 6 (2017): 639, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367549417733002>.

⁷⁸ Welsh Parliament was created in May 1999. As of May 2020, the National Assembly for Wales is known as ‘The Senedd’.

⁷⁹ Allard, ‘Imagined Diversity,’ 71.

⁸⁰ Arts Council of Wales, *Creative Nation: The European Funding Framework of the Welsh Cultural Sector*, 2001, quoted in Allard, ‘Imagined Diversity,’ 78.

⁸¹ Allard, ‘Imagined Diversity,’ 81.

This change in Welsh funding is vital to understanding the funding landscape for Hay Festival in the 2000s. By 2000, Hay Festival's budget was reaching £500,000, with its turnover £1,000,000 by 2005.⁸² In applications for ACW funding, the festival compared itself to other festivals in Wales and wider Britain in a bid to gain more funding:

Whilst we acknowledge that we cannot aspire to the public funding for the Urdd, The National Eisteddfod or any music Festivals of comparable scale, we are applying for significantly enhanced funding to try and close the gap on our colleagues in the Literature field at Cheltenham, Edinburgh and London, all of whom receive more than double our funding from Arts Councils and Local Authorities. We cannot stay ahead of them without proper funding.⁸³

In naming the Eisteddfod, Hay Festival once again places itself amongst festivals of national importance, though it humbly notes here that the festivals are not the same size. However, in naming its 'colleagues' of British literary festivals, Hay Festival directly drew comparison and marked the difference between the various Arts Councils and local funders, pointing towards the discrepancies and differences in size, inferring competition. Hay Festival staked its claim and warrant for more funding due to 'our international profile for Wales and Welsh literature, our pioneering and committed Education work, and the historic poverty of the Festival in comparison to any comparable organisations'.⁸⁴ By underlining its Welsh identity and international success, Hay Festival targeted ACW's own cultural policy goals mentioned in the *Creative Nation* report.

In 2001, Hay Festival successfully received £21,703 from ACW, and by 2005, this had risen to £38,803, replicating the increase in funding as cultural governmental funding also rose.⁸⁵ However, in its 2003 agreement with ACW, Hay Festival said that it 'cannot

⁸² Hay Festival annual review and application for Arts Council of Wales's Access Development Division, 5, 2001, Add MS 89482/2/23. Hay Festival unaudited accounts, 2006, Add MS 89482/3/34.

⁸³ Peter Florence to Tony Bianchi and Marlene Powell, December 15, 2000, Add MS 89482/2/22.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Budget outline in Hay Festival application for ACW funding, 2000, Add MS 89482/2/22; Hay Festival annual revenue funding agreement with ACW, 2005, Add MS 89482/2/31.

continue to push boundaries without a more representative contribution from the ACW'.⁸⁶ That year, Hay Festival had an annual cash turnover of approximately £750,000 which reached over £1,000,000 when sponsorship-in-kind was included.⁸⁷ ACW provided £36,723, less than 5% of the festival's turnover, and, as the festival noted, this was 'less than half that received by our closest rivals in Edinburgh from the Scottish Arts Council'.⁸⁸ The festival justified an application for 10% of total turnover due to its status in 'the Welsh arts economy,' its internationalism, its 'commitment to supporting and nurturing emerging young writers, particularly from Wales,' and the 'expertise and facilities the Hay Festival provides within Wales to an international audience and performer base'.⁸⁹ Hay Festival's awareness of ACW values and its use of them to gain funding proved to be somewhat successful, though it did not reach its intended 10% of annual turnover. It is important to note that in 2005, Hay Festival received the lowest funding of any of the four literature organisations that ACW supported, with other organisations that focused specifically on Welsh language and literature receiving larger shares.⁹⁰ Therefore, it is clear that Hay Festival's small share of ACW's literature budget, amounting to £796,425 for 2004-2005, was largely impacted by its lack of Cymraeg programming. Though there was an increase in arts funding and new optimism with the New Labour cultural policy and focus on creative industries, Hay Festival did not largely benefit due to its scarce Cymraeg programming as explored in the previous chapter. Unlike today, in the 2000s, the Hay Festival Wales programme was not dual-language, and its media

⁸⁶ Hay Festival to the Arts Council of Wales, 2003, Add MS 89482/2/29.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ 'Arts Council of Wales Annual Report 2004-2005,' Arts Council of Wales, accessed July 22, 2022, <https://issuu.com/artscouncilofwales/docs/annual-report-2004-2005>, 56. The other ACW funded organisations for 2004-2005 included: Mercator at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David, a research centre in the fields of minority (or minoritised) languages which received £56,380; The Taliesin Trust (Tŷ Newydd), the National Writing Centre for Wales, a charitable trust set up to provide a residential writers' centre for Wales to encourage and promote writing in English and Welsh, and the establishment of the Tŷ Newydd Writing Centre which received £109,003; and The Welsh Academy (Yr Academi Gymreig), the Welsh national literature promotion agency and society of writers, existing to promote Welsh-language and English-language literature in Wales, which received £592,239.

and commercial sponsorships were mainly English-based, with only 15% of sponsors in 2009 based in Wales or concerned with specifically Welsh subjects.⁹¹

For Hay Festival and many other arts organisations in the 2000s, the possibility of increased arts funding from the newly formed New Labour government led to a sense of optimism. The progressivism of the early twenty-first-century politics – a response to the emergence of the New Right in the preceding years – emphasised social justice as well as equal opportunities and used neoliberal strategies like market economics to deliver economic efficiency and social justice. There has since been debates on the use of ‘neoliberal’ to describe the Labour government. However, New Labour’s techniques of centralisation, privatisation, corporatisation and de-regulation of the state-owned sector, and the extension of market forces into public and social services can be described as neoliberal. New Labour did create a national minimum wage and a tax credits system, as well as improving NHS waiting times. The literature on New Labour and neoliberalism is extensive.⁹² For Hay Festival, the New Labour government offered the opportunity to gain further funding with the aim to grow the festival into one that was nationally and internationally-renowned. As a festival on the border between England and Wales with a dearth of Cymraeg programming, its governmental arts support from ACW was limited. As a result, Hay Festival turned to international commercial sponsors to supplement its reduced government funding.

⁹¹ Hay Festival, ‘The Pink Book,’ 2009, Add MS 89482/4/37.

⁹² Key surveys are: Bob Jessop, ‘From Thatcherism to New Labour: Neo-Liberalism, Workfarism, and Labour Market Regulation,’ in *The Political Economy of European Employment: European Integration and the Transnationalization of the (Un)Employment Question*, ed. Henk Overbeek (London: Routledge, 2003); Matt Beech, ‘Neoliberalism, New Labour, and the Welfare State,’ in *Liberalism and the Welfare State: Economists and Arguments for the Welfare State*, eds. Roger E. Backhouse, Bradley W. Bateman, and Tamotsu Nishizawa (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Deborah Philips and Garry Whannel, *The Trojan Horse: The Growth of Commercial Sponsorship* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 67–96; Christopher Byrne, *Neoliberalisms in British Politics* (London: Routledge, 2018).

Sponsorships and commercial controversies: Newspapers and Nestlé

To fund its domestic and international expansion, Hay Festival had to find creative new funding streams. As in the 1990s, the issue of the festival's borderland geography arose, as did the difficulty of UK government arts funding, resulting in Hay Festival turning to more media and corporate sponsors to support its ambitions. In 2002, the *Guardian* replaced the *Sunday Times* as Hay Festival's title sponsor and stayed until 2011 when the *Telegraph* took over as its final title sponsor. The *Guardian* sponsorship amounted to around £200,000 for the first three years, moving the festival into more leftist media, aligning with the festival's left-leaning programme and bringing the 'greater media attention, coverage and the increased readership' of the daily newspaper as opposed to the weekly *Sunday Times*.⁹³ Hay Festival's Penny Compton suggests that the title sponsor influences the festival audience, remarking that the shift in 2011 to the *Telegraph* sponsorship brought in a 'different demographic' and she could 'tell straight away the people that were phoning up were totally different'.⁹⁴ Another member of the Hay Festival team, Kerr elaborates that 'the institution [of Hay Festival] is very much aligned with the *Guardian*, and so, when we moved to the *Telegraph*, it felt like a very uncomfortable fit,' but she concedes that 'we reached a new audience, and, in fact, that was quite a useful and helpful thing for the organisation to not necessarily just be an echo chamber talking to itself, but to actually be talking to people that we wouldn't normally be put in front of'.⁹⁵ Kerr calls this an 'audience development opportunity' and reveals that diversified other sponsorship opportunities for the festival as its name not only became associated with the newspaper but became nationally known.⁹⁶ As explained in the previous chapter, the newspaper title sponsors ceased all together in 2016, as, in Kerr's

⁹³ Mike Barker to Mike Horwood, 'Hereford Memo', February 8, 2002, Add MS 89482/3/13; Clare Purcell to John Williams, October 16, 2001, Add MS 89482/1/298.

⁹⁴ Penny Compton, interview by Ellen Addis, Zoom, October 6, 2021.

⁹⁵ Maggie Kerr, interview by Ellen Addis, Zoom, September 27, 2021.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

words, ‘there wasn’t the money available in the way that there had been up until that point’.⁹⁷

Unlike Cheltenham Literature Festival which still has a title sponsor with the *Times* and the *Sunday Times*, Hay Festival’s choice to part with newspaper title sponsors signals its recent ambitions to broaden out the festival to a wide audience, no matter what newspaper the audience members read or their political opinions.

In the new millennia, Hay Festival prioritised broadcasting sponsorships and coverage, ratifying its desire to be an internationally recognised organisation. It gained prominent media sponsors with the BBC, Sky Arts and Channel 4 broadcasting special features and interviews from the festival on television and radio. In the 2000s, with new media sponsorships and coverage, the festival pushed further into the nation’s living rooms. Channel 4 was its broadcast sponsor in 2005 and 2006, and in the advertisement, the broadcaster adopted Hay’s literariness in a comedic poetic form to target its audience:

What is our purpose here?
To share with our fellow man the
fusion of disparate creative forces,
melding then slitting, spit-sparking
in this foundry of human thought.
For this we’d have come, even if
there were no pub. Honest.⁹⁸

From 2007, Sky Arts broadcast ‘Hay-on-Sky,’ a daily round-up of the festival shown each night of the festival, acting as the festival’s exclusive broadcast sponsor, since shared with the BBC and BBC Wales. After 2000, the festival attracted more commercial sponsors in brands and by the end of the 2000s, the festival relied upon sponsorship of the likes of Emirates, Neal’s Yard, and Sony.⁹⁹ Its partnership with Sony in 2009 arose specifically to help promote the company’s new eBook device, the Sony Reader.¹⁰⁰ Literary festivals are productive

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Hay Festival programme, 2005, Add MS 89482/4/33.

⁹⁹ Hay Festival, ‘The Pink Book,’ 2009, Add MS 89482/4/37.

¹⁰⁰ Mark Sweney, ‘Sony UK Sponsors Guardian Hay Festival to Help Push Ebook Device,’ *Guardian* (London), May 12, 2009, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2009/may/12/sony-reader-hay-festival>.

spaces for examining the meeting of commercial and public sector funding. By moving to broadcast media and commercial sponsorships, Hay Festival diversified its funding streams in the 2000s, learning from its mistakes in the 1990s that arose with local governmental funders and the festival's uncertain administrative geography.

Commercial sponsorship is a mutually beneficial venture and Kerr explains that businesses choose to sponsor the festival 'because they've identified Hay as an opportunity for them'.¹⁰¹ One such opportunity came from Nestlé in 2002 when it approached Hay Festival to sponsor a children's venue at the festival named after the Nestlé Smarties Book Prize. However, controversy arose with the sponsorship due to Nestlé's marketing of powdered baby milk in countries in the Global South. Germaine Greer, a long-standing festival favourite, wrote to Peter Florence to boycott the festival and the Nestlé sponsorship, urging that the matter was 'non-negotiable' due to these breast-milk substitutes, 'so no me at Hay this year'.¹⁰² Greer followed up her first letter to say that 'I know too that there is no clean money, but we are all entitled to reject certain kinds of dirt as intolerable to ourselves'.¹⁰³ Greer was joined in her boycott by the author Jim Crace, though nothing in the archive remains of Crace's correspondence with the festival, pointing towards the archive's gaps.¹⁰⁴ This controversy is the first manifestation of what would become a much larger issue for Hay Festival.¹⁰⁵ Greer insists that her departure from the festival had 'no intention of taking on Nestlé single-handed' and notes that she was reluctant to take a stand as 'this is the first time that my being involved in a boycott has been a matter of conflict for me'.¹⁰⁶ It was not only authors, though, that condemned the Nestlé sponsorship. Local town booksellers

¹⁰¹ Maggie Kerr, interview by Ellen Addis, Zoom, September 27, 2021.

¹⁰² Germaine Greer to Peter Florence, May 9, 2002, Add MS 89482/1/65.

¹⁰³ Greer to Florence, May 10, 2002, Add MS 89482/1/65.

¹⁰⁴ 'Writers Boycott Literary Festival,' *BBC News*, May 27, 2002, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/2010324.stm>.

¹⁰⁵ I will later discuss Hay Festival's controversies with Tata Steel in 2014 and Baillie Gifford in 2024.

¹⁰⁶ Greer to Florence, May 10, 2002, Add MS 89482/1/65.

criticised the Nestlé sponsorship, with one complaining, '[i]t's a shame that the Festival is looking to big business to support an arts event that was iconoclastic in its day, in a town that has been fuelled by the second-hand book industry – which no one would have believed possible'.¹⁰⁷ The Nestlé boycott shows a creeping unease between the corporate sponsorships that Hay Festival permits, and the liberal values of its speakers and audience. Florence, however, stood firm on accepting the Nestlé sponsorship, simply stating that '[w]e have a different understanding about what Nestle's position is worldwide'.¹⁰⁸ The following year, the Nestlé sponsorship was quietly dropped, with Florence conceding that he 'decided that they would detract from the content of the festival'.¹⁰⁹

The Nestlé boycott and the ensuing media publicity around the issue raises an essential question: what do international corporate businesses gain from sponsoring a literary festival? For corporate sponsors, giving money to an event like a literary festival or to galleries not only provides exposure but also counts as tax deductible, giving sponsorship an economic motivation. Driscoll explains that '[i]n Bourdieu's model of the literary field, sponsors of culture exchange their economic capital for the symbolic capital of the sponsored' and 'the symbolic capital sought by sponsors may be the goodwill generated from being seen as a supporter of the arts or the prestige of association with culture'.¹¹⁰ As an international corporation with a poor reputation, Nestlé used the Hay Festival sponsorship of the children's literature prize to improve its own cultural capital and prestige in the eyes of Hay Festival's UK audience, though it did misfire. Nestlé's involvement in children's literature and with Hay Festival is indicative of 'artwashing,' a practice similar to sportswashing and

¹⁰⁷ Anne Addyman, quoted in 'Authors Pull out of Literary Festival over Nestlé Sponsorship,' *Hereford Times*, May 30, 2002, <https://www.herefordtimes.com/news/5691611.authors-pull-out-of-literary-festival-over-nestle-sponsorship/>.

¹⁰⁸ 'Authors Pull out of Literary Festival over Nestle Sponsorship,' *Hereford Times*, May 30, 2002, <https://www.herefordtimes.com/news/5691611.authors-pull-out-of-literary-festival-over-nestle-sponsorship/>.

¹⁰⁹ James Morrison, 'The Mystery of the Missing Festival Chief,' *The Independent* (London), May 24, 2003, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/media/the-mystery-of-the-missing-festival-chief-106094.html>.

¹¹⁰ Driscoll, 'Local Places and Cultural Distinction: The Booktown Model,' 407.

greenwashing, describing a process that uses art unwittingly (or not) in the service of private capital.¹¹¹ Stephen Pritchard further defines artwashing as the deliberate use of art as a tool to make a place more ‘amenable’ for private capital and the aesthetics that it currently desires.¹¹² If artwashing is applied to literary festivals, it can be defined as the use of sponsors, including those that are environmentally damaging such as oil companies, or ethically dubious, such as Nestlé in this case, for the company to clean up its own image with an association with the art and output of an organisation such as Hay Festival, where the power of literature to enact change is underscored.

Hay Festival audiences in focus groups recognise the power of festival sponsorship and call a sponsor such as the University of Cambridge ‘more appropriate’ than a sponsor like Nestlé, with one stating that they ‘don’t want to come to a talk on climate change that’s sponsored by a massive conglomerate’.¹¹³ The audience member continues, calling a potential sponsorship by an oil company such as Shell ‘greenwashing,’ and underlines the importance of festival sponsors, asking ‘do [the sponsors] reflect all of those ideas [of the festival] in their practices?’.¹¹⁴ In the years following the Nestlé sponsorship, Hay Festival also accepted a major sponsorship deal with the Indian conglomerate Tata Steel in 2014, lending its name to the festival’s largest stage. The partnership, which saw Tata supply £1

¹¹¹ ‘Sportswashing’ describes the practice of nations, individuals, groups, corporations, or governments using sports to improve their reputation tarnished by wrongdoing – an example of this is Qatar hosting the 2022 World Cup, despite the country’s ‘repression of women and LGBTQ people, and its punishing exploitation of hundreds of thousands of migrant workers’ (David Wearing, ‘A Game of Two Halves: How “Sportswashing” Benefits Qatar and the West,’ *Guardian* (London), November 16, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/nov/16/sportswashing-qatar-west-world-cup-regime>).

‘Greenwashing’ describes ‘misleading the public to believe that a company or other entity is doing more to protect the environment than it is’, and ‘promotes false solutions to the climate crisis that distract from and delay concrete and credible action’ (‘Greenwashing – the Deceptive Tactics behind Environmental Claims,’ *United Nations*, accessed May 29, 2024, <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/science/climate-issues/greenwashing>.)

¹¹² Stephen Pritchard, ‘Artwashing: Social Capital & Anti-Gentrification Activism,’ *Colouring in Culture (blog)*, last updated June 17, 2024, <https://www.colouringinculture.org/blog/uncategorized/artwashingsocialcapitalantigentrification>.

¹¹³ Speaker 3, Focus group 3, interview by Ellen Addis and Jennifer Tegg, May 28, 2023, Hay Festival, Hay-on-Wye.

¹¹⁴ Speaker 3, Focus group 3, interview by Ellen Addis and Jennifer Tegg, May 28, 2023, Hay Festival, Hay-on-Wye.

million into Hay Festival over the years, came to an end in 2019, following Booker Prize-winning novelist Arundhati Roy's boycott of the festival due to Tata's negative grip on the Indian economy and environment.¹¹⁵ The festival's commercial sponsorships indicated for some, the festival was leaning further into its 'London literati' label and creating a distance between the festival and the town itself, while others, such as Peter Florence, justified the commercialisation citing that a broad mix of funding streams were necessary to keep the not-for-profit festival going and that organisers were working to increase philanthropic giving.¹¹⁶

In 2021, reflecting on the Nestlé sponsorship, Hay Festival's sustainability director Andy Fryers notes that the festival 'quite rightly ... got slated for it,' and since then, 'as we become bigger as an organisation and we've been more bold about what we said we believe and do, that's meant that there's more of a spotlight on who you then work with'.¹¹⁷ Fryers underlines how the festival's sustainability goals affect sponsorship and funding, and the impact of artwashing and greenwashing, saying that 'we won't take money from those companies who don't meet with our morals and ethos'.¹¹⁸ However, Fryers does not mention the more recent controversy of the Tata Steel sponsorship, and the contradictions that corporate sponsorship of the arts often invokes shows the difficulty of the issue for an international festival such as Hay.

While literary festivals depend on commercial sponsorships to support their work, the practice of artwashing and greenwashing consequently has the possibility to alienate authors and audiences, seen no more clearly than in the complexity of Baillie Gifford's sponsorship of Hay Festival, with the investment management firm the festival's major corporate sponsor

¹¹⁵ Hasan Saroor, 'London Diary: Tatas out Arundhati Roy in for Britain's Famous Hay Literary Festival,' *National Herald* (New Delhi), April 10, 2019, <https://www.nationalheraldindia.com/india/london-diary-tatas-out-arundhati-roy-in-for-britains-famous-hay-literary-festival>.

¹¹⁶ David Sanderson, 'Arundhati Roy Ends Hay Festival Boycott as Sponsor Quits,' *The Times* (London), March 26, 2019, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/arundhati-roy-ends-hay-festival-boycott-as-sponsor-quits-vcn560xbg>.

¹¹⁷ Andy Fryers, interview by Ellen Addis, Zoom, September 29, 2021.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

since 2016. Many festivals share the same sponsor, leading to the suggestion that as a whole, literary events are becoming more corporate. In 2023, Baillie Gifford also sponsored nine literary festivals including those in Cambridge, Stratford, Cheltenham, Edinburgh and Wigtown. At this time, Greta Thunberg pulled out of her headline Edinburgh Book Festival event ‘It’s Not Too Late To Change The World’ after a piece in the Scottish online investigative journal the *Ferret* reported that Baillie Gifford invests in companies connected with fossil fuels. In a statement, Thunberg said, ‘[g]reenwashing efforts by the fossil fuel industry, including sponsorship of cultural events, allow them to keep the social licence to continue operating’.¹¹⁹ Following Thunberg, writers including Zadie Smith, Ali Smith, and Baillie Gifford prize winner Katherine Rundell signed an open letter calling on the Edinburgh Book Festival to drop any sponsor that invests in fossil fuels, stating that if alternatives are not found by 2024, authors would boycott the festival. Like Edinburgh, Hay Festival relies upon large corporate companies to fund its cultural events, tightening the tattered rope between culture and commerce. At Hay Festival 2024, Hay Festival was boycotted by speakers including Welsh singer Charlotte Church, comedian Nish Kumar, and the Labour MP Dawn Butler, all due to the festival’s sponsorship by Baillie Gifford and the firm’s fossil fuel investment and its links with Israel during the Israel-Gaza war.¹²⁰ Following the boycott, Hay Festival ended its sponsorships agreement with Baillie Gifford. In a statement, Julie Finch wrote that the festival’s ‘first priority is to our audience and our artists,’ remarking that

¹¹⁹ ‘Greta Thunberg Pulls out of Edinburgh Book Festival Over “Greenwashing”,’ *BBC News*, August 4, 2023, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-66407059>.

¹²⁰ Lucy Knight, ‘Authors Threaten Boycott of Edinburgh Book Festival over Sponsors’ Fossil Fuel Links,’ *Guardian* (London), August 11, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2023/aug/11/authors-boycott-edinburgh-book-festival-sponsors-fossil-fuel-links>. Baillie Gifford refute the claim that it is a significant fossil fuel investor, citing that 2% of its clients’ money invested in companies with some business related to fossil fuels compared to a market average of 11%, and its investment in companies finding alternatives to fossil-fuel energy, such as the Swedish battery manufacturer Northvolt, and Tesla (‘Greta Thunberg Pulls out of Edinburgh Book Festival Over ‘Greenwashing,’ *BBC News*; Charlotte Higgins, ‘Of Course Greta Thunberg Is Right to Call out Greenwashing, but the Reality Can Be Messy,’ *Guardian* (London), August 11, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/aug/11/greta-thunberg-greenwashing-edinburgh-book-festival-arts>.)

the festival will review its sponsorships before next year's events and meet with Fossil Free Books (FFB), the group leading the campaign against Baillie Gifford.¹²¹ A week later, Edinburgh Book Festival ended its twenty-year agreement with the investment company, before Baillie Gifford cancelled its remaining sponsorship deals with all UK literary festivals.

The fallout of the dropping the Baillie Gifford sponsorship has been complicated. In a joint statement from all nine of the literary festivals previously sponsored by Baillie Gifford, the necessity of corporate sponsorship to festivals is highlighted: 'as charities and non-profit organisations, all our festivals operate mixed-funding models that rely on public funding, corporate sponsorship and individual giving. Without this, festivals cannot continue to thrive and engage new audiences'.¹²² Literary festivals are now unable to support fewer commercial ventures, and some smaller festivals face the risk of closing all together. Writing about the controversy, the *Guardian*'s financial editor Nils Pratley noted that 'in a ranking of climate villains in the fund management industry, Baillie Gifford would surely come a long way down most people's list'.¹²³ Just 2% of the assets that Baillie Gifford manages are invested companies involved in fossil fuels, compared to an industry average of 11%, and it invests much more in greener energy.¹²⁴ On top of this, the FFB campaign have said that they 'wouldn't call' the ending of the Baillie Gifford sponsorships 'a victory,' as no money has been divested from fossil fuels, and literary festivals have lost large sums of their budgets for

¹²¹ Julie Finch, 'An Update on Our Funding,' *Hay Festival (blog)*, accessed May 30, 2024, <https://www.hayfestival.com/news/blog.aspx?post=1693>.

¹²² The literary festivals that released the joint statement are: Borders Book Festival; Cambridge Literary Festival; Cheltenham Festivals; Edinburgh International Book Festival; Hay Festival Global; Henley Literary Festival; Stratford Literary Festival; Wigtown Book Festival; Wimbledon Book Festival. Hay Festival, 'Book Festivals Improve Our World,' accessed July 31, 2024, <https://www.hayfestival.com/news/blog.aspx?post=1699>.

¹²³ Nils Pratley, 'Book Festival Activists Are Making Absurd Demands over Baillie Gifford,' *Guardian* (London), June 4, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/business/nils-pratley-on-finance/article/2024/jun/04/book-festival-activists-baillie-gifford-divestment-fossil-fuels>.

¹²⁴ Lucy Knight, "'I Wouldn't Call It a Victory': Fossil Free Books Organisers on Baillie Gifford's Exit from Literary Festival Funding," *Guardian* (London), June 11, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/article/2024/jun/11/fossil-free-books-team-on-baillie-gifford-and-the-future-of-arts-funding>.

events.¹²⁵ Furthermore, Hay Festival's vast environmental programming and projects – including Planet Assembly events, its partnership with the Woodland Trust to plant thirty acres of woodland to mark the Festival's thirtieth anniversary, and its renewable energy and conscious waste schemes during the festivals – show a commitment to ecological concerns.¹²⁶ Ultimately, the Baillie Gifford sponsorship has echoes of Greer's point in 2002 that there is 'no clean money,' especially in arts sponsorship, and literary festivals must somehow navigate this minefield, where no businesses can seemingly be ethical or rich enough to support them.¹²⁷

Literary festivals have recently had to become more reliant upon commercial sponsors and private donors to sustain them as the UK Conservative government's austerity cuts since 2010 have resulted in grant-in-aid and lottery funding for the arts in England cut by £178 million.¹²⁸ Starved of public money, which, it must be noted, as Greer says, is not always 'clean' – New Labour's cultural investment money for 'Creative Britain' took place during its invasion of Iraq – UK cultural organisations rely upon money from ethically dubious sources and the belief that its events will outdo the negatives of its funders. Fryers explains the moral complexity involved with commercial sponsorships of Hay Festival, saying 'I think accepting there is a certain amount of hypocrisy as well as pushing for change is fine,' and there is both a 'negative side' and a 'positive side' to the sponsorships.¹²⁹ There is an endless stream of these hypocrisies and contradictions arising from the culture-commerce debate about cultural organisation sponsorship, another being that the writer who unravelled how the Sackler

¹²⁵ Knight, "“I Wouldn't Call It a Victory”: Fossil Free Books Organisers on Baillie Gifford's Exit from Literary Festival Funding

¹²⁶ 'Hay Festival Green,' Hay Festival, accessed September 13, 2024, <https://www.hayfestival.com/green>.

¹²⁷ Knight, "“I Wouldn't Call It a Victory”: Fossil Free Books Organisers on Baillie Gifford's Exit from Literary Festival Funding"; Greer to Florence, May 10, 2002, Add MS 89482/1/65.ing a

¹²⁸ Charlotte Higgins, 'Culture Is Not Trivial, It's about Who We Are. That's Why Labour Needs a Plan to Save the Arts,' *Guardian* (London), November 26, 2023,

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/nov/26/culture-labour-plan-save-the-arts-tory-cuts>.

¹²⁹ Andy Fryers, interview by Ellen Addis, Zoom, September 29, 2021.

family used culture to cleanse its reputation, Patrick Radden Keefe, won the UK's foremost nonfiction award – the Baillie Gifford prize.¹³⁰ The controversy from the 2000s onwards concerning commercial sponsorships and Hay Festival reveals the difficult and ever-evolving funding landscape for literary festivals to establish their platforms, and the tightening grip that governmental arts funding has on cultural organisations in the UK.

Authors, Bill Clinton, and searching for literature at Hay Festival

Compared to the 1990s, there is a distinct lack of author personalities in the 2000s archival material and correspondence except for in the scant email printouts. What remains are admin notes mainly pertaining to funding applications, transport, and accommodation. The planning and correspondence occurs mainly between Hay Festival staff and either publishers, literary agents, or publicists within the publishing industry.¹³¹ As the economies of writing and the professionalism of writing changed with the advent of the twenty-first century and new communication technologies, a further distance emerged between the authors and the festival, coinciding with the increasing professionalisation of Hay Festival, and it came under fire for being 'more about event culture than literary culture'.¹³² Continuing the rise of the literary celebrity in the 1990s, in the 2000s, Hay Festival worked to expand and broaden its literary modes.

As Hay Festival catapulted authors into fame, it became a platform for authors to perform and be celebrities, speaking on topics outside of their remit at the festival. Weber argues that in recent years, literary festivals inhabit a 'new media space,' a site for 'mediation across and between different publics, points of view, and topics of conversation,' reaffirming established author's authority, and authorising their commentary on topics 'beyond the scope

¹³⁰ Higgins, 'Of Course Greta Thunberg Is Right to Call out Greenwashing, but the Reality Can Be Messy.'

¹³¹ For the sake of brevity, I call these publishers, literary agents, and publicists 'publishing professionals.'

¹³² Giorgi, 'Between Tradition, Vision and Imagination,' 42.

of their personal experience or specialisation'.¹³³ This claim is strengthened by Hay Festival's 'Thinkers in Residence' project, a group of writers and readers that host events throughout the festival, 'questioning norms, finding new perspectives and challenging us to action'.¹³⁴ Thinkers in Residence at the 2024 festival included former Green Party leader, Caroline Lucas, the presenter Ruby Wax, and author Alex Wheatle. Instead of focusing on the gaps in the archive, I turn to the voice of the participants at Hay Festival in the 2000s and how Hay Festival provided a platform for them.

One author that Hay Festival provided a platform for in the 2000s was the Welsh historian and travel writer Jan Morris. In a 2001 email exchange between Morris and Peter Florence, Morris approached Florence and propositioned herself for a talk at the festival about her upcoming and 'final' book, the publication that 'frankly intended to round off my book-writing career,' *Trieste and The Meaning of Nowhere* (2001).¹³⁵ Morris revealed that *Trieste and The Meaning of Nowhere*, which would be her forty-sixth published book, was a travelogue about the 'lifelong influence' of the city of Trieste and 'the passing of time, the loss of friends, the end of empires, the scrapping of great ships, the effects of age and all that kind of stuff'.¹³⁶ Sidestepping the interlocutor of a publishing professional in the correspondence, Morris approaches Florence with informality and friendship, showing the innumerable personal relationships between festival organisers and authors that make up a literary festival. Morris wrote that 'for the first time in my life I am actually anxious to get publicity for this last book (I've never cared before) and I wonder if you would allow me to give a talk about it [sic] Hay this year, if only as one of your token Welsh-persons? Forgive me my chutzpah in asking!'¹³⁷ Morris's anxiety about promoting her so-called final book

¹³³ Weber, *Literary Festivals and Contemporary Book Culture*, 24.

¹³⁴ Hay Festival, 'Thinkers in Residence,' accessed May 31, 2024, <https://www.hayfestival.com/thinkers-in-residence>.

¹³⁵ Jan Morris to Peter Florence, January 16, 2001, Add MS 89482/1/45.

¹³⁶ Morris to Florence, January 16, 2001, Add MS 89482/1/45.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

nearing the end of her career (a prolific writer, she published nine more following 2001, and one book was published posthumously in 2021), shows the importance of literary festivals to the author as they provide a platform for publicity and media. In approaching Florence, Morris seeks control over the portrayal of her book and utilises her personal relationship with the festival and her Welsh identity to publicise *Trieste and The Meaning of Nowhere*, with Florence's response – 'anything, anytime. of course' – showing the depth of their connection.¹³⁸ Morris's jest at being 'one of your token Welsh-persons' implies a levity, but also the knowledge that Welsh writers at Hay are scarce. As a Welsh writer, Morris's presence at Hay Festival and her literary stardom are wrapped up in her Welshness, something no doubt that prompted her to want to promote her 'final' book at the festival.

In 1988, the festival sought 'to extend the literary reputation of The Town of Books and develop a focus for the wealth of talent here in other arts media,' and fourteen years later in 2001, Florence described Hay Festival in the programme as 'an opportunity to indulge your taste for books, music, comedy, politics, gardening, art, and literature. The ideas and stories flow freely'.¹³⁹ The 2001 festival featured world-renowned authors, politicians, musicians, Margaret Atwood, Bill Clinton, and Paul McCartney, broadly described by Florence as having 'changed minds and enriched lives'.¹⁴⁰ What is really at stake here is the value of literature at Hay Festival. Bill Clinton's appearance in 2001 resulted in an infamous statement describing the festival as 'the Woodstock of the mind,' but it also caused some controversy. Clinton did not have a book to promote, and his payment was \$150,000 plus travel expenses.¹⁴¹ In a *Guardian* article from the time, literary editor Stephen Moss asked: '[b]ut what was [Clinton] doing for Hay, which since its foundation in 1988 has established

¹³⁸ Peter Florence to Jan Morris, January 16, 2001, Add MS 89482/1/45.

¹³⁹ Norman Florence's letter in the Hay Festival 1988 programme, Add MS 89482/4/32. Peter Florence's letter in the Hay Festival 2001 programme, Add MS 89482/4/35.

¹⁴⁰ Peter Florence's letter in the Hay Festival 2001 programme, Add MS 89482/4/35.

¹⁴¹ Hay Festival and Bill Clinton contract for appearance, March 19, 2001, Add MS 89482/1/47.

itself as the leading literary festival in the country?’¹⁴² Moss’s *Guardian* article, forming both the commentary and critique of the festival the year before the newspaper would become its title sponsor, stakes the claim that in 2001, Hay Festival began to depart from literature and instead moved towards attracting headlines with celebrity guests and speakers. Moss interviewed the novelist Robert Erdic who said that inviting Clinton and McCartney in 2001 changed the nature of the festival and that ‘[e]verything else is easily available outside Hay. Good literature isn’t ... if you want to go and see Paul McCartney, don’t pretend that it is a literary occasion. It’s sad because Hay has always set the standard for literary festivals’.¹⁴³ However, Moss defended the festival in part, writing that the move towards celebrities ‘can be reduced to one word – buzz’.¹⁴⁴ The Clinton event, while not strictly literary, gave the festival major media publicity. Moss concludes that the festival was becoming ‘about ideas rather than books; about literature as an expression of life; about that much-abused word, “culture”’.¹⁴⁵

Hay Festival has been called a ‘festival of ideas’ for years, reaching back to its promotion of ‘storytelling,’ wherein literature becomes one field amongst many. Quoted in Moss’s 2001 article is Florence calling Hay Festival a ‘festival of ideas,’ noting that it not been called ‘the Hay Literary Festival’ for years, pushing back on its reputation as primarily a literature festival.¹⁴⁶ The embrace of celebrity and the growing role of publishing professionals at literary festivals suggests that in the early 2000s, literature had become a branch of the entertainment industry. Alternatively, the 2000s ushered in a new era for Hay Festival, where the dining table has now become a platform for authors. At these events, books are sold through pop-up shops, writers may be paid appearance fees, audiences

¹⁴² Stephen Moss, ‘Making Hay,’ *Guardian* (London), May 31, 2001, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2001/may/31/fiction.news>.

¹⁴³ Robert Erdic quoted in Moss, ‘Making Hay.’

¹⁴⁴ Moss, ‘Making Hay.’

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

purchase tickets, but the festival also provides a platform for authors (and celebrities) to talk to audiences. Literature is one part of Hay Festival, one that it pivots upon, but that is not the whole story.

Developing an audience profile

As discussed, under Blair's New Labour government, the UK saw a growth in the idea of the cultural industries. This produced the circumstances where, in order to receive state funding, an organisation had to provide evidence for three things: that it had good employment records; that it earned tourist money; and that it thereby raised the image of the nation.¹⁴⁷

These three tropes became dominant in the creative industries as a consequence, and with that came the requirement, in performance studies scholar Martin Baker's words, to 'know who your audience was'.¹⁴⁸ From the 2000s, Hay Festival began to look closer at its audience profile, compiling surveys and reports to understand them best and shape the festival following feedback, building upon its more ad hoc approach to audiences in the 1990s. In a funding application to ACW in 2002, the festival described its audience as aged twenty-five to seventy-five, 'upwardly mobile art and culture-loving people who are well read, well versed in current affairs, who are Radio 4-type listeners and who spend a healthy proportion of their income on leisure, visiting the countryside, foreign travel, the theatre, the arts and literature'.¹⁴⁹ Calling its audience 'Radio 4-type listeners' is shorthand for older, middle-class, educated people interested in arts and current affairs. In a report of BBC Radio 4's demographics, the average age of a Radio 4 listener was found to be fifty-six years old, with the station having 'an upmarket bias – 75% of those tuning in fall into the ABC1

¹⁴⁷ Martin Baker, 'Martin Baker in Conversation,' interview by Matthew Reason in *Routledge Companion to Audience and the Performing Arts*, eds. Matthew Reason, Lynne Conner, Katya Johanson and Ben Walmsley (London: Routledge, 2022), 251.

¹⁴⁸ Baker, 'Martin Baker in Conversation,' 251

¹⁴⁹ Hay Festival Arts Council of Wales funding application, 2002, Add MS 89482/2/30.

demographic'.¹⁵⁰ ABC1 demographic is a consumer from one of the three higher social and economic groups, consisting of people who generally have more education and better-paid jobs than those in other groups. Fundamentally, Hay Festival characterised its audience as those with leisure time to choose to visit the festival and spend money, and the pursuit of categorising its festival into typologies shows its increasing professionalisation as it became a platform prioritising audience experience.

The audience surveys conducted in 2004 and 2005 were sent out with the festival programmes. The data showed that 10% had heard of the festival from the *Guardian*, the title sponsor at the time, and 29% had been previous visitors.¹⁵¹ The most common age group of those responding were in their fifties, and a majority of respondents – 29% – worked in education.¹⁵² Of the people responding to the survey, 19% were local to the area.¹⁵³ In the 2000s, the number of festivalgoers increased annually on average by 10%, having what the festival calls 'a significant positive impact on the local tourist economy'.¹⁵⁴ Hay Festival realised Baker's claim that organisations began to understand who their audience was by summarising survey results. In the summary of the 2004 audience survey, the festival concluded that:

Compared with last year, these results show a dramatic increase in the use of the internet as a source of information about the festival; that the age range of the audience is becoming young and that visitors are coming from a wider geographic radius. The festival attracts visitors from various occupations, with Education workers being the largest group. It may be worthwhile conducting further research of this group to define the sectors of education most represented: Primary school vs. secondary school, higher education vs. primary and secondary etc.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁰ 'The BBC Radio 4 Audience,' BBC Marketing and Audiences, accessed June 8, 2022, https://downloads.bbc.co.uk/radio/commissioning/R4_44_Minute_Drama_Audience_Pack.pdf, 2.

¹⁵¹ Notes comparing 2004 and 2005 Hay Festival audiences, n.d., Add MS 89482/2/49.

¹⁵² Notes comparing 2004 and 2005 Hay Festival audiences, n.d., Add MS 89482/2/49.

¹⁵³ Ibid. It must be considered the small sample size. In 2004 alone, the festival sold 85,985 tickets to almost 80,000 attendees. The sample size for Hay Festival's survey that year was 119, small in comparison to those that attended, so it cannot be seen as fully representative, though it does provide some insight into the Hay Festival audiences at the time.

¹⁵⁴ Hay Festival Arts Council of Wales funding application, 2002, Add MS 89482/2/30.

¹⁵⁵ Notes comparing 2004 and 2005 Hay Festival audiences, n.d., Add MS 89482/2/49.

These surveys aided Hay Festival in understanding its audience and how it was changing, in order to shape events around their interests, as well as to receive state funding. For example, there is a clear correlation following this survey that the festival began to implement specifically education-focused events towards teachers and students, such as GlamLit and StoryQuest, both of which received state funding, potentially following the information that much of its audience works in education. Demographic expansion is conceived by Hay Festival in terms of age, not race, disability, or sexuality. The disregard of minorities by Hay Festival in the mid-2000s is echoed in criticisms that it has received, though Peter Florence batted these away, calling it ‘not too white,’ ‘not too middle-class,’ and ‘far more representative than the House of Commons’.¹⁵⁶ Florence argues that instead, the festival is interested in ‘people who are interested in stories,’ not a particular type of person, echoing the festival’s repeated usage of ‘stories’ and ‘storytelling’ to appeal to as wide an audience as possible.¹⁵⁷

The audience surveys reveal some insight into the reaction of Hay Festival’s flitting between festival sites in the 2000s. Between 2000 and 2005, the festival switched between locations inside and outside of the town, before finally settling on a permanent field just outside of the town where it still holds the annual festival. However, not all audience members were happy with the move. In the 2005 surveys sent out to audience members asking recipients questions about themselves for the festival to learn about its demographic, one audience member added an additional, unprompted comment on the side of the survey, expressing that they felt that ‘the festival has become too large – don’t like it not being in the town. May not come next year’.¹⁵⁸ This audience member was the only one out of almost 200

¹⁵⁶ Decca Aitkenhead, ‘Confessions of a First-Time Festival-Goer,’ *Guardian* (London), June 1, 2010, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2010/jun/01/hay-festival-first-time-festival-goer>.

¹⁵⁷ Aitkenhead, ‘Confessions of a First-Time Festival-Goer.’

¹⁵⁸ Audience survey, 2005-2006, Add MS 89482/2/49.

survey respondents to leave an additional comment. The comment suggests some unrest from the festival audience, but it is the only example of negative audience feedback about the new site. Recently, Hay Festival has become more interested in its demographic and in attracting a more diverse audience to the festival holding annual audience surveys and focus groups at the May festival.

Hay Festival today

After the Hay Festival archive was deposited at the British Library in 2017, the festival entered a period of transition once again, with Fletcher commenting in October 2021 that ‘more’s changed in the last six months than the last twenty years’.¹⁵⁹ Due to the lack of archival materials from this period, I turn to research interviews with current staff members who comment on events directly. In 2020, prompted by other international expansions, the festival set up an event in Abu Dhabi. Presented as an opportunity to showcase ‘the female voice, the international voice,’ and to promote freedom of expression, the festival ended in controversy after Hay Festival curator Caitlin McNamara accused Sheikh Nahyan bin Mubarak Al Nahyan of sexually assaulting her. After the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) decided they would take no action in the UK courts, McNamara contacted media outlets to raise complaints and awareness of her treatment.¹⁶⁰ Soon after, in March 2020, the UK went into lockdown following the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic, resulting in Hay Festival hosting two fully digital May festivals in 2020 and 2021 and one digital Winter Weekend in 2020. The pandemic has radically changed the landscape of cultural events in the

¹⁵⁹ Joe Fletcher, interview by Rebecca Roach, Zoom, October 4, 2021.

¹⁶⁰ Caitlin McNamara, “‘Until the Law Catches Up, All We Have Is Our Stories’: My Year-Long Fight to Hold My Attacker to Account,” *Guardian* (London), March 20, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/mar/20/until-the-law-catches-up-all-we-have-is-our-stories-my-year-long-fight-to-hold-my-attacker-to-account>.

UK and internationally, and I will explore in much more detail the impact of the pandemic on the festival, especially on its turn to digital, in the final chapter of this thesis.

The major recent change has been in the festival's leadership team. In March 2020, following a formal bullying complaint made against him by one festival staff member, supported with statements by fifteen others out of the team of eighteen, Peter Florence was suspended in October 2020 and was on sick leave for the following nine months.¹⁶¹ In August 2021, after an independent investigation upheld the complaint of bullying against Florence, he resigned. After more than three decades leading the festival, Florence left acrimoniously and described his role as 'untenable due to the conduct of the board,' following the upheld complaint.¹⁶² Florence's leadership is described by staff as making the festival 'limited,' often working 'very last minute' and resulting in deadlines that 'were never met'.¹⁶³ His departure and the complaints about unprofessionalism with deadlines led to one staff member saying that 'the festival succeeded despite Peter [Florence], not because of him'.¹⁶⁴ Hay Festival's growth from 'a family business to a festival where there was a lot at stake and a lot of people's livelihoods depended on the festival,' where it was 'a big responsibility' reflects the tension between running a family business that is also a large-scale, professional, and international arts organisation.¹⁶⁵ Fundamentally, the success and growth of the festival, as well as the corporate governance structures set up to support its continuous expansion, became too much for the founder and led to his undoing. Florence's story is not dissimilar from other founders and CEOs of successful organisations, such as WeWork's Adam Neumann who resigned as CEO after reports of his eccentric behaviour, and Alfred Barr, the

¹⁶¹ Henry Mance, 'From Hay to Haywire,' *Financial Times* (London), August 6, 2021, <https://www.ft.com/content/ad4f420e-24e1-4e57-bd01-d02dd8e2bb6f>.

¹⁶² Vanessa Thorpe, 'Hay Festival Director Quits after Bullying Claim Upheld,' *Observer* (London), August 1, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2021/aug/01/hay-festival-in-disarray-as-director-quits-after-bullying-claim-upheld>.

¹⁶³ Heather Salisbury, interview by Rebecca Roach, Zoom, September 20, 2021.

¹⁶⁴ Mance, 'From Hay to Haywire.'

¹⁶⁵ Penny Compton, interview by Ellen Addis, Zoom, October 6, 2021.

first director of MoMA in 1929 who was dismissed fourteen years later and ‘relegated to the faceless ranks of the museum bureaucrats’ due to his bad scheduling, dislike of administration, and adversaries in the museum.¹⁶⁶

Florence’s departure left the space for a festival director to be filled.¹⁶⁷ The festival board advertised the replacement as two separate roles: a CEO, who would lead ‘organisational strategy, enhancing the organisation’s national and international standing, reach, impact, engagement with existing and new audiences, and its long-term sustainability,’ and a UK director of programmes and engagement that would ‘oversee programming and engagement for UK activities’ including festivals, digital projects, and community and learning outreach.¹⁶⁸ In May 2022, Finch was appointed as the new CEO. Having previously worked as CEO of The Cheltenham Trust and Compton Verney Art Gallery and Park, Finch has a background of cultural leadership, though not in festivals, and her appointment signals the festival’s continuing professionalisation. In April 2024, Helen Bagnall was appointed Hay Festival’s UK director, after a career directing and curating festivals including Also Festival, Salon London, and Latitude Festival.¹⁶⁹

In financial documents from 2021, under the heading ‘Significant activities,’ Hay Festival describes its change to charitable status, moving ‘Hay Festival of Literature and the Arts Ltd’ into the charity, Hay Festival Foundation, in February 2022. The document cites the ‘pandemic continuing to negatively impact on the live operations of the Summer Festival in 2021’ as the reason for this transition and calls the Hay Festival Foundation ‘the best

¹⁶⁶ Hilton Kramer, ‘The Man Who Created MOMA,’ *The New Criterion* (New York), December 1, 2001, accessed August 1, 2024, <https://newcriterion.com/article/the-man-who-created-moma/>.

¹⁶⁷ Interim CEOs for Hay Festival in the period of Peter Florence’s suspension and resignation include financial director Tania Rice and international director Cristina Fuentes La Roche.

¹⁶⁸ Hay Festival, ‘Julie Finch Appointed Hay Festival CEO,’ accessed June 25, 2024, <https://www.hayfestival.com/news/blog.aspx?post=1537>; Hay Festival, ‘Hay Festival Global Appoints Helen Bagnall as UK Director of Programmes and Engagement,’ accessed August 1, 2024, <https://www.hayfestival.com/news/blog.aspx?post=1680>. Cristina Fuentes La Roche remains Hay Festival’s international director.

¹⁶⁹ ‘Hay Festival Global Appoints Helen Bagnall as UK Director of Programmes and Engagement.’

governance model to support the future delivery and ongoing financial sustainability of the Hay Festival'.¹⁷⁰ The restructure to a charity brings financial stability, more funding opportunities, and joins the once separated charity wing with the festival itself and provides an opportunity, in Compton's words, 'to protect those jobs, the people that are reliant, the benefits that [Hay Festival] has to the town and so on, and by changing in the charity, we wrap it up in bubble wrap and make sure that it will be safe'.¹⁷¹

The changes under Finch's leadership in 2024 include a significant rebrand in February 2024, changing the name from 'The Hay Festival' to 'Hay Festival Global,' delineating the festival as an international charity. Hay Festival Global's new nomenclature gestures to its status as primarily a platform that hosts different ventures, outside of its May Festival: international festivals, year-round projects and education events, and digital platforms. In an article launching the festival's rebrand, the new name is described as one that 'unifies the charity's multiple editions, projects and social purpose under a core brand, highlighting its internationalism and impact' and is said to aim to 'convey that the festival is now about more than literature and also spans the worlds of art, science, politics, music and comedy'.¹⁷² Much like the name change in 2018 from 'Hay Festival of Literature and the Arts' that dropped 'literature' from its title, the new Hay Festival Global outlines the change in programming and the festival's more international outlook and ambitions to be an institution divorced from specifically being about books, and more about ideas. Despite the move away from literature and the substantial changes in leadership, status, and branding,

¹⁷⁰ 'Report of the Trustees and Unaudited Financial Statements for the Year Ended 31 December 2021 for Hay Festival Foundation Limited,' Charity Commission for England and Wales, accessed June 25, 2024, <https://register-of-charities.charitycommission.gov.uk/charity-search/-/charity-details/3950893/accounts-and-annual-return>, 1.

¹⁷¹ Penny Compton, interview by Ellen Addis, Zoom, October 6, 2021.

¹⁷² Tom May, 'EDIT's New Identity for Hay Festival Global Better Evokes Its 21st-Century Mission,' *Creative Boom* (Manchester), February 19, 2024, <https://www.creativeboom.com/news/edit-hay-identity/>.

some staff believe that ‘the heart of the festival remains the same: sharing ideas and giving people a voice, sharing ideas, changing minds’.¹⁷³

While some see little change in Hay Festival, the 2000s saw Hay Festival prioritise growth by expanding its festival output both domestically and internationally. This ‘golden era’ of the 2000s for the festival, with international expansions, a new winter festival and education programme, and starry guests attracting new media and sponsorship attention, continued into the 2010s.¹⁷⁴ Now a globally recognisable brand, the festival became a platform for selling books and providing the intimate connection between author and audience. New Labour’s ‘Creative Britain’ offered the festival hopes of governmental arts support, but ultimately, the necessity of commercial sponsorships that provided financial support and stability turned the festival towards sponsors such as Nestlé, Tata Steel, and Baillie Gifford, that brought with them corporate baggage and controversy in the shape of artwashing and greenwashing. The 2020s so far mark a period of the most radical change for Hay Festival. The pandemic, the controversy at the Abu Dhabi festival, and the bullying complaint and resignation of the festival’s co-founder and former director have shepherded in a new era for Hay Festival. The recent rebrand to Hay Festival Global is further evidence of the festival’s resilience and ability to shape and adapt to new and unforeseen problems.

¹⁷³ Jo Rodell-Jones, interview by Rebecca Roach, Zoom, September 13, 2021.

¹⁷⁴ Heather Salisbury, interview by Rebecca Roach, Zoom, September 20, 2021.

Part Two

Places: Local and Digital Environments at Hay Festival

In part two of this thesis, I explore the places that Hay Festival inhabits. Incorporating both archival and interview materials as I have done thus far, this part also uses literary analysis of texts and their corresponding events at Hay Festival to understand the local and digital environments of the festival.

The first chapter of this part, ‘On the borders: Mapping the literary inheritance of the Wales-England border,’ examines the influence of Hay Festival’s local environment and the border on the festival and its identity. Using the work of three authors to explore the literary inheritance of the local area, the chapter underlines how Hay Festival uses the literary community of writers to formulate its identity and boost the borderlands as a tourist destination. Analysing data from focus groups, the chapter also looks at how Hay Festival’s attendees view the landscape and how it influences their experience.

The final chapter of this thesis, ‘Digital past, present, future: Accessing Hay Festival online,’ turns to the digital environment to investigate the online life of the festival – before, during, and after the coronavirus pandemic. It examines Hay Festival’s digital events and projects to understand how a literary festival changes when it is put online. The chapter explores the work of three authors at Hay through the festival’s digital archive, online book club, and digital events: Zadie Smith, Ali Smith, and Patricia Lockwood. The chapter examines, using literary analysis, what happens to a literary text when it is discussed online, and how Hay Festival’s events and projects participate in and influence Murray’s digital literary sphere.

4 On the borders: Mapping the literary inheritance of the Wales-England border

'The night was cool and pleasant as I walked home under the stars. About midnight I passed over the Rhydspence border brook, and crossed the border from England into Wales. The English inn was still ablaze with light and noisy with the songs of revellers, but the Welsh inn was dark and still.'

Francis Kilvert, *Kilvert's Diary*.¹

'But where I was born was under the Black Mountains, on the Welsh border, where the meadows are bright green against the red earth of the ploughlands, and the first trees, beyond the window, are oak and holly.'

Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*.²

'Believe you me, that cry, "What about Wales?" is a cry that goes straight to my heart. For in my veins Welsh blood and English blood course in equal quantities.'

Bruce Chatwin, *On the Black Hill*.³

Incised by the Wales-England border, Hay Festival is consequently described by staff as 'rooted in this border town. At the same time British but Welsh'.⁴ Francis Kilvert, Raymond Williams, and Bruce Chatwin whom I quote above describe this border experience and mark the contrast between the two countries, and throughout its history, the border has presented both a problem and an opportunity for Hay Festival. While I have explored already how it has limited local government funding opportunities, the indeterminacy of the border has also enabled Hay Festival to construct a distinctly border identity attached to the landscape and have an identity that is both 'British,' encompassing the whole of the UK, and 'Welsh'. The Wales-England border is an ideal site for the study of rural literary festivals because of Hay Festival's success in making a liminal space in the UK into a cultural epicentre every May when the festival occurs. In this chapter, I focus on texts by Kilvert, Williams, and Chatwin

¹ Francis Kilvert, *Kilvert's Diary: 1870-1879*, ed. William Plomer (1944; reis., London: Vintage Classics, 2019), 234.

² Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 3.

³ Bruce Chatwin, *On the Black Hill* (1982, reis.; London: Vintage Books, 1998), 93.

⁴ Cristina Fuentes La Roche, interview by Ellen Addis, Hay Festival, Hay-on-Wye, June 6, 2022.

that are all set in the borderland in order to understand how the landscape has been envisaged by writers and adopted by Hay Festival.

As explored, Hay Festival takes place in a field on the outskirts of Hay-on-Wye, a town primarily known for its status as the world's first book town. The prominence of these bookshops, coupled with the festival, grants Hay-on-Wye the primary identity of a tourist destination and a competitive advantage over other similar rural towns within the area.⁵ Festivalgoers credit the location as an influence on their visits. In response to a question about what enticed audiences to attend Hay Festival, one member responded saying, 'well, here ... It's beautiful. It's lovely ... the location being in the town of books'.⁶ In Norman times, for administration purposes, the town was divided into 'English Hay' and 'Welsh Hay'.⁷ Today, the town describes itself within a geography of borders, situated at a 'unique position on the border between England and Wales [which] makes Hay ideal for visitors to explore and enjoy the beautiful border country'.⁸ Lambert explains the oddity of this order position, noting that the local grocery shop 'is in England, even though it's covered in Welsh labels,' and that 'Hay still bizarrely has an English postcode ... [but] it's in Powys ... its nearest sorting office, and where it gets its mail from probably comes from Hereford'.⁹ Hay Festival's location on the border removes it from singular national identities and instead, as one Hay Festival staff member calls it, gives the festival a 'very borders' sense of self.¹⁰

The area, also known as the Welsh Marches, has long been a region of contention. Imprecisely defined and historically jittery, the borderline creates a liminal area surrounding it. P. Thoresby Jones in *Welsh Border Country* (1938) takes a meandering walk around the

⁵ Jenkins, 'The Hay Festival: A Longitudinal Study on its Attributes and the Sustainable Impacts on a Small Welsh Town,' 121.

⁶ Speaker 2, Focus group 4, interview by Ellen Addis, June 2, 2023, Hay Festival, Hay-on-Wye.

⁷ 'A Brief History of Hay-on-Wye,' Hay-on-Wye, accessed April 3, 2023, <https://www.hay-on-wye.co.uk/tourism/history>.

⁸ 'Croeso I'r Gelli / Welcome to Hay-on-Wye,' Hay-on-Wye, accessed April 3, 2023, <https://www.hay-on-wye.co.uk/>.

⁹ Adrian Lambert, interview by Ellen Addis, Zoom, August 12, 2021.

¹⁰ Gareth Howell-Jones, interview by Rebecca Roach, Zoom, September 8, 2021.

area where Hay Festival now takes place and describes the local history: ‘I have not confined myself to the English side, for the wavering Border marks no logical division, and it is necessary, in order to understand the countryside, to cross it in both directions’.¹¹ Borders are represented on maps and in administrative documents as fixed but are constantly changing, wobbling and uncertain with land wars and ownership rights.

The border has followed broadly the same line set by the great earthwork boundary, Offa’s Dyke, once called ‘a dead monument in an empty landscape,’ since it was built along the Anglo-Welsh border by Offa, King of Mercia during the eighth century.¹² Though attributed to the kingship of Offa, questions remain concerning its precise date, construction, and purpose.¹³ Following a north-south route from North Wales to the Severn Estuary and dissecting the western margins of the English Midlands, Offa’s Dyke mimics the rolling skyline of the Black Mountains, a group of hills spread across parts of Powys and Monmouthshire in southeast Wales and extending across the border.¹⁴ The Dyke’s basic structure comprises ‘an earthen, or earth and stone, bank with a ditch dug (mostly) on its western side, such that the earthwork faces westwards’ and has survived despite natural erosion and human disturbance.¹⁵ Though it is also gap-toothed and crooked, Offa’s Dyke ‘shows the old porosity of the border and a gander at the map shows all manner of linguistic drift and evidence’ between the divided England and Wales.¹⁶ Recently, there has been a turn on the Welsh side of the border towards embracing its Welsh-language history, exemplified by the previously named Brecon Beacons National Park announcing that it will only use its

¹¹ P. Thoresby Jones, *Welsh Border Country: The Face of Britain Series* (1938; reis., B. T. Batsford, 1946), 3-8.

¹² Dan Llywelyn Hall, preface to *Walking with Offa: Paintings and Poetry Inspired by Offa’s Dyke* (Llanfyllin: Ravenmade, 2021), 12-13; Lambert, interview by Addis.

¹³ Keith Ray and Ian Bapty, *Offa’s Dyke: Landscape and Hegemony in Eighth Century Britain* (Macclesfield: Windgather Press, 2016), 10.

¹⁴ Ray and Bapty, *Offa’s Dyke*, 12.

¹⁵ Ibid, 12-13.

¹⁶ Jon Gower, introduction to *Walking with Offa: Paintings and Poetry Inspired by Offa’s Dyke* (Llanfyllin: Ravenmade, 2021), 19.

Welsh name, Bannau Brycheiniog, in the future, as ‘[w]e want this celebration of our language and heritage to have a positive impact on tourism and local culture’.¹⁷ The modern boundary was set in 1536 when the former marcher lordships, knights who occupied the borderlands, were abolished and new county boundaries were created.¹⁸ But even as recently as 1972, the administrative boundary of Wales was changed to include Monmouthshire.¹⁹ As a result, these vacillations of the border lends itself to individual definitions.

This long history of the border landscape has also resulted in a long history of literary treatment. Poems in *Walking with Offa* (2021), a collection responding to the ancient partition, describe the self-determined and amalgamated nature of the border: ‘this land is mine, mine ... the dyke’s no more than a line in the mind’.²⁰ The trembling, illogical division of the border is something determined by one’s own sense of place and belonging to a landscape, where the lines on the map are transposed to the mind of those that live there, enacting Edward Soja’s definition of place as expansive and dynamic, ‘real-and-imagined’.²¹ These borderland inhabitants have their own particular identity, neither Welsh nor English, but an amalgamated in-between. Raymond Williams wrote, referring to his own childhood in the Welsh Marches, ‘I was born on the border, we talked about “The English” who were not us, and “The Welsh” who were not us’.²² The borderline and the elusiveness of the borderland territory are fertile ground for individual definitions of place by literary texts and by Hay Festival. Kilvert, Williams, and Chatwin’s texts and Hay Festival’s interaction with them, as well as Hay Festival’s own work, makes the area significant.

¹⁷ Steffan Messenger, ‘Brecon Beacons: Park to Use Welsh Name Bannau Brycheiniog,’ *BBC News*, April 17, 2023, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-65274952>.

¹⁸ Thoresby Jones, *Welsh Border Country: The Face of Britain Series*, 3-8.

¹⁹ UK Government Legislation, *Local Government Act 1972*, (sections 1, 20 and 269), October 26, 1972, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1972/70/wales/1991-02-01>

²⁰ Gillian Clarke, ‘Offa’s Dyke,’ in *Walking with Offa: Paintings and Poetry Inspired by Offa’s Dyke* (Llanfyllin: Ravenmade, 2021), 30.

²¹ Edward Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 1996).

²² Raymond Williams, *Who Speaks for Wales? Nation, Culture, Identity*, 3rd edition, ed. Daniel Williams (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2021), 87.

Defining place at literary festivals

Places shape and are shaped by festivals. ‘Space’ is a more abstract construct, ‘places’ are ‘especially meaningful spaces, rich in associations and steeped in sentiment’.²³ While Hay Festival takes place in the rural borderlands of Wales, many literary festivals are hosted in urban centres, often in already-established public arts venues and institutions. Toronto International Literary Festival (TIFA) is based in a cultural venue situated on the edge of Lake Ontario, the Harbourfront Centre, a site specifically chosen to revitalise the city’s derelict industrial harbour and increase cultural tourism in the city. In 2021, Edinburgh Book Festival moved to the Edinburgh College of Art in the heart of the Old Town after years in the village green-like tented spaces circling Charlotte Square Gardens of New Town.²⁴ During its now-defunct annual festival, Bristol Ideas hosted events in a multi-arts centre, The Watershed, in the centre of the city. These three urban literary festivals, all bound to fully integrated cultural institutions, build upon the audience’s pre-existing relationship with the city. Festivals in large cities like Toronto and Edinburgh tend to be international in orientation, while those in smaller cities, such as Bristol, represent a national picture within a more local context.²⁵

However, less attention has been paid to the significant role of literary festivals’ placemaking in rural contexts such as Hay Festival. Research that does exist focuses on how while urban festivals are more frequently hosted ‘onto places,’ resulting in weaker ties with local structures and resulting in a somewhat detached and commercial marketing focus, rural

²³ Lyn H. Lofland, *The Public Realm: Exploring the City’s Quintessential Social Territory* (Aldine Transaction, 1998), 64, quoted in Millicent Weber, *Literary Festivals and Contemporary Book Culture* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 198.

²⁴ Brian Ferguson, ‘Edinburgh International Book Festival to Move from Charlotte Square to Art College Complex,’ *Scotsman* (Edinburgh), January 27, 2021, <https://www.scotsman.com/whats-on/arts-and-entertainment/edinburgh-international-book-festival-to-move-from-charlotte-square-to-art-college-complex-3114137>.

²⁵ Giorgi, ‘Between Tradition, Vision and Imagination,’ 37.

festivals, in contrast, often ‘derive from places,’ and thus, ‘their grassroots nature predominates’.²⁶ In these rural places, the temporary events of literary festivals, so concentrated in time and space, can have long-term economic, cultural, and spatial impacts that form the basis for local growth and change. This was referenced by one locally-based festivalgoer noting that because of the festival, ‘the local area benefits as well, rather than just the Hay Festival organisation’.²⁷

In this chapter, I explore the role of literary festivals and, more widely, cultural organisations, in sustaining, creating, and changing rural places through the placemaking process. Hay Festival is an especially interesting case study as it transplants the programming, audiences, and authors regularly seen at festivals situated in urban centres to an extremely rural setting in the Black Mountains, contributing to its growing national and international appeal. Venables comments that while the festival does not ‘have all the buildings and venues that Cheltenham or Edinburgh have and the city vibe,’ it does have ‘this incredible landscape and so we’ve started to sort of creep out into that’.²⁸ What I aim to present, then, is this rich and complex landscape that Hay Festival ventures into, mixing literary culture with cultural tourism activities to attract audiences and shape the region’s sense of place.

Literary mapping

Literary texts transform places for readers. A subsection of cultural geography, ‘literary geography’ is concerned with the geographical analysis of literary works and aims to ‘explore how works of literature negotiate their relationship to the space of the external world and to

²⁶ Kwiatkowski, et al, ‘The Assemblers of Rural Festivals: Organizers, Visitors and Locals,’ 256.

²⁷ Ibid, 257; Speaker 3, Focus group 4, interview by Ellen Addis, June 2, 2023, Hay Festival, Hay-on-Wye.

²⁸ Aine Venables, interview by Rebecca Roach, Zoom, October 8, 2022.

consider how this negotiation influences the way those works are read and received'.²⁹ Place comes into being through the act of reading, and the narrative carves out ways to read the different landscapes, with more emerging through each new reading. As a placemaker, Hay Festival preserves the tradition of the local area and brings cultural renewal to the borderlands. In turn, the festival strengthens the local identity by creating a community celebrating the sense of place, brings in visitors, and provides a distinctive identifier of the place and people.³⁰ Within the field of literary geography sits 'literary cartography': the practice of mapping works of literature and their spatial elements and attributes.³¹ Literary cartography, or literary mapping, 'enriches the reader's appreciation of the literary work of art' and can take the form of geospatial technological rendering of literary spaces in texts, a simply drawn map of important places within texts, or implicitly in the reader's mind.³² What unites literary cartographers is the interest in developing the relationship between place and space within literature.

Three texts in particular create literary maps and what I call the 'literary inheritance' of Hay Festival and the Wales-England borderlands: Bruce Chatwin's *On the Black Hill* (1982), Raymond Williams's *Border Country* (1960), and Kilvert's diary (1870-1879).³³ In the 1993 Hay Festival programme, Peter Florence names all three writers, along with William Shakespeare and the poet and painter David Jones (whom I will also come to), as having 'found inspiration and ease' in the landscape surrounding Hay Festival, 'some of the most beautiful countryside in the world'.³⁴ I argue that throughout its history, Hay Festival ascribes

²⁹ Piatti, 'Mapping Fiction: The Theories, Tools and Potentials of Literary Cartography,' 89.

³⁰ Ros Derrett, 'Making sense of how festivals demonstrate a community's sense of place,' *Event Management*, vol. 8, no.1 (2003), 47, quoted in Kwiatkowski et al, 'The Assemblers of Rural Festivals: Organizers, Visitors and Locals,' 258.

³¹ Piatti, 'Mapping Fiction: The Theories, Tools and Potentials of Literary Cartography,' 89.

³² Cooper, Donaldson, and Murriete-Flores eds., introduction to *Literary Mapping in the Digital Age*, 8.

³³ Due to its many versions and separate publications, I only italicise Kilvert's diary when discussing and/or quoting from the 2019 Vintage edition specifically.

³⁴ Peter Florence, Hay Festival programme, 1993, Add MS 89482/4/32, 1.

each writer with a specific borderland identity aligning with the festival's characteristics, thus creating the festival's own diverse conception of the borderland. Kilvert is a ubiquitous presence at Hay Festival since its inception as already shown in chapter one in his inclusion on the cover of the first programme. The area that the Victorian curate lived in Clyro, one mile from Hay, and the history of the landscape is mapped by the festival through the various paths and walks of Bannau Brycheiniog that it traces in its programming of 'Kilvert Walks,' mirroring the rambles of Kilvert. Cultural theorist Williams is credited with the initial idea and location of Hay Festival, and the festival honours this with an annual lecture in his name, attaching itself to not only Williams as the cultural thinker and figure, but also to Williams's understanding of the border country that he grew up in. Finally, Chatwin is presented at Hay Festival as the paradoxical nomadic-yet-settled author, and his novel *On the Black Hill*'s representation of the border as dynamic epitomises the festival's local-yet-international status. I explore how Hay Festival gestures to these three writers through events and programmes to imagine and shape literature and offer an insight into how cultural organisations expand the existing identity of their surrounding landscapes through their literary programming.

Kilvert's diary

In Kilvert's diary, the curate takes copious walks in the Welsh Marches, often passing through Hay-on-Wye. He describes walking 'over to Hay across the fields in a keen white bright frost,' being 'cheered by the solitary light in Hay' when he arrives home after midnight,' and 'Hay in the distance bright in brilliant sunshine'.³⁵ In 2009, the writer John Toman gave a lecture at Hay Festival, 'Kilvert's Diary and Landscape,' and described the diary as 'crisscrossing his Clyro parish in endless solitary walks and blending epitaphs, biographies,

³⁵ Kilvert, *Kilvert's Diary: 1870-1879*, 2, 9, 11.

history and folklore to create a portrait of community that he knew was fast disappearing. His diary, I believe, is his epitaph for that community'.³⁶ As mentioned in chapter one, Hay Festival utilised one of Kilvert's descriptions of Hay from a Good Friday entry in 1879 on the cover of its first programme, detailing 'the picturesque little border town with its slate roofed houses climbing and shining up the hill crested by the dark long mass of the old ivy grown castle with its huge war broken tower'.³⁷ However, this entry from the diary is absent from modern editions which all end on March 12, 1879, before Good Friday, leaving the question as to where the Florences found the mention of Hay from: a lost diary, an old edition, or is it simply made up? Interspersing events about Kilvert from its inception and throughout, Hay Festival innately ties itself to the curate and his exploration of the Welsh Marches through his diary.

The first Hay Festival in 1988 held 'an exhibition by Artists connected with Kilvert country' called 'Kilvert: The Spirit of the Place' in Ashbrook House where Kilvert lived while curate in Clyro, exemplifying the festival's further wishes to equate itself with the border country's literary inheritance.³⁸ I have previously mentioned the two further Kilvert-focused events at Hay Festival 1988 wherein the actor Timothy Davies performed as Kilvert twice in Clyro Church in a one-man show created for the National Theatre Platform. In the programme description for the events, Kilvert's diary is described as 'charming and candid, with vivid descriptions of the beauty of the countryside in the decade of 1870, a time when it would have been completely unspoilt ... There is a wealth of social detail'.³⁹ Underneath the event description, the programme advertises the Kilvert Festival at Clyro in September 1988,

³⁶ John Toman, 'Kilvert's Diary and Landscape,' *Hay Festival*, May 27, 2009, <https://www.hayfestival.com/p-1170-john-toman.aspx>.

³⁷ Hay Festival programme frontmatter, 1988, Add MS 89482/4/32.

³⁸ Hay Festival programme, 1988, Add MS 89482/4/32, 3.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 7.

demonstrating the prevalence of Kilvert at the time of the festival's beginning. In that first year, no other writer featured more than once other than Kilvert at Hay Festival.

Kilvert moved from Langley Burrell in Wiltshire to Clyro in 1865 and began his diary five years later on January 1, 1870, writing almost every day for the next nine years.⁴⁰ In his diary, he recorded his daily life for his family and friends to read, a common practice amongst his circle.⁴¹ However, Kilvert did not intend for his diary to be read by the masses. The diary was discovered by William Plomer, a poet and novelist who worked as a reader for Jonathan Cape, at the London offices of the publisher in 1937, when the diary arrived at the publisher in a pile of manuscripts sent by Kilvert's nephew, six decades after Kilvert's early death at the age of thirty-nine. Plomer was excited by the diary, enthusing that '[i]t simply *creates* that really unknown and remote period' of rural life in the late nineteenth century.⁴² Plomer edited the notebooks, and the first of three volumes of Kilvert's diary were published in 1938 to immediate acclaim for Kilvert as a writer and the diary as a piece of Victorian social history. This was shortly followed by the second volume in 1939, and the third in 1940. The creation of the diary is important to my understanding how Hay Festival does the same: it creates the modern literary landscape of the border country by referencing and bolstering the landscape's literary ancestors in its festival events and beginning.

Kilvert's diary maps two areas which are now affectionately known as 'Kilvert Country': the area of surrounding Clyro and Langley Burrell where his childhood home was.

⁴⁰ N.B: there are some periods of inconsistencies in the published diary where there are large gaps missing – the year 1877 has one entry in the published diary, 31st December. This is partly due to the diary's editing by William Plomer, who cut out details and entries he did not think an audience would find interesting, such as details about Kilvert's parish visits and day-to-day routines, and also due to the elisions by Kilvert's wife, Elizabeth Rowland, who had reduced the diary by eight to nine notebooks, cutting the sections about her husband's relationships before their marriage and their own meeting and courtship. After the first three volumes of the diary were published, the twenty-two notebooks were passed onto Kilvert's niece, Essex Hope, who preserved just three, losing most of the unpublished source material. For more on this, see Mark Bostridge's introduction to *Kilvert's Diary: 1870-1879*, ed. William Plomer (Vintage Classics, 1944; 2019).

⁴¹ Reverend Venables also kept a multi-volume diary, described as 'terse' and 'laconic' by Mark Bostridge. They are held at the National Library of Wales (Bostridge, introduction to *Kilvert's Diary*, xii.)

⁴² William Plomer, quoted in Bostridge, introduction to *Kilvert's Diary*, xvii.

It is the Welsh countryside I will be focusing on in this chapter. Kilvert showed great affection to the landscape, often walking twenty miles a day, without maps, relying upon signposts and the Hay and Brecon Railway, which opened in 1864 and allowed him to travel not just up and around the Wye Valley, but home to Wiltshire and to London.⁴³ The diary maintains a detailed picture of Kilvert's life and his visits to parishioners, describing the characters and the border countryside in great detail. In referencing Kilvert through its events such as 'Kilvert Walks,' Hay Festival enforces the traditions of the borderlands for its festivalgoers from London literary circles arriving in Hay through an act of rustication.

Capel-y-ffin and the spiritual history of the Welsh Marches

The borderland has a distinctly spiritual and artistic history. Within Kilvert's diary, the varying spiritual histories of the borderland are recorded and responded to by the Anglican clergyman. Toman's lecture at Hay Festival emphasises the spirituality of Kilvert's walks, noting that Kilvert 'saw landscape and people's lives as inseparable, and he found a religious purpose in walking through both,' and as an Evangelical Christian, Kilvert 'had been raised with the importance of recording his life seen as a spiritual journey' and had the self-chosen family motto: 'we are pilgrims'.⁴⁴

One particular monument of spirituality in Kilvert's diary is found in his visit to the 'lonely, timeless place' of Capel-y-ffin – translated to the chapel on the boundary.⁴⁵ A hamlet on the border, Capel-y-ffin has been a spiritual retreat for the last 1,500 years and lies eight miles from Hay-on-Wye and below Gospel Pass, the highest road pass in Wales made up of a steep single-track road that drops from Hay Bluff to Llanthony Priory. Kilvert describes the small church at Capel-y-ffin as 'short, stout and boxy with its little bell turret (the whole

⁴³ Bostridge, introduction to *Kilvert's Diary*, xxiv.

⁴⁴ Toman, 'Kilvert's Diary and Landscape,' *Hay Festival*.

⁴⁵ Ben Mallalieu, 'A Spiritual Journey,' *Guardian* (London), May 3, 2006, <https://www.theguardian.com/travel/2006/may/03/unitedkingdom.onlocationfilminspiredtravel.culturaltrips>.

building reminded one of an owl).⁴⁶ Capel-y-ffin was home of the Anglican monastery of Llanthony Tertia, founded in 1870 by Reverend Joseph Leycester Lyne, who later took the religious name Father Ignatius who Kilvert describes as ‘a man of gentle simple kind manners, excitable, and entirely possessed by the one idea’.⁴⁷ A prominent character in Kilvert’s diary, Lyne built the monastery and ruined chapel, and tried unsuccessfully to revive the Benedictine faith, or Cistercian way, in Wales and restore monastic life into the Anglican order. Despite failing to persuade Anglican bishops to ordain him, Lyne settled at Capel-y-ffin with a small group of monks. Kilvert recalls his visit there when the monks were building the monastery:

Dressed in long black habits girt around the waist with scourge cords knotted at the ends and dangling almost to the ground ... Father Philip was digging. Brother Serene or Cyrene was wheeling earth to him from a heap thrown out of the excavation dug for the foundation of the monastery.⁴⁸

The monk’s naïve building skills and the rushed builders that Lyne hired meant that by the time of his death in 1908, the monastery was already crumbling.⁴⁹ After Lyne’s death, Capel-y-ffin was acquired in 1924 by an arts and crafts artistic community with religious influences, led by artist and sculptor Eric Gill.

At a 1991 Hay Festival event, Eric Gill’s biographer, Fiona MacCarthy, describes Gill’s ‘own increasingly idiosyncratic Catholic artistic community in the ruined gothic monastery formerly occupied by Father Ignatius of Llanthony,’ Capel-y-ffin.⁵⁰ Gill, a Catholic of independent views, inhabited the monastery, though it was unsuitable and damp, the weather hard, the location and narrow roads difficult for bringing large pieces of stone in

⁴⁶ Kilvert, *Kilvert’s Diary*, 21.

⁴⁷ Kilvert, *Kilvert’s Diary*, 89.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 21-23.

⁴⁹ Jonathan Miles, *Try the Wilderness First: Eric Gill and David Jones at Capel-y-ffin*, 2nd ed (Bridgend: Seren Books, 2018).

⁵⁰ Hay Festival programme, 1991, Add MS 89482/4/32, 7; Eric Gill is remembered today for more controversial reasons, including the sexual abuses of his daughters, his sisters, many other women, and his dog. For more on this, see Fiona MacCarthy, *Eric Gill* (London: Faber & Faber, 1990).

and out for Gill's sculpting.⁵¹ In her biography of Gill, MacCarthy explains that Capel-y-ffin 'was by far the furthest off, the most remote, the wildest' of all the artistic communities that the sculptor would set up, and the seclusion that the hamlet provided suited his desire to distance himself from secular and industrialised society.⁵² Gill's preference for the remoteness of the Welsh Marches replicates Kilvert's own appreciation for the landscape, as the curate wrote: 'I like wandering about these lonely, waste and ruined places. There dwells among them a spirit of quiet and gentle melancholy more congenial and akin to my own spirit than full of life and gaiety and noise'.⁵³ The London-born artist and poet David Jones, who Peter Florence wrote also 'found inspiration and ease' in the landscape, joined Gill at Capel-y-ffin in 1925.⁵⁴ Jones intended only to visit, not 'in any sense to join,' though he stayed intermittently there until 1927, already engaged to Gill's daughter Petra, and magnetised by the solace that the remote landscape provided. On the stairway by the chapel door in Capel-y-ffin today is a reproduction of his painting *Sanctus Christus de Capel-y-Ffin* (1925).⁵⁵

Sanctus Christus de Capel-y-Ffin, as with Jones's other works from his time there, has since become synonymous with Welsh border life. Like Kilvert's diary, Jones's work provides an insight into the cultural ancestry and legacies of the Welsh Marches that have become instrumental in Hay Festival's identity and placemaking. Thomas Dilworth's biography of Jones recounts that '[e]xcept for the cold, Jones loved everything about Capel': Gill's daughters, the farm animals, and 'the majestic, irregular landscape' with the ridge Offa's Dyke on the horizon and the contours of the hills encircling the hamlet.⁵⁶ With the coldness of the area prompting Jones to paint watercolour outdoors, Dilworth writes that '[p]lace also precipitated stylistic change' in Jones, with the flowing, undulating rhythms of his paintbrush

⁵¹ Mallalieu, 'A Spiritual Journey.'

⁵² MacCarthy, *Eric Gill*, 279; Mallalieu, 'A Spiritual Journey.'

⁵³ Kilvert, *Kilvert's Diary*, 147.

⁵⁴ Peter Florence, Hay Festival programme, 1993, Add MS 89482/4/32, 1.

⁵⁵ Thomas Dilworth, *David Jones: Engraver, Soldier, Painter, Poet* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2017), 85, 89.

⁵⁶ Dilworth, *David Jones*, 85-86.

mimicking the curves of the River Honddu and the rocky Black Mountains.⁵⁷ The jagged hills and branches, the tremble of the river's banks and the plump clouds of the pictures done by Jones mainly at Capel-y-ffin, the Pembrokeshire monastic Caldey Island, and Brockley, were shown at a shared exhibition with Gill in 1927 to favourable reviews, many viewers, and most pictures sold.⁵⁸ The art collector Jim Ede, writing anonymously in the *Times*, acutely described Jones's landscapes as 'half maps and half pictures, with the distance between near and far abolished, but with considerable emphasis upon the relief of the individual parts – such as the folds of hills'.⁵⁹ In Jones's paintings from this period such as *Tir y Blaenau*, *Capel-y-ffin* (1925) and *The Orchard, Capel-y-ffin* (1926), the mountains leave little room for sky, the rivers swell upwards, the trees bend, and the horizon and the foreground blend as distance is compressed. Jones called this period at Capel-y-ffin, which ended in 1927 with the breakdown of his engagement with Petra Gill, 'a new beginning,' reflecting decades later that '[m]y subsequent work can, I think, be truthfully said to hinge on that period'.⁶⁰

While artistically fertile, the landscape did not ignite a sense of comfort for Jones as it did for Kilvert, but helpless isolation. He would not accompany Petra Gill into Hay-on-Wye or interact with the local Welsh farmers whom he thought strange.⁶¹ Jones, Gill, and Kilvert all show the intermingling of cultural and artistic histories of the landscape, mapping it in different ways through diaries, sculptures, and paintings. The landscape of Capel-y-ffin and the area surrounding it, with its ragged hills and swirling river, explicitly encourage creativity and spirituality, something that Hay Festival references throughout its history.

Capel-y-ffin has been the location of many Hay Festival events and coverage. In 2016, the festival hosted a walk around the hills surrounding Capel-y-ffin. Starting at the

⁵⁷ Dilworth, *David Jones*, 86.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Jim Ede quoted in Dilworth, *David Jones*, 99.

⁶⁰ David Jones quoted in Peter Wakelin, "'Hill-Rhythms': David Jones and Capel-y-Ffin," *Art UK*, August 3, 2023, <https://artuk.org/discover/stories/hill-rhythms-david-jones-and-capel-y-ffin>.

⁶¹ Dilworth, *David Jones*, 101.

chapel, historian Jonathan Miles led the guided walk, exploring the innate connection between artists and landscape that his book *Try the Wilderness First: Eric Gill and David Jones at Capel-y-ffin* (2018) studies.⁶² Joined by a member of the Bannau Brycheiniog National Park team, Hay Festival animated the cultural history of the border landscape through Miles' walk, underlining further the importance of figures such as Gill and Jones to the imagining of the area and Hay Festival's role in bolstering their work.

The year prior, as part of BBC Radio 3's coverage of Hay Festival, the writer Horatio Clare recorded a four-hour, ten-mile 'Sound Walk' from the hamlet to Hay-on-Wye. The episode is described as an 'immersive "slow radio" experience,' as Clare recorded the bird song, his footsteps, and rushing of the River Wye, and described the smells and sights of his walk: 'the smell of nettles,' the landscape 'deep, ice-cut, ridge-shouldered, piled,' and the 'giant puffballs' of cumulus clouds.⁶³ The recording is accompanied by orchestral music from the Welsh symphonists William Mathias and Alun Hoddinott. Clare also read from his memoir about his childhood in the Black Mountains, and excerpts from literature and poetry describing the area are read and interspersed in the Sound Walk. Clare explicitly recalls the cultural heritage of the borderlands in the episode, with references to Jones and Gill, saying that in Capel-y-ffin, 'they were looking for space and peace and beauty, imminence, connection with creativity' of the area.⁶⁴ Later in the walk, a section of Kilvert's diary is read: 'A lovely warm morning so I set off to walk over the hills to Colva ... We were out on the open mountain at once. There was the brown withered heather, the elastic turf, the long green ride stretching over the hill like a green ribbon between the dark heather'.⁶⁵ By referencing

⁶² Jonathan Miles, 'Wayfaring: Capel-y-Ffin,' Hay Festival, Hay-on-Wye, May 30, 2018; Miles, *Try the Wilderness First: Eric Gill and David Jones at Capel-y-ffin*.

⁶³ *Sound Walk*, 'Sound Walk to Hay-on-Wye,' Horatio Clare, aired May 29, 2017, BBC Radio 3, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b08rg41l>.

⁶⁴ 'Sound Walk to Hay-on-Wye.'

⁶⁵ Kilvert, *Kilvert's Diary*, 8.

Gill, Jones, and Kilvert as he walks the path from Capel-y-Ffin, Clare's Sound Walk, and its use in the promotion of Hay Festival, inherently maps the border landscape onto its cultural ancestors.

Literary maps in Kilvert

To understand the mapping of the Wales-England borderland through literature from the area, this section looks particularly at the physical maps found within texts as well as the imaginative maps created through Kilvert's impressions and descriptions of the landscape, and the physical maps within the Hay Festival programmes. Both Kilvert's diary and Hay Festival use physical maps to make legible the indeterminate and sometimes-ambiguous Welsh Marches. For Hay Festival, programme maps allow audiences to navigate not only the festival site, but to make sense of the wider geographical area surrounding Hay Festival.

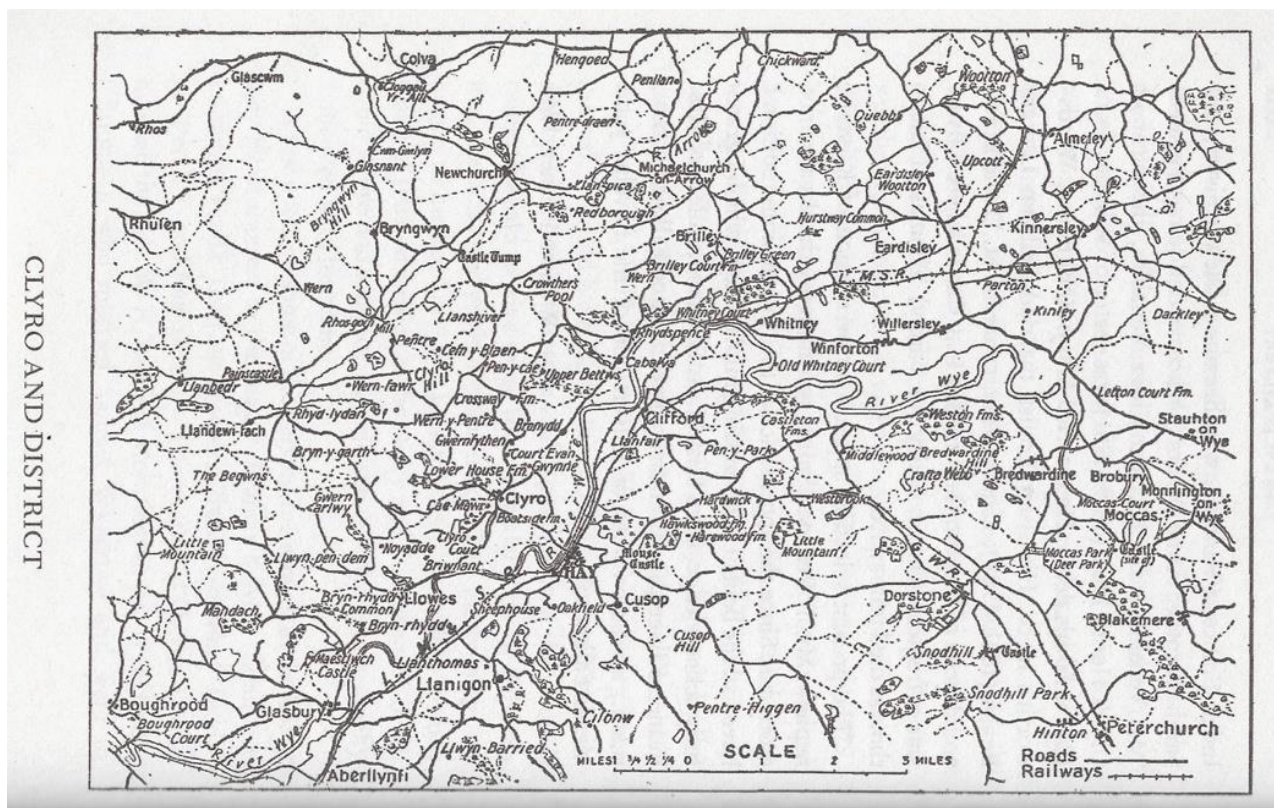


Figure 10: Clyro and District map in Kilvert's Diary (Vintage, 2019).

At the beginning of the 2019 Vintage Classics edition of *Kilvert's Diary*, there are two maps on a double page spread. One map, titled 'Chippenham and District,' depicts Kilvert's home county of Wiltshire, but I will be focusing on the other map, titled 'Clyro and District,' illustrating the area and paths of the Welsh border country during the Victorian period, with the roads and railways marked.⁶⁶

The Clyro map is a cramped portrayal of the hamlets and villages in Radnorshire which Kilvert trekked to throughout his time as curate. Hay-on-Wye is the designated largest town of the area, written in a large bold typeface different from all other fonts designating places, with the river and the railway running through it. Footpaths populate the map, tributaries out of the larger country roads so that the map appears scattered with small veins, a living, breathing thing for which to follow and track life. The topography of the Black Mountains is also reflected in miniature curlicues representing tree lines and forest circles. The landscape and its manifestation in the literary piece of work is intrinsically layered, both like the sedimentary layers and the layers of terrain on the map at the beginning of the text and its rocky terrain.

There is a special complexity in the Vintage edition of *Kilvert's Diary* in that the map produced alongside the text is not made or ordained by the author, Kilvert, but by his editor, Plomer, some sixty years later. Drawn maps are illustrative rather than integral to the meaning of the literary work, and in the diary, Kilvert's descriptions of landscape supplement the drawn maps.⁶⁷ Most diary entries detail his walks: 'At 5.30 started to walk to Clifford Priory to dinner, going to Hay across the fields'; 'I set out for Pwllldwrgwy to get some wild snowdrops along the river side by the Otter's Pool for Mrs. Venables'.⁶⁸ These walks are interrupted by Kilvert's poetic reflections on the landscape and the changeable weather: '[t]he

⁶⁶ *Kilvert's Diary*, xxx-xxxi

⁶⁷ Bushell, 'Mapping Fiction: Spatialising the Literary Work,' in *Literary Mapping in the Digital Age*, eds. David Cooper, Christopher Donaldson, and Patricia Murriete-Flores (Oxford: Routledge, 2016).

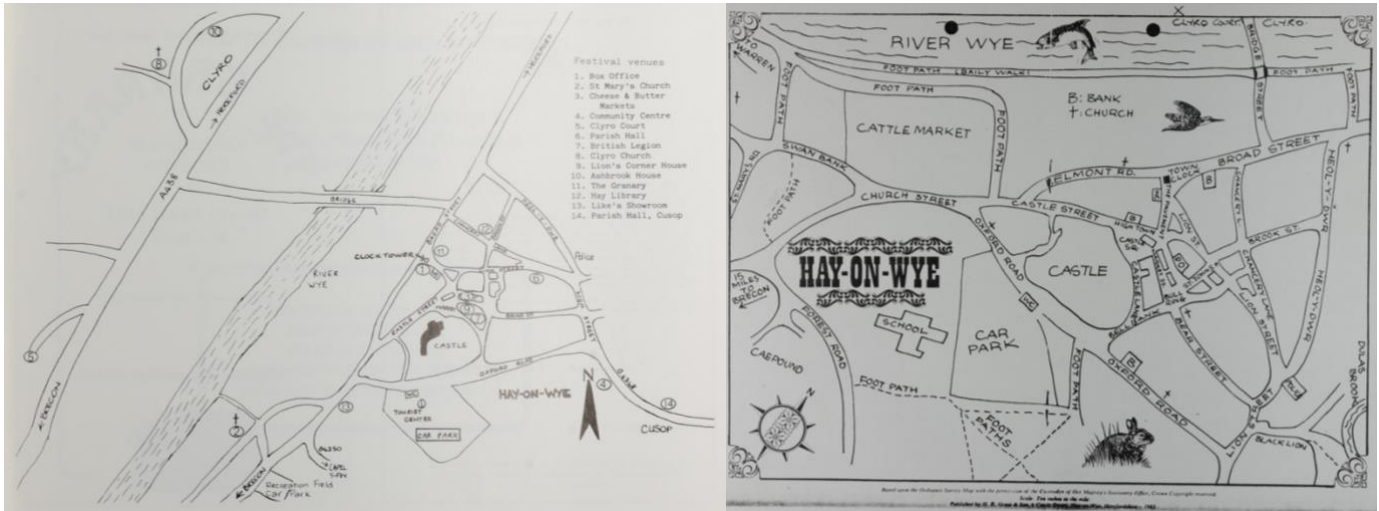
⁶⁸ Kilvert, *Kilvert's Diary*, 61, 216.

blue mountains were silver-ribbed with snow and looked like a dead giant lying in state – a Titan’; ‘[t]he trees blazed with the diamonds of the melting hoar frost’; ‘[f]amiliar as this place is to me I am always noticing some fresh beauty or combination of beauties, light or shade’.⁶⁹ Kilvert’s writing, coupled with the physically drawn map at the start of the diary, merge to build a sense of the borderlands that the curate inhabited. While the drawn map is seen often as an objective object depicting a place, the two-dimensional map cannot portray the weather, or how sunlight reflects on the mountains or the rivers. What the map misses and provides is as important in the reader’s interpretation of a place and the ultimate creation of the sense of place of the borderland. Hay Festival, like *Kilvert’s Diary*, provides two forms of mapping the landscape: through the physical maps depicting the site and town, and through the festival events that reach back to the landscape’s literary inheritance through guided walks, lectures, and readings.

⁶⁹ Kilvert, *Kilvert’s Diary*, 208, 113, 67.

Hay Festival's maps

Two hand drawn maps in the Hay Festival archive illustrate the festival's venues in town during its early years: one map is included in the 1988 programme, and another map accompanies an invitation to a festival guest.⁷⁰



Figures 11 and 12: Hay Festival maps, 1988, Add MS 89482/4/32 and Add MS 89482/1/165.
© Hay Festival.

In both maps, the roads disappear out of frame and are labelled with arrows delineating 'to' somewhere else: '15 miles to Brecon,' '->Hereford,' 'to Warren'.⁷¹ The undefined borders are fertile ground for inscribing new identities, and Hay Festival does this early by nestling Hay-on-Wye within the context of other places in the border landscape. The map sent to festival guests is photocopied from a local map maker and is 'based on the Ordnance Survey Map' of the area and includes various wildlife sketches to mark different parts of the town.⁷² The south of Hay which is largely covered in fields is represented by a rabbit; the River Wye is delineated by a fish. The iconography of this map depicts Hay-on-Wye via distinctly rural, wildlife iconography. The lack of an official festival map and the reliance upon hand drawn maps demonstrates the improvised nature the small community arts festival in the 1980s, a

⁷⁰ Hay Festival programme, 1988, Add MS 89482/4/32, 19; Hay-on-Wye map, 1988, Add MS 89482/1/165.

⁷¹ Hay Festival programme, 1988, Add MS 89482/4/32, 19; Hay-on-Wye map, 1988, Add MS 89482/1/165.

⁷² Hay-on-Wye map, 1988, Add MS 89482/1/165.

time that one long-time festivalgoer describes Hay Festival as being ‘bohemian,’ as well as the integral reliance the festival had on the town for its venues.⁷³

By the 1990s, the maps within the Hay Festival programmes gestured outwards to the capitals of Cardiff and London, an addition signalling the growing success within the literary map of the UK. The town of Hay-on-Wye is no longer simply fifteen miles from Brecon, but within sight of cities against whom it can hold its own. The 1991 map includes numbers marking similar festival venues within Hay town, much like the earlier maps. But a distinct difference is the professionalisation of this later map. The 1991 map is made by a local artist, Eugene Fisk, who also illustrated the town of Hay-on-Wye for the inaugural festival programme’s front cover. Fisk ran the Kilvert Gallery of Contemporary Art in Ashbrook House, the same boarding house that Kilvert lived in as curate, and made topographical paintings as well as portraits, with ‘his enthusiasm for the history and architecture, the characters and community of a place was a lifelong passion’.⁷⁴ Fisk’s Hay Festival map depicts the landscape through an artist’s eye, a shift from the amateur-drawn maps of the previous years. The architecture of the town is represented by Fisk’s sketches of festival venues, with tents and flagpoles depicting the single temporary structure of the festival theatre.⁷⁵

⁷³ Speaker 9, , Focus group 2, interview by Ellen Addis and Jennifer Tegg, May 27, 2023, Hay Festival, Hay-on-Wye.

⁷⁴ ‘About,’ Eugene Fisk, accessed April 5, 2023, <http://www.eugenefisk.co.uk/pages/about....php>.

⁷⁵ Hay Festival programme, 1991, Add MS 89482/4/32, 23.

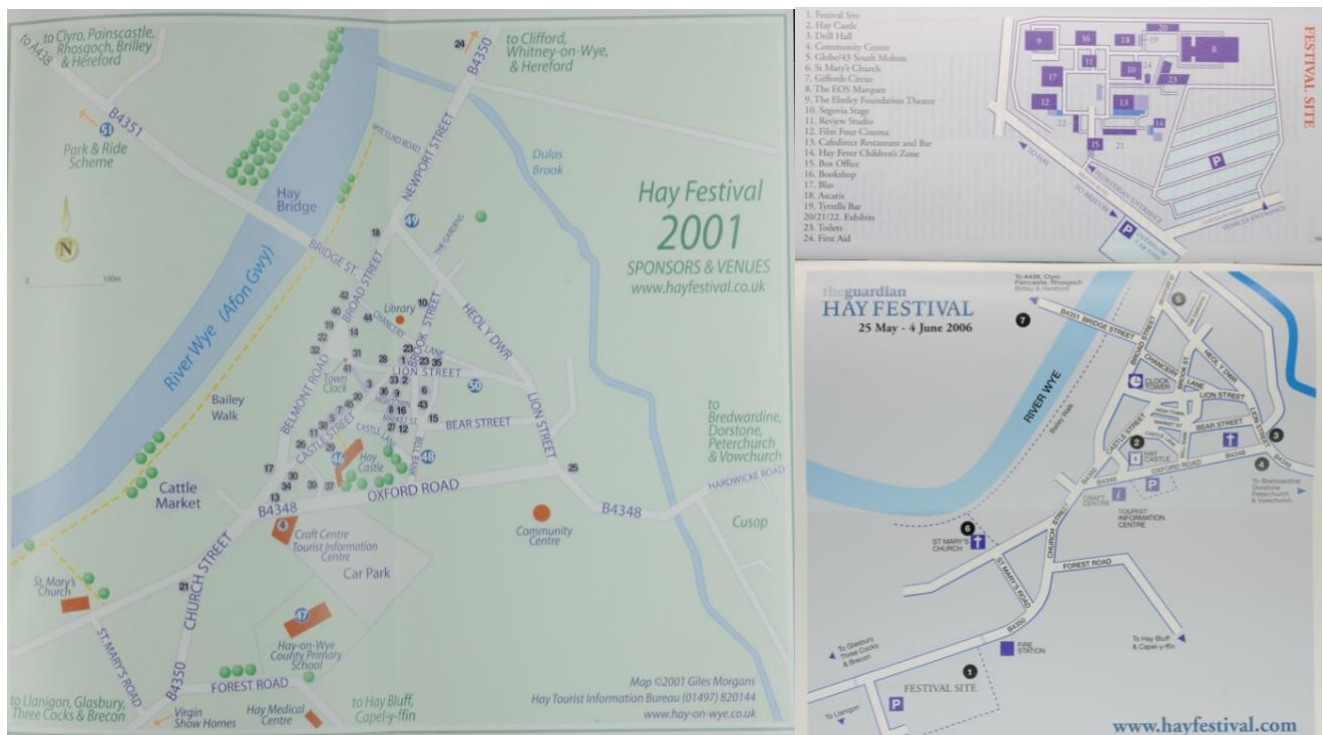


Figure 13: Eugene Fisk's Hay Festival programme map, 1991, Add MS 89482/4/32, 23. © Hay Festival.

At Fisk's hand, the town becomes artistically reimaged and remapped, while showing the fusing of festival with town. Transcribing artistry onto map-making with hand-drawn typeface, illustrations of festival venues in town, and representations of the natural world through the sketch of the River Wye bordering Hay-on-Wye, Fisk's map characterises the creativity of the festival.

By the early 2000s, the Hay Festival programme maps had become more plainly informational and professional, signposting the wider professionalisation of the festival itself. Absent are the hand-drawn, artistic renderings of the landscape. In their place are simple, logistical maps with scales, computer-generated by the Hay Tourist Information Bureau and Ordnance Survey. In the 2000s, the arrows to roads outside of town gestured to local borderland towns — Clifford, Whitney-on-Wye, Clyro, Painscastle, Hay Bluff, Glasbury, and Capel-y-ffin — returning Hay Festival to its local surroundings, perhaps in an attempt to root itself after its exponential growth in the late 1990s and provide an anchor for the festival site amongst the borderlands after it changed location from town to the 'tented village' in the

countryside four times between 2000 and 2006.⁷⁶ Since 2005, Hay Festival has provided two maps in its programme: one of the festival site, with each venue marked, and another map of Hay-on-Wye in the Ordnance Survey style with tourist information marked clearly, showing a distinct separation between the two.



‘a really difficult place to physically get to’ and the journey to the town ‘generally involves Figures 14 and 15: Hay Festival maps, 2001 and 2006, Add MS 89482/4/35 and Add MS 89482/4/33. © Hay Festival.

being stuck behind a tractor for forty-five minutes’.⁷⁷ To visit Hay Festival requires audiences to either live locally, have access to a car or be able to pay for public transport and a taxi to the festival. The Hay Festival audiences have differing opinions on the difficulty of this journey. While for some the journey is a barrier – shown by one festivalgoer’s remark that ‘it’s not the easiest cause it’s all windy roads, it’s a problem with where Hay is situated but we can’t change that’ – for others, it makes the festival what it is, with one audience member

⁷⁶ Hay Festival programme, 2006, Add MS 89482/4/33, 99; Adrian Lambert, interview by Ellen Addis, Zoom, August 12, 2021.

⁷⁷ Peter Florence, quoted in Eliza Williams, ‘Inside the Hay Festival Experience,’ *Creative Review* (London), February 11, 2019, <https://www.creativereview.co.uk/inside-the-hay-festival-experience/>.

⁷⁸ Adrian Lambert, interview by Ellen Addis, Zoom, August 12, 2021.

commenting that ‘the journey for us, it’s part of it. It’s so beautiful that I don’t need to worry about anything else right now’.⁷⁹ The split between the festival site and the town also makes it difficult for festival audiences and authors to visit the town and the surrounding landscape, as the walk to town entails navigating narrow paths and busy traffic to reach it. The remoteness also requires those from elsewhere to stay near the festival site and stay a few days, with accommodation prices during the festival ranging between £100 and £300 a night, often selling out a year in advance, something that audience members show some frustration to, commenting that ‘it’s hard to find accommodation’ and ‘[i]f you don’t know the festival, it’s really hard because you don’t know what to expect,’ though this contributes to the ‘overall experience’ and exclusivity of the festival.⁸⁰

However, Hay Festival chooses to see the festival’s inaccessibility optimistically.

Lambert describes the difficult journey to Hay Festival as a large positive for audiences:

Because you have to buy into it, you have to come, you’re not in a big city, you’re not in the middle or Edinburgh or Cheltenham or London necessarily, it’s something you’ve had to invest time in to do, and it has a very dedicated and committed audience who absolutely adore doing that.⁸¹

Its remoteness from cultural, urban centres allows the festival to build an identity for themselves through the sense of place: the landscape, town, literature, and history, with very little other intruders. Unlike a city which ‘has lots of other things to offer,’ according to Kerr, a festival in a rural location is ‘not competing to the same extent with pre-existing alternatives, so it gives you a bit more opportunity to impose a personality on it’.⁸² Lambert uses the example of Hay Festival as a microcosm for culture, as authors are ‘all in the same place, stuck in a field ... there’s something about being in that place that is a huge part of

⁷⁹ Speaker 5, Focus group 4, interview by Ellen Addis, June 2, 2023, Hay Festival, Hay-on-Wye; Speaker 2, Focus group 4, interview by Ellen Addis, June 2, 2023, Hay Festival, Hay-on-Wye.

⁸⁰ Speaker 12, Focus group 3, interview by Ellen Addis and Jennifer Tegg, May 28, 2023, Hay Festival, Hay-on-Wye.

⁸¹ Adrian Lambert, interview by Ellen Addis, Zoom, August 12, 2021.

⁸² Maggie Kerr, interview by Ellen Addis, Zoom, September 27, 2021.

what Hay [Festival] is: it is its identity and its location in the Brecon Beacons National Park'.⁸³ Similar to the artist community at Capel-y-ffin that Gill and Jones are associated with, the remoteness of Hay Festival offers a retreat in a rural community, bringing authors together in a concentrated space and time, authors usually programmed only in metropolitan centres to a minority of the population, where cultural opportunities are scarce.

Kilvert Walks at Hay: Pathfinding with Kilvert's Diary

In early March 1997, a letter arrives at the Hay Festival office. On the header of the letter is a detailed drawing of a country house and the tree-topped hills wavering behind it, the address in Hereford typed just below. The letter begins with a poem:

And will my feet now aged by time
Plod across Welsh borders green?
And will this part holy, land of God
At Festival time once more be seen?

Yes, my countenance a tenth time shall shine
Then the crowds so gathered there
For this man of extraordinary feet
Cannot yet accept defeat.⁸⁴

This letter is from David Lockwood, a clergyman who lived close to Clyro, vice-president of the Kilvert Society and biographer of Kilvert, to Peter Florence, accepting Florence's invitation to appear at Hay Festival and run the 'Kilvert Walks,' guided walks wherein Lockwood would lead festivalgoers across Kilvert Country. Lockwood's poem mimics William Blake's 1810 poem from 'Jerusalem' and its ode to the English pastoral. In his ode to Hay Festival, Lockwood invokes the festival as an unspoilt and idyllic event in the Welsh borders, and draws a contrast between Blake, a theist who opposed organised religion, and Kilvert, an Anglican clergyman, linking the two writers through their shared connection

⁸³ Adrian Lambert, interview by Ellen Addis, Zoom, August 12, 2021.

⁸⁴ David Lockwood to Peter Florence, March 3, 1997, Add MS 89482/1/17.

between rural landscapes and spirituality. In Kilvert's diary, the curate describes at various points how the vast views of the landscape that walking provides a form of worship for him and is a connection to God. When walking near Cusop Dingle on one afternoon in March 1871 and admiring the 'dazzling glittering snow' on the Black Mountains, Kilvert writes that his 'first involuntary thought' was to 'lift up the heart to God and humbly thank Him for having made the earth so beautiful'.⁸⁵ In his lecture at Hay Festival, Toman observed that for Kilvert, 'the beauty of the landscape was God-given,' and 'to walk through landscapes ... was a form of worship'.⁸⁶ Kilvert's personal and spiritual descriptions of the landscape depict the Wales-England borderlands as having an almost numinous quality, accessed by walking.

The most popular tourist activity in the border country is walking, with 34% of tourists in Herefordshire, 32% in Shropshire and 29% in Powys actively taking part in walks and hikes.⁸⁷ Capitalising upon this interest and directly tying it to the literary inheritance of the area, Hay Festival programmed events and guided walks inspired by Kilvert, directly creating a connection between the diarist, the landscape he wrote about, and the festival. In 1990, Hay Festival hosted 'a launch lunch' for Lockwood's biography of Kilvert.⁸⁸ Beginning the same year, the Kilvert Walks ran from 1990 and took participants around Kilvert Country, led by Lockwood, with walkers told that '[w]alking boots or stout shoes are essential'.⁸⁹ The festival in 1990 describes the Kilvert Walk as '[a] breath of fresh air ... as David Lockwood leads an invigorating walk, reading from the diaries on one of Kilvert's favourite routes, above Clyro'.⁹⁰ The 1997 Kilvert Walk is a 'six-mile walk along one of the Curate's favourite

⁸⁵ Kilvert, *Kilvert's Diary*, 149.

⁸⁶ Toman, 'Kilvert's Diary and Landscape,' *Hay Festival*.

⁸⁷ Wales Tourist Board 1999 and Heart of England Tourist Board 2000, quoted in Brian Ilbery, Gunjan Saxena, and Moya Kneafsey, 'Exploring Tourists and Gatekeepers' Attitudes Towards Integrated Rural Tourism in the England-Wales Border Region,' *Tourism Geographies* 9, no. 4 (2007), <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616680701647667>.

⁸⁸ Hay Festival programme, 1990, Add MS 89482/4/32.

⁸⁹ Hay Festival programme, 1994, Add MS 89482/4/32.

⁹⁰ Hay Festival programme, 1990, Add MS 89482/4/32.

routes in the Gospel Pass,' with Lockwood reading from the Kilvert's diary as he walked.⁹¹ These walks, unique from other events at Hay Festival at the time which typically consisted of 'in conversation'-style events between authors and an interviewer, take festivalgoers out into the border landscape, to map the area and reference a literary community of border writers.

Literally tracing Kilvert's footsteps, the Kilvert Walks bound literature to landscape, enabling festivalgoers' interaction with the landscape to be experienced via the curate while Lockwood read from passages of the diary. Jon Anderson argues that reading texts in the places that they are set in can 'help us tell a new truth about the relations between people and place' and 'we can locate our own lives, finding new meanings which resonate with our own experiences and broaden our horizons'.⁹² In a similar way, by featuring events about literary texts set in the same landscape as a literature festival, Hay Festival gestures outwards to the borderlands and creates new possibilities for literature to be read within the place. In turn, this broadens the reader's ability to find new meanings by resonating with their own embodied experience of the place coupled with the text, informing one's perspective the festival and the text, as well as the landscape and the place itself. Today, the descendent of the Kilvert Walks is the festival's 'Wayfaring Walk' with Bannau Brycheiniog National Park Guides. Instead of exploring the landscape through the prism of Kilvert's diary and his detailed paths, the Wayfaring Walk is simply about the local environment, and is described as offering participants 'the opportunity to learn more about the Park's work and its treasured landscape'.⁹³ Despite the lack of literature in these recent guided walks, Hay Festival still takes the audience into the countryside and landscape, away from the festival site to map the border landscape.

⁹¹ Hay Festival programme, 1997, Add MS 89482/4/32, 6.

⁹² Jon Anderson, *Page and Place: Ongoing Compositions of Plot* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2014), 314.

⁹³ Wayne Lewis and Rhys Guevara, 'Wayfaring Walk with National Park Guides,' Hay Festival, May 24, 2024.

In October 1870, Kilvert reflected on his time in the border country, and wrote, ‘I believe I might wander about these hills all my life’.⁹⁴ Kilvert’s appreciation of the solitude, community, and beauty of the Welsh Marches have lived on in literature, and since 1939, his diary has not been out of print. Based in a rural location with poor accessibility and little infrastructure for cultural organisations, Hay Festival uses the literary inheritance of Kilvert’s diary to create its sense of place and its festival brand.⁹⁵ Hay Festival repeatedly references Kilvert to map itself onto the borderland landscape, making it synonymous Kilvert Country. By quoting Kilvert on the front cover of its first festival and programming dedicated Kilvert Walks for festivalgoers to explore the local countryside and retrace Kilvert’s steps, Hay Festival invokes Kilvert’s view that people and landscape were interdependent and part of the essence of the Wales-England borderland that he wrote about.

Raymond Williams’s *Border Country*

Hay-on-Wye, May 2008. On stage in a tent, Peter Florence stands at a podium. He has spent months preparing for this moment, and 200 other moments across eleven days. Florence begins to speak to the audience in the tent, discussing someone who, he says, ‘most affected my life’:

Without whom, none of us actually would be here. Who was one of the first people that suggested that a festival that was situated between his home in Pandy and my home in Clyro might work. He also suggested that one of the things that we might pay careful attention to was the weather. God bless you, Raymond Williams.⁹⁶

Florence introduces the cultural theorist Raymond Williams as a figure tied to Hay. Williams, who died in January 1988, four months before the first Hay Festival, was Florence’s tutor at

⁹⁴ Kilvert, *Kilvert’s Diary*, 111.

⁹⁵ Stewart, ‘The Culture of Contemporary Writers’ Festivals,’ 5.

⁹⁶ Peter Florence, ‘The 2008 Raymond Williams Lecture: Border Country,’ Hay Festival, Hay-on-Wye, May 26, 2008.

Jesus College Cambridge and through conversation during this time about the possibility of a literary festival, their shared homes in the borderlands became a core inspiration. From Hay Festival's beginning, place and Williams were integral.

The deep-rooted connection between Williams and Hay Festival led to the creation of the Raymond Williams Lecture, an annual lecture given by a literary critic, writer, or politician at every Hay Festival since its beginning to honour Williams and explore the continuing relevance of his work. Introducing former prime minister Gordon Brown in 2021, Hugh Muir calls the Raymond Williams Lecture 'a landmark of our festival'.⁹⁷ The lecture evokes the debt that Hay Festival pays to Williams for not simply the idea of the festival, but also Williams's influence on the conception of the border landscape and provides a space for Hay Festival to map itself onto the works of Williams through new thinkers. Some of the lecturers approach the topic broadly, such as Greer in 1996, who focused on 'tradition and female talent,' only alluding to Williams at the beginning of her lecture stating, 'I only hope that he [Williams] takes from wherever he is now a benign look at my attempts to tell the truth about a rather difficult situation'.⁹⁸ For others, Williams is the focal point of their lectures, as in John Mullan's discussion of Williams as his teacher and colleague at the University of Cambridge, and the influence of Williams's seminal *The Country and the City* (1973) on his work, a text which I will return to. The recurrence of the Raymond Williams Lecture makes Williams himself a constant figure at Hay Festival, despite never attending.

In this section, I focus principally on the industrial and agricultural histories of the borderland through Williams's debut novel, *Border Country* and the festival's Raymond Williams Lecture. I seek to show that the festival works to align itself with the figure of Williams as a scholar of the New Left with his interest in mental and manual work in

⁹⁷ Hugh Muir, 'The Raymond Williams Lecture: Seven Ways to Change the World,' Hay Festival, Hay-on-Wye, June 6, 2021.

⁹⁸ Germaine Greer, 'The Raymond Williams Lecture: Tradition and Female Talent,' Hay Festival, Hay-on-Wye, May 26, 1996.

conjunction with rural life and the work of cultural organisations, though the festival does not foreground the history of agriculture and industrial labour at work in the borderlands as Williams does. I emphasise the significance of the relationship between Williams and Hay Festival both focusing on working away from urban centres, as shown in *The Country and the City*. As Giorgi writes, ‘in adopting Williams as a thinker, Hay Festival attempts to show, like Williams, that cultural and literary life is not concentrated in the capital, London’.⁹⁹ Ultimately, the presence of Williams at Hay Festival represents the different ways that the borderland has been mapped by Hay Festival, demonstrating how the different types of landscape and inhabitation are made or narrated.¹⁰⁰

Crossing and re-crossing boundaries in Border Country

In *Border Country*, Williams portrays the ‘two different worlds’ of Wales and England, and how lines on a map such as the Wales-England border, though geologically, geographically, and historically constructed, can impart a boundary and limitation upon communities and relationships.¹⁰¹ The novel follows two timelines. The first is set in the 1950s as Matthew Price, an academic researching population movement in the industrialising valleys of South Wales in the nineteenth century, returns home from London to visit his dying father. The other timeline follows his father, Harry, as he settles in Glynmawr with his wife Ellen, working as a railway signalman in the 1920s and raising Matthew who then leaves home for university in Cambridge. The novel mirrors parts of Williams’s own life: the fictional

⁹⁹ Giorgi, ‘Between Tradition, Vision and Imagination,’ 37-38.

¹⁰⁰ Literary cartographers have recently created interactive maps inspired by a selection of English-language novels in Wales, including Williams’s *Border Country*, using artists’ interpretations and digital mapping tools to map the areas explored in the books as part of the AHRC-funded ‘Literary Atlas of Wales’ project. For more, see: Literary Atlas of Wales, accessed March 30, 2023, <http://www.literaryatlas.wales/en/>; Kieron Smith, Jon Anderson and Jeffrey Morgan, ‘Literary Atlas: A Digital Resource for Creative Tourism in Wales,’ in *Creative Tourism in Smaller Communities: Place, Culture, and Local Representation*, ed. Kathleen Scherf. Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2021. For the *Border Country* maps, see: <http://www.literaryatlas.wales/en/novels/border-country/>.

¹⁰¹ Williams, *Border Country*, 286.

Glynmawr is based on Pandy, the border village where Williams grew up, just sixteen miles south of Hay-on-Wye; Williams's father, like Matthew's, was a railway signalman; and Williams also left home on a scholarship to the University of Cambridge.

Borders and their traversal in *Border Country* form the focus of Williams's Dai Smith's Raymond Williams Lecture at Hay Festival in 2008. Smith places the novel firmly within 'the countryside around us' in Hay-on-Wye.¹⁰² He provides a history of the area through the cultural change that came with the advent of the railway connecting Pandy and the close-by Abergavenny to Merthyr Tydfil and the industry of ironworks and coalmining. In the novel, the border crossed signifies a new way of life and a new path for Matthew and his family, one which he only crosses back over once his father is dying, and he reflects upon his initial leaving. In giving a lecture about *Border Country* and Williams's conception of the Wales-England border at a literary festival set exactly on this border, Smith takes part in the new kind of cultural change that Hay Festival has brought to the borderlands.

In *Border Country*, the fictional Glynmawr is situated close to border, so much so that '[i]n Wales, on Sundays, none of the pubs were open, but only three miles away, where the border river curved in towards the village, lay England, and just across the bridge was the Silver Fox'.¹⁰³ Similarly, Hay Festival inhabits an unusual, bifurcated geography, as the Wales-England border 'goes right through the middle of the town'.¹⁰⁴ Crossing the border between England and Wales in *Border Country* does not necessarily mean entrance into a different world, but it is used by Williams to show a traversal and a change, sometimes symbolically – as when Matthew leaves home, Williams describes how taking the train to university, Matthew 'saw the river coming back to him, and then suddenly it was under the line, and away on the other side, and the border was crossed' – or with levity, such as the

¹⁰² Dai Smith, 'The 2008 Raymond Williams Lecture: Border Country,' Hay Festival, Hay-on-Wye, May 26, 2008.

¹⁰³ Williams, *Border Country*, 207.

¹⁰⁴ Georgie Cooke, interview by Rebecca Roach, Zoom, September 28, 2021

disparate customs of pubs in each country which signal the separate character of the two countries.¹⁰⁵

Referring to Matthew's departure from Wales, Smith reflects in his Raymond Williams Lecture that 'borders, [Williams] often asserted, whether of the mind or the map, are permanent and must be permanently crossed and recrossed, since you went out for knowledge, but you also came back'.¹⁰⁶ In his foreword to the Library of Wales's 2021 republication of *Border Country*, Smith calls it a novel 'about Welsh people set in Wales' where 'its Welsh character is more locally rooted than nationally defined'.¹⁰⁷ This local rooting results in the novel gesturing spatially outwards – regionally to the mining areas, nationally to the government during the 1926 General Strike, and to London, where Matthew lives in the present timeline. Hay Festival too is rooted locally, attaching itself to its border identity rather than any strong national identities, but it also gestures spatially outwards through its temporary, impermanent tented village, taking root each May, attracting visitors from all over the world, and its international network of festivals. Perched on the border, Hay Festival represents a place for the lines to be 'permanently crossed and recrossed,' a space for searching for knowledge, reflecting the borders in Williams's novel.¹⁰⁸

For Williams, the landscape defines the area. The constantly redrawn and annexed borders between England and different regions within Wales join anomalous regions and separate analogous areas, marking the borderline as indeterminate, so much so that Williams concludes that '[w]ithin the Black Mountains, these lines on the map mean nothing'.¹⁰⁹ He writes that in the borderland area:

¹⁰⁵ Williams, *Border Country*, 292-293. The Sunday Closing (Wales) Act of 1881 required all pubs in Wales to close on Sundays but was not repealed until 1961. It was seen as an important step to detach Wales from the Anglican church (Neil Prior, '130 Years since Sunday Drinking Was Banned in Wales,' *BBC News*, August 4, 2011, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-14136013>).

¹⁰⁶ Smith, 'The 2008 Raymond Williams Lecture: Border Country,' Hay Festival.

¹⁰⁷ Dai Smith, foreword to *Border Country* by Raymond Williams (1960; reis., Cardigan: The Library of Wales, 2021), x.

¹⁰⁸ Smith, 'The 2008 Raymond Williams Lecture: Border Country,' Hay Festival.

¹⁰⁹ Williams, *Who Speaks for Wales? Nation, Culture, Identity*, 147.

You only have to stand there to see an unusually distinct and specific region ... An old internal organisation, in the region's old activity, still visibly holds. Later, of course, the externally drawn lines and their consequences arrive, administratively in the post. They are usually bills.¹¹⁰

The tension between administrative boundaries, cultural history, and work, or 'the region's old activity,' is marked on the landscape through the agricultural fields and slag heaps. In a similar way, Hay Festival leaves a mark on the map of the borderland, not only in the tented village it erects each May, but in its shaping of the cultural history of the landscape through the festival itself and its evoking of the region's literary inheritance. In *Border Country* and Williams's work, crossing class divisions and borders enable new possibilities and change as the novel recognises the polysemy of these borders and their meanings to foster a common existence.

Industrial and agricultural labour in the borderlands

Hay Festival uses Williams as a representative cultural figure from the Welsh Marches to generate tourism to the area and to the festival. In doing so, the festival obfuscates the traditional labour and working culture of the Black Mountains. However, the Raymond Williams Lecture offers an opportunity to further explore this labour. For example, the filmmaker Ken Loach frames his 2017 lecture explicitly through Williams' writing on labour. Loach credits Williams as a 'very significant figure' to his own work and his influence in highlighting the 'conflict of interests that is inexorable, inevitable, permanent as long as we have this economic framework' between 'those who own and control finance, capital, business, and those that by-and-large get wages and rely on wages for their income'.¹¹¹ This split between capitalists and the working class is reflective of Williams's work in his

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 147.

¹¹¹ Ken Loach, 'The 2017 Raymond Williams Lecture,' Hay Festival, Hay-on-Wye, June 4, 2017.

bestselling book, *Culture and Society: 1780–1950* (1960). In *Culture and Society*, Williams argues that the ‘new idea of culture’ is ‘the court of appeal in which real values are determined, usually in opposition to the “factitious” values thrown up by the market’.¹¹² Loach applies this sardonically to Hay Festival by explicitly referencing the festival’s own position balanced between culture and commerce and the festival’s historically controversial commercial sponsor: ‘I’m in the tent of Tata so I guess there are a few questions there’.¹¹³ As a global conglomerate using Llanwern steelworks in Newport, just fifty-five miles south of Hay, for its industrial labour and materials, the Tata Steel sponsorship of Hay Festival emphasises the glocal connections present at the festival. Hay Festival, buoyed by commercial sponsorships that use materials and labour from the local area, and the capitalisation of regional economies such as the book town, turn the rural borderland region into a tourist destination commodifying cultural identities and, in turn, are ‘conjoining literature to cultural heritage, the creative industries and political ideology’.¹¹⁴ In benefiting from and extending the regional economy of Hay-on-Wye, Hay Festival maps the borderland as an explicitly literary place, though the history and contemporary agricultural and industrial labour of the landscape is lost and not emphasised in the cultural work of the festival.

In *Border Country*, the labour of the borderlands area is implicitly inscribed onto the landscape. Reminiscent of Williams’s view that landlines on maps ‘mean nothing,’ in the novel, Matthew stands on the mountains looking over his village and surveys the area before leaving home for university. He notices the differing geologies of the landscape changed by both industry and agriculture:

Look out, not east, but south and west, and there, visibly, was another history and another border. There was the limestone scarp where the hills were quarried and burrowed. There along the outcrop stood a frontier invisible on the surface, between the rich and the barren rocks. On the near side the valleys were green and wooded, but

¹¹² Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society: 1780 – 1950* (1958 reis., New York: Anchor, 1960), 37.

¹¹³ Loach, ‘The 2017 Raymond Williams Lecture,’ Hay Festival.

¹¹⁴ Finkelstein and Squires, 677-678.

beyond that line they had blackened with pits and slagheaps and mean grey terraces. It seemed only an accident of the hidden rocks, but there, visibly, were two different worlds.¹¹⁵

Williams describes the Black Mountains and their surrounding areas as defined by a variety of borders, splitting the land ‘visibly’ and ‘on the surface’ by the different terrains and dichotomies: between England and Wales, industry and agriculture, what is seen and unseen, woods and pits, hills and valleys, rich and barren rocks. Williams performs a type of ‘earth writing,’ showing the relationship between literature and the physical environment.¹¹⁶ He excavates the country’s history that is etched onto the landscape to unearth hidden pasts and places, showing that the history of the place and the landscape is inscribed by people and the remnants of the past that are left behind. Matthew reads history from the landscape and sees that the earth’s matter upon which Glynmawr and other towns in the borders are built is historically rich. Mapped onto the land, the natural sedimentary origin of limestone, the woodland, and the fields form the materials which sustain the rural communities through time. By wedding the rural landscape to that of both agricultural and industrial labour – the land is at once felled and mined, while also ploughed and grazed upon – Williams depicts landscape as reflective of the geological history and work of the border country.

This joining of both industrial and agricultural work forms a large focus of Williams’s oeuvre, including *The Country and the City* which scrutinises the perceived contrast between

¹¹⁵ Williams, *Border Country*, 285-286.

¹¹⁶ I use ‘earth writing’ here as Philipp Erchinger defines it as a direct translation of ‘geo-graphy’ and to mean the integration of ‘the material presence of the earth with the activity of making it into meaningful text,’ or, the ways or writing about the earth (Philipp Erchinger, ‘Introduction: Earth Writing,’ *Philological Quarterly* 97, no. 2 (2018): 125, <https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/introduction-earth-writing/docview/2099390434/se-2>). Though he died before the term became popularised, Williams’s ideas have also been described as ‘germane’ to the ‘aims and principles’ of ecocriticism – defined broadly as the ‘an earth-centred approach to literary studies’ (Michael Malay, ‘Raymond Williams and Ecocriticism,’ *Key Words: A Journal of Cultural Materialism*, no. 12 (2014): 12, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26920360>; Cheryl Glotfelty, ‘Introduction: Literary Studies in an Age of Environmental Crisis,’ in *The Ecocriticism Reader*, eds. Cheryl Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996), xviii.). For more, see Dominic Head, ‘Raymond Williams and Ecocriticism,’ *Green Letters* 1, no.1 (2000): 7–9, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14688417.2000.10588961>.

rural and urban life in Britain through a guided tour of 400 years of literature. *The Country and the City* historically and critically traces how this divide came to be despite the transformation of the countryside through the Industrial Revolution and the development of capitalism and is a useful text to look at to understand Hay Festival's own relationship with both country and the city – as a rural festival in a peripheral location that attracts those from urban centres to attend and speak at its event. Williams's social historical perspective rejects the classic generalisations and dualistic view of the country as the 'natural way of life: of peace, innocence, and simple virtue' and also a place of 'backwardness, ignorance, limitation,' whereas the city is 'an achieved centre: of learning, communication light' as well as a place of 'noise, worldliness, and ambition'.¹¹⁷ Dominic Head calls *The Country and the City* 'a masterpiece of ecocriticism *avant la lettre*,' as Williams 'insists on the economic and social interdependence of the urban and the rural'.¹¹⁸ Hay Festival, in its co-opting of Williams as a cultural stalwart at the festival and its identity as a rural festival that programmes events most likely to be seen at a metropolitan festival, showcases the complexities found in *The Country and the City*.

In his 2005 Raymond Williams Lecture at Hay Festival, Mullan argues that *The Country and the City* represents a striking attempt 'to make social history out of English literature without actually doing what everybody else would do which would be to reduce English literature to social history'.¹¹⁹ However, while in Mullan's Hay Festival lecture he calls the text the most important of Williams's, much work is also being done to reassess it.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ Williams, *The Country and the City*, 1.

¹¹⁸ Head, 'Raymond Williams and Ecocriticism,' 7.

¹¹⁹ John Mullan, 'The Raymond Williams Lecture 2005: Criticism and the Common Reader,' Hay Festival, Hay-on-Wye, May 29, 2005.

¹²⁰ Ibid. Revision in Williams's work is frequent and occurs through the various editions of his texts, most clearly seen in *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. Originally published in 1976, *Keywords* derived from the lengthy appendix of definitions from *Culture and Society* and looked at the cultural and historical changes to 109 'keywords'. Fontana published the revised and expanded second edition of *Keywords* in 1983, wherein Williams added 21 new keywords, including the word 'ecology' meaning 'a central concern with

Since 1973, the context that Williams discusses in the text has changed. Gerald MacLean, Donna Landry, and Joseph P. Ward revisit *The Country and the City* in 1999 and note that the contemporary rise of interdisciplinary work and the expansion of the English literary canon to include the writing of women and racial and ethnic minorities ‘make a project like Williams’s largely unthinkable today’ in its singular focus on literary history ‘specifically within the Cambridge English curriculum,’ though they concede the text is ‘a necessary starting point for any investigation of the politics of place in the formation of English cultural identity’.¹²¹ In his lecture, Mullan echoes this criticism, calling the text ‘an extraordinary audacious attempt, he would never have done it if he’d paid attention to what other academics said’.¹²² Mullan describes Williams as having an ‘intellectual loneliness’ and ‘separateness’ especially detached from literary theory and the structuralist and poststructuralist debates in the 1960s, divulging that his colleagues at Cambridge even used the euphemism ‘Raymond’s in Wales’ to describe this separateness from the university.¹²³ The Raymond Williams Lecture at Hay Festival attempts to bridge this gap typified by Williams as separate from the academy – often with academics such as Mullan giving the lecture to create the ‘campus environment’ of the festival, wherein for audience members the festival then feels ‘like a week of being at university lecturers again that you enjoy’.¹²⁴

The role of the university is further represented in *Border Country* through Matthew’s job as an academic social historian, one example of the different types of labour shown in the

human relations to the physical world as the necessary basis for social and economic policy’ (Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, 2nd edition (Fontana, 1983), 111.) In 2005, seventeen years after Williams’s death, Blackwell Publishing published *New Keywords: A Revised Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, eds. Tony Bennett, Lawrence Grossberg and Meaghan Morris. This new revision with new contributors offered new discussions of Williams’s keywords that had developed over the thirty years since the first edition was published, adding new keywords, and deleted those of Williams’s keywords that ‘we feel have not sustained their importance’ (Bennett, Grossberg, and Morris, ‘Introduction,’ *New Keywords: A Revised Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), xviii).

¹²¹ Gerald MacLean, Donna Landry, and Joseph P. Ward, *The Country and the City Revisited: England and the Politics of Culture, 1550 – 1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 3, 1.

¹²² Mullan, ‘The Raymond Williams Lecture 2005,’ Hay Festival.

¹²³ Mullan, ‘The Raymond Williams Lecture 2005,’ Hay Festival.

¹²⁴ Speaker 5, Focus group 4, interview by Ellen Addis, June 2, 2023, Hay Festival, Hay-on-Wye.

novel. Simon Dentith writes that *Border Country* ‘carries with it the classical ambition of realism: the painstaking record of ordinary lives,’ a topic that Williams would go on to explore in his chapter ‘Realism and the Contemporary Novel’ from *The Long Revolution* (1961), published just a year after the novel.¹²⁵ In *Border Country*, realism and the themes of work and labour that are later explored in *The Country and the City* provide a historical frame for the change from manual labour to entrepreneurship and the rejection of divisions between mental and manual labour. For example, Harry’s work on the railway has various symbolic nodes – crossing borders, communication, networks, industrialisation, socialisation. Outside of work, Harry also owns land to grow vegetables and keep bees, and helps his friend, the farmer Edwin Parry, with his work on the mountains. Harry is split between two forms of work, one concerning transportation and crossing borders, the other with tending to the land, defining him as a character with doubleness and rejecting division. Reflecting upon his father’s life, Matthew describes Harry’s working life as having ‘done new work, but his centre’s been here, with his bees in his garden’.¹²⁶ This ‘new work’ of the railway is the effect of industrialisation, but his ‘centre,’ his core and the crux or purpose of Harry’s life, according to Matthew, lies within the landscape and working with it to cultivate a lifecycle. Having two forms of networks, the railway and agriculture, both mental and manual labour, one for money and the other for pleasure and fulfilment, dissolves a boundary imposed by the capitalist society that Williams describes in *The Country and the City*. *Border Country* shows through fiction the altering networks between country and city, places and communities, and intermediate jobs and settlements in action.¹²⁷

¹²⁵ Simon Dentith, ‘Border Country: Then and Now,’ *Key Words: A Journal of Cultural Materialism* 9 (2011): 61-62, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26920292>.

¹²⁶ Williams, *Border Country*, 279.

¹²⁷ Williams, *The Country and the City*, 5.

In a contemporary context, Hay Festival could be said to be an example of this ‘new work’ in rural environments. Hay Festival is part of what Paddy Bullard in his introduction to *A History of English Georgic Writing* calls ‘rural cultural services’.¹²⁸ Bullard argues that the ‘inverted proportions between the economic power of British farming and the cultural power of ruralism’ detected by Williams’s *The Country and the City* in 1973 ‘has become even more pronounced in recent decades’.¹²⁹ With National Trust membership rising to almost six million in 2020 from 226,200 in 1970 and the growing number of popular rural ‘New Nature Writing’ books, ‘country-facing culture has boomed’ while the agricultural sector shrinks and its position in the economy looks increasingly marginal.¹³⁰ UK farming is valued at £4.1 billion, 10% of the £48 billion impact that UK domestic tourism has on the UK economy.¹³¹ Hay Festival, as a cultural festival based within an agricultural community in the Wales-England borderlands, has outgrown its label as a small, rural community arts festival and is now globally successful. Tensions arise from those rural cultural services which take over an area or become, as Hay Festival has, synonymous with a location. The question then becomes: how much do rural cultural organisations provide to the area, and how much do they take away?

As the head of production at Hay Festival, Georgie Cooke explains the realities of holding a successful festival in a rural and traditionally agricultural community. Hosting the festival in the countryside around Hay-on-Wye disrupts the farmer’s calendar, animals have to be taken out of the field six weeks prior, during, and a week after the festival, taking away a ‘big chunk of [the farmer’s] yearly grazing times’.¹³² Cooke discusses Hay Festival’s collaboration with local farmers, mainly ‘trying to keep them happy that we’re wanting to use

¹²⁸ Paddy Bullard, ‘Introduction: A Survey of English Georgic Writing, 1521–2021,’ *A History of English Georgic Writing*, ed. Paddy Bullard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 23.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹³² *Ibid.*

that land,' especially during the grazing period which forms 'a huge part of their income'.¹³³ She recognises that in 'wanting to use every field we can in the surrounding area,' Hay Festival has a substantial impact on the local agricultural community and work, disrupting calendars and reducing income.¹³⁴ However, this loss of income is justified by the festival by the income that it can produce through rural tourism and a new form of cultural work providing employment for the local people.

Hay Festival and rural tourism

Hay Festival represents the cultural labour that takes place in the rural borderlands, and in order to attract visitors away from cultural urban epicentres, it relies upon tourism and marketing the 'beautiful setting' of the Welsh Marches area to be successful.¹³⁵ The festival encourages its visitors to have a particular relationship to the place, shot through the conception of 'landscape'. Landscape is what Tim Cresswell calls 'an intensely visual idea'.¹³⁶ Cresswell uses the example of *Border Country* and Matthew's return to the Welsh borders to argue that it is only in existing within a landscape that it becomes a lived and felt 'place'.¹³⁷ After leaving home, Matthew notices that '[t]he visitor sees beauty ... as the guide-book sees it,' while 'the inhabitant [sees] a place where he works and has his friends'.¹³⁸ Upon return from London to 'his only landscape,' his home, Matthew realises he has become this 'visitor' seeing the 'valley as landscape' where 'its work [is] forgotten'.¹³⁹ As Matthew spends more time in Glynmawr visiting his sick father, he slips back into the rhythms of rural life and the movements of work, recognising that the land 'was not still, as the image had

¹³³ Georgie Cooke, interview by Rebecca Roach, Zoom, September 28, 2021

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Hay Festival 1997 programme, Add MS 89482/4/32.

¹³⁶ Tim Cresswell, *Place: A Short Introduction* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2004), 17.

¹³⁷ Cresswell, *Place*, 17.

¹³⁸ Williams, *Border Country*, 71.

¹³⁹ Williams, *Border Country*, 71.

been. It was no longer a landscape or view, but a valley that people were using,' and that '[t]his was not anybody's valley to make into a landscape'.¹⁴⁰ Williams therefore maps the landscape surrounding Glynmawr and the borderland through the various types of labour.

The polarity between how a visitor and a local see the same landscape is represented through Hay Festival's various festival programmes throughout the years. These programmes describe the borderland landscape often in a touristic manner, or as Williams says, as 'the guide-book sees it,' engaging in the long tradition of literary tourism.¹⁴¹ In early Hay Festival programmes, the border country is described from the viewpoint of those who want to promote it to the outside world, shown in Norman Florence's letter in the first programme laying out the aim to 'celebrate the history, culture, and language of the people of the border country'.¹⁴² However, by 1994, there is a shift emphasising the area as a tourist destination. The programme describes the festival's location 'at the foot of the Black Mountains' as 'the perfect setting for an easy and relaxed holiday,' while the 1997 programme entices visitors 'to savour a holiday in the most beautiful setting in the world'.¹⁴³

Only in the 2001 programme is the agricultural work of the area explicitly mentioned. It comes in reference to the Foot and Mouth disease that year which 'has threatened our community'.¹⁴⁴ As a consequence of the epidemic, Hay Festival moved the festival back into the town centre from the farmer's fields, where it stayed for the next four years before moving back, citing the 'local business community' and the 'local economy' as key factors in continuing with the event.¹⁴⁵ The Foot and Mouth epidemic and the festival's response shows the rural realities of hosting a festival in an agricultural community, while also raising the important question about what type of labour is involved with working at a rural cultural

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Norman Florence, Hay Festival programme, 1988, Add MS 89482/4/32, 1.

¹⁴³ Hay Festival 1994 programme, Add MS 89482/4/32; Hay Festival 1997 programme, Add MS 89482/4/32.

¹⁴⁴ Hay Festival 2001 programme, Add MS 89482/4/35.

¹⁴⁵ Clare Purcell to John Williams, 10 September 2001, Add MS 89482/1/298.

organisation. By 2008, the rural community and landscape becomes vaguer in Hay Festival's programme descriptions, marking a deeper focus on global concerns following the festival's international expansion. The programme calls the twenty-first festival:

A chance to mature our commitment to being local and global, to champion great creative writing in all media, to respect the blessing of this staggeringly beautiful natural environment, to deepen our engagement with the most passionately held beliefs that fuel conflict around the world, and to throw ourselves headlong into the pursuit of a really good time.¹⁴⁶

In 2013, the festival description is even more abstract ('a bunch of friends hanging out in a field') and by 2016, Hay Festival is set in 'this magical town, in these spectacular and beautiful mountains'.¹⁴⁷ The different conceptions of the place as both within a town and within the wilderness and mountains portrays the split sense of self of Hay Festival in attracting a primarily urban audience, and it is this distinction that makes Hay Festival a destination festival. In comparison to other rural, destination festivals, Hay Festival has grown exponentially in size by promoting the border country as a tourist destination. For example, Ilkley Literature Festival has remained small in size since it began in 1973, attracting 14,000 attendees over two weeks to its festival, with 150 events dotted around the small Victorian spa town at the foot of Ilkley Moor in West Yorkshire.¹⁴⁸ By comparison, Hay Festival, since attracting national media coverage and sponsors in the 1990s and its international expansion in the 2000s, has become a festival that ten times the amount of people compared to Ilkley visit.

In a landmark essay, Williams argues for cultural growth in peripheral areas such as the border country as 'culture is ordinary, you should not have to go to London to find it'.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ Hay Festival 2008 programme, Add MS 89482/4/36.

¹⁴⁷ Hay Festival 2013 programme, Add MS 89482/4/39; Hay Festival 2016 programme, Add MS 89482/4/41.

¹⁴⁸ 'Ilkley Literature Festival,' Ilkley Literature Festival, accessed August 9, 2024, <https://www.ilkleyliteraturefestival.org.uk/>.

¹⁴⁹ Raymond Williams, 'Culture is Ordinary,' in *Raymond Williams on Culture and Society: Essential Writings*, ed. Jim McCuigan (London: SAGE Publications, 2014), 15.

Williams's understanding of culture as 'a whole way of life' shown in 'the special processes of discovery and creative effort,' also places culture, economics, and politics as existing in a 'complex interlocking'.¹⁵⁰ Hay Festival has put the town of Hay-on-Wye and the wider borderland region not only on the map of literary culture, but also economically. The cultural tourism of the book town and the book festival together is vital to the local economy; with its estimated £25 million of inwards investment supporting the area.¹⁵¹ Hay Festival has grown from 1,000 in its first year to host 150,000 visitors each year, changing the community into a tourist destination.¹⁵² In a 2007 article, Brian Ilbery, Gunjan Saxena, and Moya Kneafsey investigate the strategy of Integrated Rural Tourism (IRT), tourism explicitly linked to the economic, social, cultural, natural, and human structures of the locality, with a specific focus on the Wales-England border region.¹⁵³ They suggest that to combat the tourism issues in the Welsh borderlands such as the decline of Cymraeg and agricultural industries, the area must vigorously market itself as a distinct border region, mixing English and Welsh cultures: 'it's where England meets Wales. [Tourists will] be able to place it in their minds geographically'.¹⁵⁴ Festivals, such as Hay Festival, are a recognised way to achieve this.

However, Hay Festival does not only focus on attracting visitors to the area, but runs projects focused on the local community and the local environment. One such project is the Beacons Project which works directly with the landscape and local young people. Launched in 1993 in conjunction with the Bannau Brycheiniog National Park Authority, the Beacons Project aims to increase access to literature for young people in Wales and encourage creative writing 'about "a sense of place" in literature'.¹⁵⁵ The first Beacons Project discussed two set

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 3; Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 108.

¹⁵¹ Written evidence submitted by the Hay Festival, *The Future of UK Music Festivals*.

¹⁵² Charles Williams, 'Hay Festival, One of the World's Biggest and Best Literary Festivals.'

¹⁵³ Ilbery, Saxena, and Kneafsey, 'Exploring Tourists and Gatekeepers' Attitudes Towards Integrated Rural Tourism in the England-Wales Border Region,' 447.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, 455.

¹⁵⁵ Application to the BBC Wales Enabling Awards, 1994, Add MS 89482/1/3.

texts, Kilvert's diary and Chatwin's *On the Black Hill* 'and how the experience of this landscape was explored,' showing the inherent influence of the two writers on the festival's conception of the border landscape.¹⁵⁶ The project, still running today, hosts workshops for the students, providing them with the opportunity meet and work with professional writers, broadcasters, and journalists to develop their writing skills, and explore the National Park with farmers, geographers, and historians. The Beacons Project also extends Williams's passion for adult education. Williams promoted the concept of 'lifelong learning' and the critical skills that extramural education provided could work to create a democratic society through his work in adult education at the Extra-Mural Delegacy and Workers Education Association at Oxford University. Hay Festival answers Williams's call for extramural education by reaching out into the landscape through the Beacons Project to establish Hay-on-Wye and the surrounding Welsh Marches as new cultural epicentres.

Williams as a figure is deeply entwined with Hay Festival. *Border Country* is a particularly useful case study to understand Hay Festival's mapping of the borderlands as it is exceptionally rich in geographical and topographical detail of the landscape as well as its opening out of understandings of manual and mental labour. Though the placenames of the Williams's novel are fictionalised, the actual places are real and from Williams's childhood, shown in the copyright page that Williams wrote for the novel: 'I know this country, but the characters and events of the novel are imagined, and are not intended to describe actual persons and events'.¹⁵⁷ The protagonist's movement through the novel, his various crossings and re-crossings of the border, suggest that the borderland area, as a narrated space, is characterised by a dynamic profile, it is a space wherein most characters traverse the landscape frequently, even if staying within the local area.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Williams, *Border Country*,

Bruce Chatwin's *On the Black Hill*

'For forty-two years, Lewis and Benjamin Jones slept side by side, in their parents' bed, at their farm which was known as 'The Vision' ... One of the windows looked out over the green fields of England: the other looked back into Wales, past a dump of larches, at the Black Hill.'

*Bruce Chatwin, On the Black Hill.*¹⁵⁸

In these opening lines, Bruce Chatwin positions his novel within a geography of borders. A real-life farm forms the setting for *On the Black Hill*, a farmhouse in Capel-y-ffin that Chatwin names 'The Vision' due to the religious visions of the Virgin Mary seen in the monastery in the nineteenth-century. However, Chatwin moves The Vision towards the Black Hill, a ridge in Herefordshire leading up to Hay Bluff, and describes the farm as bisected by 'the border of Radnor and Hereford [which] was said to run right through the middle of the staircase'.¹⁵⁹ I begin with the description of Benjamin and Lewis Jones's bedroom at The Vision because it captures the representational challenges posed by borderland fiction and the difficulty in mapping places that have two identities at once. The indeterminate identity of the Welsh border results in what Jonathan Chatwin calls 'nationalistic confusion; they must choose between languages, between religions, between cultures'.¹⁶⁰ What arises are consequently antithetical themes in the novel as the border draws dividing lines: settlement and movement; tradition and modernity; isolation and community; fact and fiction. According to his wife, Elizabeth, Chatwin 'was interested in borders, where things were always changing, not one thing or another'.¹⁶¹ Chatwin approaches the indeterminacies,

¹⁵⁸ Chatwin, *On the Black Hill*, 1.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, 2. 'Radnor' refers to the district within the county of Powys from 1974. The district was renamed Radnorshire in 1989 but was abolished in 1996 when Powys became a unitary authority.

¹⁶⁰ Jonathan Chatwin, "'Anywhere Out of the World': Restlessness in the work of Bruce Chatwin,' PhD dissertation, (University of Exeter, Open Research Exeter, 2008), 159, <https://ore.exeter.ac.uk/repository/handle/10036/41273>.

¹⁶¹ Nicholas Shakespeare, *Bruce Chatwin* (London: The Harvill Press, 1999), 291.

peripheralities, and liminalities of the border area through *On the Black Hill* to create the sense that the place is mapped by an individual's experience within it.

Chatwin the travel writer

Chatwin was a traveller, curator, anthropologist, and writer. Born in Sheffield, he moved regularly as a child with his mother, travelling around Britain to stay with various relatives during the Second World War. He had little attachment to the label of travel writer, though the travelogue was the genre through which he is primarily defined.¹⁶² Continuing the tradition of his grandparents' bicycle rides from their home in Edgbaston to Llanthony, Chatwin and his father would travel to Hay Bluff and the border country around Hay-on-Wye by car regularly, and he visited once again at boarding school.¹⁶³ The area, from then on, proved to be 'a constant' in his life.¹⁶⁴ Elizabeth Chatwin calls the outliers of the Black Mountains, the rocky Black Hill and its companion Cefn Hill, 'his favourite place' and Chatwin himself reported that he had 'always thought of this landscape ... as my home in many ways'.¹⁶⁵ These youthful encounters with the border country eventually coalesced into *On the Black Hill*.

After leaving school, Chatwin worked at the fine art auction house Sotheby's, and then briefly studied archaeology at the University of Edinburgh before pursuing a career as a writer. His first success came with his partly fictitious travelogue *In Patagonia* (1977) which builds the portrait of the region through snippets of stories of the landscape and those that live within it, all strung together through short chapters. Like the Wales-England border country, Patagonia spans two nations, Argentina and Chile, and in the Chubut area of Patagonia, an

¹⁶² Shakespeare, *Bruce Chatwin*, 448.

¹⁶³ Jonathan Chatwin, "'Anywhere Out of the World'", 150; Nicholas Shakespeare, 'Chatwin,' Hay Festival, Hay-on-Wye, June 4, 2000.

¹⁶⁴ Shakespeare, 'Chatwin,' Hay Festival.

¹⁶⁵ Elizabeth Chatwin, Personal interview, 9 March 2007, quoted in Jonathan Chatwin, "'Anywhere Out of the World'", 150; Bruce Chatwin, 'The South Bank Show,' directed by Nigel Wattis, LWT, November 7, 1982, quoted in Jonathan Chatwin, "'Anywhere Out of the World'", 150.

estimated 6,000 Welsh speakers and 50,000 people descended from Wales preside after migrating in 1865 to find a new area ‘uncontaminated by Englishmen.’¹⁶⁶ Unlike typical travel books, however, *In Patagonia* contains little mention of how the writer got from one place to another and Chatwin only hints towards buses and sleeping arrangements (a pale turquoise hotel in Rio Pico, behind a bush outside a bar in Epuyén). A ‘peculiarly dotty book,’ *In Patagonia* mixes genres and fact, causing Nicholas Shakespeare to ask, ‘was it true – and, if not, did it matter?’¹⁶⁷ By defying genre, Chatwin saw himself outside of categorisation, an adversary to confinement and in all elements of his writing, even his non-fiction, fabrications and an enduring interest in nomadic cultures prevail.¹⁶⁸

The first mention of Chatwin at Hay Festival is in the 1991 programme in an event titled ‘Black Hills and Mountains’. The event consisted of a conversation between Tony Pinkney, Russell Celyn Jones, and Dai Smith about Chatwin’s *On the Black Hill* and Williams’s *People of the Black Mountains* (1989 and 1990): ‘[b]oth writers [who] produced epic versions of our local community and its development; Chatwin as a great travel writer and master prose stylist, Williams as a native’.¹⁶⁹ By pairing Chatwin the traveller with Williams the ‘native’ early in the festival’s programming, Hay Festival mark Chatwin as integral to conceptions of the Wales-England borderland. Chatwin has subsequently been a frequent reference throughout Hay Festival’s history.

While he produced ‘epic versions’ of the borders, Chatwin, like Kilvert and Williams, never attended Hay Festival, something Peter Florence references in a 1997 Hay Festival event with Susannah Clapp, Chatwin’s friend and editor, about her biography, *With Chatwin:*

¹⁶⁶ Chatwin, *In Patagonia* (1977; reis., London: Vintage, 2005), 26.

¹⁶⁷ Nicholas Shakespeare, introduction to *In Patagonia*, xv.

¹⁶⁸ Susannah Clapp, ‘With Chatwin,’ Hay Festival, Hay-on-Wye, May 26, 1997.

¹⁶⁹ Hay Festival programme, 1991, Add MS 89482/4/32, 19.

Portrait of a Writer (1997). Florence introduces the session by underlining the importance of Chatwin to Hay Festival:

It occurs to me in this tenth year of the festival that there is one writer whose work and life have featured more prominently than any others in the last ten years, just in terms of numbers of people coming to events with different speakers, and this writer is Chatwin. It is significant I think that he is absent for every single one of these sessions.¹⁷⁰

Florence bookmarks Chatwin as the most important writer to the festival in regard to the festival events' popularity and his omnipresence despite his premature death. Chatwin died in 1989 from AIDS, eight months after the first Hay Festival. Florence had written to Chatwin in 1988, asking him to talk at the festival, not knowing how ill he was, to which Chatwin replied, 'I'm sorry I can't come, I shall be travelling'.¹⁷¹ Naming Chatwin as the prominent writer of Hay Festival, Florence inextricably links the festival to Chatwin and to the landscape that he writes about. The dynamics and antithetical themes that Chatwin presents in *On the Black Hill* reflect Hay Festival's own tensions arising from its border position: it is a rural festival based in a peripheral border town hosting urban and international visitors annually, and in the festival's simultaneous promotion of culture and commerce. The novel illustrates the split landscape where Hay Festival presides as a productive site for tensions and creativity to emerge and is used by the festival as a literary example to help produce its sense of place.

The two walks: English and Welsh

After staying with friends in Cwm Hall in Shropshire near the Wales-England border during the 1970s and meeting local significant characters from the borders – such as the Howell brothers and Joe and Jean the Barn – Chatwin brought together the local facts, myths, people,

¹⁷⁰ Peter Florence, 'With Chatwin,' Hay Festival.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

geography, and social history of the area with cut material from previous works into *On the Black Hill*. In the novel, the Howells and the Barns became the Jones twins and Jim and Meg the Rock. *On the Black Hill* is an antidote to Chatwin's nomadism; it focuses on life in one place, where belonging and settlement prevail. Chatwin wrote this book, he said, to escape the travel writer label: 'I decided to write something about people who never went out'.¹⁷²

Confined to a few square miles, the Jones twins form a personal cosmos of The Vision and the Black Hill,. Chatwin establishes a self-determined sense of place through home and the Welsh concept of *cynefin*, meaning 'habitat' or 'lived landscape;' it is 'not defined by clearly demarcated borders, nor is it fixed territorial space. It varies from person to person'.¹⁷³ Place in the novel is therefore constructed by a community through stories, experiences, and relationships where the landscape is dissolving, always moving between known and unknown, mirroring the rippling and changing border itself. The 'secret sense of belonging' of *cynefin* is established in the mapping of The Vision and the Jones's routines, sleeping side by side for forty-two years in a house where they have lived all their lives.¹⁷⁴

The self-determined nature of the border country is shown no more strongly in *On the Black Hill* than on the two paths that the twins walk with their grandfather, Old Sam:

The twins loved to go on walks with their grandfather, and had two particular favourites – a 'Welsh walk' up the mountain, and an 'English walk' to Lurkenhope Park. The 'Welsh walk' was only practical in fine weather. Often, they would set out in sunshine, only to come home soaked to the skin. And equally often, when walking down to Lurkenhope, they would look back at the veil of grey rain to the west while, overhead, the clouds broke into blue and butterflies fluttered over the sunlit cow-parsley.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷² Susannah Clapp, *With Chatwin: Portrait of a Writer* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1997), 179.

¹⁷³ Bedwyr Lewis Jones, 'Cynefin: the word and the concept,' *Nature in Wales* (1985), 121, quoted in Kate Woodward, "'Here is Wales, there England': Contested Borders and Blurred Boundaries in *On the Black Hill*," in *British Rural Landscapes on Film*, ed. Paul Newland (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 103-118; 107.

¹⁷⁴ Clarke, 'Offa's Dyke,' 30.

¹⁷⁵ Chatwin, *On the Black Hill*, 45.

Similar to the opening page of the novel that separates the two countries by two windows, one showing the beatific ‘green fields’ of England, the other the lowly ‘dump of larches,’ Old Sam’s two walks signify a distinct split and difference in the bordering countries.¹⁷⁶ The ‘English walk’ passes through the horticultural gardens of Lurkenhope Park in Shropshire. The gardens are adorned with unusual plants like orchids, cineraria, and a waxy red begonia, and the twins make friends with the Park’s gardener, Mr Earnshaw.¹⁷⁷ The ‘Welsh walk’, however, sees isolation and wildness in the derelict cottages and ragged mountain screes.¹⁷⁸ These rocky outcroppings of stone and hills refer to the Black Mountains and the Welsh Marches.

Distinction between Wales and England is marked further by Chatwin’s descriptions of weather. Chatwin’s Welsh weather is characterised by that of clouds, some ‘creamy,’ others ‘puffy,’ always ‘streaming’ or ‘floating’ *out* of Wales, their shadows reaching and changing the light on the fields below, as if they have been held there, static, heading now towards sunny England.¹⁷⁹ Wales’s weather described by Chatwin as peripatetic, the painterly clouds brush and alter the landscape to make the movement of the wind visible in their own passing. In the novel, Chatwin transports his own experience of dark clouds parading over the Welsh hills and the beaming countryside, as described in his personal notebooks: ‘Sunday afternoon. Walked across Cefn Hill to the Howell brothers ... Inky clouds back up behind Lord Hereford’s Knob as you looked back into England the fields were green’.¹⁸⁰ There is a partition and a personal landscape mapped into the fiction reflecting *cynefin*, one of different horizons and a belief that where you are is always different from over there. However, there

¹⁷⁶ Ibid, 1.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid, 46.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid, 46.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid, 245, 12 253, 245.

¹⁸⁰ Bruce Chatwin, unpublished manuscripts and notebooks, quoted in Jonathan Chatwin, “‘Those Blue Remembered Hills’: A Nomad’s Home in Wales,” *Studies in Travel Writing* 14 no. 3 (2010): 274, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13645145.2010.501200>.

may not be such a marked contrast in landscape when one passes the ambiguous Wales-England threshold. Instead, the sense of place is impressed and expressed by one's own placemaking. This personal landscape is capitalised upon by Hay Festival as it creates its own unique borders identity, sharing both Welsh and English characteristics, enabling it to be simultaneously locally and globally focused.

Imaginative placemaking: Hay Festival's sponsors and glocalisation

The 'English walk' and 'Welsh walk' that Chatwin presents in *On the Black Hill* emphasises the kind of creative and self-determined placemaking that the borderland allows for. The indeterminacy of the border is capitalised upon by Hay Festival economically through sponsorship. For Chatwin, the distinctiveness of the border is said to have 'always attracted' him, these 'places on the rim of the world, sandwiched ambiguously between cultures, neither one thing or another'.¹⁸¹ The duality of borders is reflected by Hay Festival's border identity, meshing local, national, and international sponsors together. The festival's success has resulted in a growing number of sponsors. In 2003, the festival had just fifteen sponsors. Two years later, this number had doubled, and by 2023, the festival had 131 sponsors and funders.¹⁸² Of these sponsors, forty-five were local (either businesses, foundations, or organisations, within the borderland region, English or Welsh), fourteen were Welsh, four were English, forty were national companies, and twenty-eight were global brands.¹⁸³ Supporting local businesses, Hay Festival develops regional economies through media exposure. Placing, for example, the independent Shepherd's Ice Cream Shop in Hay-on-Wye at the festival site alongside the international investment management company Baillie

¹⁸¹ Shakespeare, Introduction to *In Patagonia*, xii.

¹⁸² Jenkins, 'The Hay Festival: A Longitudinal Study on its Attributes and the Sustainable Impacts on a Small Welsh Town,' 122; Hay Festival, 'Sponsors,' accessed March 22, 2023, <https://www.hayfestival.com/m-12-sponsors.aspx?resetfilters=true>.

¹⁸³ Hay Festival, 'Sponsors.'

Gifford typifies the boundaries and tensions between the local and the national that Hay Festival straddles.

This concurrence between the local economy and national and international sponsors is a deliberate act by Hay Festival. Jo Rodell-Jones reveals that when searching for sponsors: '[w]e tend to look within our locale, so Powys, Wales, as well as Herefordshire and Worcestershire because we are on the border'.¹⁸⁴ The varying local borderland sponsors of Hay Festival alongside international sponsors reflect the 'glocalisation' of the festival, and literary festivals more widely.¹⁸⁵ Glocalisation can help understand Hay Festival's position as both economically and culturally beneficial to the local area. Contemporary conceptions of locality are often produced in global terms, but, as a consequence, Roland Robertson argues that not all forms of locality are homogenised; there is a connection between the discourse of locality, community, and home, but there is cultural and geographical pluralism to consider.¹⁸⁶ In the case of Hay Festival, the geographical specificity of the borderland region leads to a specificity in the local market and hence the local sponsors that the festival has. These local business sponsors showcase the cultural and geographical specificity of the area and some, such as Shepherd's Ice Cream, have become associated with Hay Festival, forming a tie between the festival and the local area through commerce.

Nation building and the wavering border

Chatwin's description of the 'Welsh Walk' and the 'English Walk' in *On the Black Hill* is lifted from the scraps of *In Patagonia*, which begins with an anecdote from his childhood about 'a piece of brontosaurus' (which turned out to be from a Giant Sloth) said to be found

¹⁸⁴ Jo Rodell-Jones, interview by Rebecca Roach, Zoom, September 13, 2021.

¹⁸⁵ Roland Robertson explores the history of the term, originally used as a Japanese business word for micromarketing to mean the tailoring of advertising goods on a global basis to particular and local markets (Roland Robertson, 'Glocalization: Time-Space and Homogeneity-Heterogeneity,' in *Global Modernities*, eds. Mike Featherstone, Scott Lash, Roland Robertson (London: SAGE Publications, 1995), 28).

¹⁸⁶ Robertson, 'Glocalization: Time-Space and Homogeneity-Heterogeneity,' 31.

by his grandmother's cousin in Patagonia.¹⁸⁷ At the 1997 Hay Festival event, Florence read a long section cut from a draft of the opening chapter of Chatwin's debut book that Clapp includes in her biography:

There were two principle walks of my childhood, two walks which detach themselves from the chaotic sequence of movement, two paths, two ways, as two sites on which I still may build. One led up to the Derbyshire hills behind the cottage, a little more than a shack that had once been a tobacconist shop in which we stayed when my brother was born ... The second path led along the south bank of the river Avon below Stratford, where I stayed with my great Aunts.¹⁸⁸

Chatwin's usage of doubles and his sense of the ownership of walks and paths of his childhood shown through repeated personal pronouns is reflected in *On the Black Hill*'s own patterned and schematic doubles, structuring the rural and tumultuous landscape into sequences while showcasing the duality of the sense of place and nationhood for those that inhabit the borderlands. Reusing the paths from his childhood intended for a travelogue into a fictional account of Welsh border life, Chatwin inserts his youth into that of the twins'. Much like the wavering border, the line drawn between fact/fiction is not straight.

At Hay Festival there is a similar quivering borderland identity allowing space for new claims of ownership and nation building. Like Chatwin's ambiguous borders, Hay Festival historically falters between identifying as either a 'Welsh,' 'British,' or an 'international' organisation. Joe Fletcher, Hay's Festival's former technical director, who was raised in 'a very Welsh-speaking area,' suggests that the festival should embrace its Welsh identity:

We're an international organisation. I guess my feeling is we really should have a Welsh presence, and everything could be bilingual – as in signage, I don't mean events – and we should certainly have a bit more of a Welsh language programme and celebrate the fact that Hay-on-Wye is in Wales. But that's my feeling, some people disagree with that, they think it narrows our focus and it's a little bit nationalistic. But I feel a little bit differently in terms of that, especially regarding the language. I think

¹⁸⁷ Chatwin, *In Patagonia*, 28.

¹⁸⁸ Susannah Clapp, 'With Chatwin,' Hay Festival.

it's such a wonderful thing to be proud of and it's a literature festival and why shouldn't we celebrate our identity a little bit more?¹⁸⁹

Fletcher's discussion of Hay Festival's place within international and national structures reveals the current geographical identity crisis that the festival is experiencing as it jostles between its success as a global cultural organisation while balancing both its Welsh and English borderland identity. The reluctance towards a fully bilingual programme juxtaposes with the hope for more Welsh signing and singularly Cymraeg events in the future, implying that the festival will look soon to cater for both their English and Welsh audiences in a reflection of its geography. Though on the border, Powys's Welsh speakers make up 29% of those who live there, closely on par with the 29.7% national average of Welsh speakers in Wales, and the seventh highest proportion of Welsh speakers out of all the counties in Wales.¹⁹⁰ However, there has been a recent upturn in Cymraeg popularity, seen no more clearly than the name change of the borderland's National Park to Bannau Brycheiniog.

Fletcher's question 'why shouldn't we celebrate our identity more?' indicates his belief that Hay Festival have not embraced its Welsh national identity, specifically shown through Cymraeg, enough in its history, potentially in its attempt to remain both Welsh and English at once. Hay Festival's dual national identity is seen as confused by some festivalgoers, with one audience member commenting that the festival 'does feel like unless until you get here, it feels very in my head like a very English thing, and then it's not ... I think it's quite Welsh when I'm here'.¹⁹¹ This audience member's comment signals the festival's difficulty in balancing both national identities and bilingualism.

¹⁸⁹ Joe Fletcher, interview by Rebecca Roach, Zoom, October 4, 2021.

¹⁹⁰ 'Annual Population Survey - Ability to speak Welsh by local authority and year,' *StatsWales*, June 30, 2022, <https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Welsh-Language/Annual-Population-Survey-Welsh-Language/annualpopulationsurveyestimatesofpersonsaged3andoverwhosaytheycanspeakwelsh-by-localauthority-measure>.

¹⁹¹ Speaker 6, Focus Group 1, interview by Ellen Addis and Jennifer Tegg, May 27, 2023, Hay Festival, Hay-on-Wye.

In 1994, the first written Welsh appears in the programme, describing events with Welsh poets and the annual S4C lecture with both given in Welsh with simultaneous translation, and I discussed the importance of the festival's Cymraeg days in the 1990s in chapter two of this thesis.¹⁹² The festival published its first fully bi-lingual programme in 2015 and continue to promote the Welsh language through its educational programme, *Scribblers Cymraeg*.¹⁹³ By tying Hay Festival's identity to the festival's national location and Cymraeg, Fletcher argues that the festival should bolster its Welsh presence and embrace a shared English and Welsh identity. Hay Festival's position on the Wales-England border allows the festival to carve out its own specifically borderland identity by engendering a connection to the area's literary ancestors, though this duality is at times, as shown by the audience member's comment, not well expressed to its audience.

The duality of the festival's border location can also create paradoxes that it must negotiate. One paradox that *On the Black Hill* explores is the tradition and timelessness of the area in conflict with the fluctuating border. Resistant to modern advancements, the Jones twins are 'being dragged reluctantly forward' towards modernity, as one writer put it, with The Vision and the landscape around it appearing almost the same at the end of the twins' lives as when their parents moved into it in the late nineteenth century, despite the twins living through two world wars.¹⁹⁴ The border country in *On the Black Hill* rouses memories of the twins' past lives and their ancestors, still experienced in their *cynefin* where the place does not stand by itself or is defined by strict preconceptions of nationhood but is a tapestry of interpretations, intrinsically related to the people that inhabit the place. This sense of fixity is depicted in the novel when, during a walk near Craig-y-Fedw, '[a]long the horizon, the

¹⁹² Hay Festival programme, 1994, Add MS 89482/4/32.

¹⁹³ Hay Festival, 'Scribblers Cymraeg Live Events 2022,' accessed April 3, 2023, <https://www.hayfestival.com/scribblers-cymraeg>.

¹⁹⁴ Hanya Yanagihara, 'Bruce Chatwin: One of the Last Great Explorers,' *New York Times*, September 7, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/07/t-magazine/bruce-chatwin.html>

hills were layered in lines of hazy blue,’ the twins ‘reflected on how little had changed since they walked this way with their grandfather, over seventy years before’.¹⁹⁵ However, the twins are able to gain a new perspective on their home when they take a plane ride over The Vision for their eightieth birthdays and the simplistic divisions between ‘Welsh’ and ‘English’ disintegrate.¹⁹⁶ Flying among the clouds themselves, distanced from ground level, the twins notice that ‘the pines of Cefn Hill were blue-green and black-green in the varied light,’ that ‘the heather was purple’.¹⁹⁷ Unlike the twins’ previous perception of the landscape, the borderland is not still, but moves in the changing light and wind.

Hay Festival reflects these tensions of the borderland’s rootedness yet mercurial movements. Compton suggests that Hay Festival’s tradition comes into conflict with its unexpected growth:

That resistance to change isn’t just internal, it’s our customers, it’s the town. Everybody has these stories about the good old days when the festival was tiny and people are very nostalgic about it, and the growth was not strategic, it was totally organic, so it just sort of got out of control.¹⁹⁸

Compton links the festival, the town, and the area’s sense of tradition intrinsically to each other, as well as to the seemingly surprising growth of Hay Festival from a small, local literary festival into a professional international arts organisation. The success of Hay Festival is also indebted to, for Compton, the ‘special place’ of the Wales-England border.¹⁹⁹ One festivalgoer from the local area, however, notes that the growth of the festival has led to an exclusion of the local area and a prioritisation of tourists, as ‘there’s people in Brecon that don’t know what Hay Festival is’ and see it as ‘elitist and snobby,’ a claim that she disputes.²⁰⁰ Performing a similar action as the twins’ plane ride in *On the Black Hill*, Hay

¹⁹⁵ Chatwin, *On the Black Hill*, 246.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid, 253.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid, 253.

¹⁹⁸ Penny Compton, interview by Ellen Addis, Zoom, October 6, 2021.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Speaker 3, Focus group 4, interview by Ellen Addis, June 2, 2023, Hay Festival, Hay-on-Wye.

Festival is a gateway for Hay-on-Wye and the wider border country to broaden its reach and perspective, inviting people from across the UK and the world to its festival and the landscape. Both settled and restless, the wavering Wales-England border represents both countries and ways of life, leaving a liminal, creative space, for unique characters and lives. The itinerant border, shown through the nomadic Chatwin writing a story of fixed and settled lives within a peripatetic landscape, is encapsulated by Hay Festival's competing status as both settled and restless.

As well as *On the Black Hill* being influential in Hay Festival's conception of the border, it also has a contemporary presence at the festival. The 2023 festival held an event screening an episode of the BBC Four's *The Read* series about the novel. *The Read* features actors reading to camera abridged sections from 'classic' books, 'breathing new life into iconic stories'.²⁰¹ *On the Black Hill* is condensed into five chapters for the episode and is narrated by Welsh actor Callum Scott Howells, who inhabits different characters from the novel and performs to camera in different locations around a farmhouse, coming to stand in for The Vision. The Hay Festival event was followed a Q&A hosted by poet Owen Sheers with Scott Howells and director Luke Collins, wherein they focused on masculinity, setting, and the Jones twins. The performance reading of the book in *The Read* replicates the practice often associated with authors at literary festival events. The episode includes exposition shots of the surrounding border landscape, the farm, and flashbacks to create a sense of intimacy with characters and the text. The inclusion of *On the Black Hill* in *The Read* series shows how important the novel has become in the canon of literature about place. Further, in programming the event twenty-six years after Clapp's event, *On the Black Hill* and its conception of the borderland runs through Hay Festival. The festival's events about Chatwin

²⁰¹ *The Read*, 'On the Black Hill,' aired June 5, 2022, BBC Four, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m0018372>.

and *On the Black Hill* make the novel synonymous with the Wales-England border, with the story and the descriptions of landscape becoming representative of the literary inheritance of the area itself.

Transporting the colours, paths, weather, and landmarks known to him, Chatwin's *On the Black Hill* is a novel about settlement and movement. He creates characters in Lewis and Benjamin who are not simplistic mirrors of each other but are divided by their attitudes to their settled *cynefin* life; Lewis dreams of 'faraway voyages' while Benjamin 'never thought of abroad'.²⁰² Chatwin's varying focus on dualism, fixity, and change within his works is represented by the settlement and movement of Hay Festival's site and glocalisation. Each May, the festival sets up a tented village at the foot of the Black Mountains. The site is temporary, inviting authors and audiences from across the world to this peripheral town for a short period, enmeshing local and global cultures. The encampment of the festival, the putting up and taking down of tents, the rush of tourists to the town and the area, and the showcase of international authors captures the essence of Hay Festival. Like the nomadic Chatwin and the wavering borders, Hay Festival creates a temporary notion of belonging while also leaving a trace on the landscape of having been there.

Clapp describes the 'Chatwinesque' as the 'bleakness' in his writing, but also 'the intricacy, the peculiarity, the sidelongness, the not-straightforwardness, the going all over the place, the loops, the navigations'.²⁰³ Even his name, Chatwin, derived from the Anglo-Saxon word 'Chetwin' meaning a winding path, captures the writer's obliqueness.²⁰⁴ The wandering Chatwinesque connects to the continual movement of the Welsh Marches and the borderland as a place whose rhythms and counter-rhythms of the Black Mountains, the cloudy and gusty weather, the streams, and paths, twist and turn in the landscape. The Chatwinesque and *On*

²⁰² Chatwin, *On the Black Hill*, 88.

²⁰³ Clapp, 'With Chatwin,' Hay Festival.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

the Black Hill show an instability of sorts in ideas of border areas and, in fact, like the borders, things and places move, and do not stay the same. Hay Festival, akin to the twins' eightieth birthday plane ride, opens the area to national and international acclaim and attention. It at once represents the work, lives, and books of the landscape that it takes place, while also bringing the whole world to that landscape.

All three writers present the Wales-England border as an area for individual definitions and mapping to take place. Throughout its history, Hay Festival has gestured to the literary inheritance of the Wales-England borders through Kilvert, Williams, and Chatwin, and has in turn mapped the border as a unique and distinct area, one that encourages creative placemaking, and allows the festival to exist as one that embraces complex dynamics: local and international, Welsh and English, traditional and forward-thinking.

5 Digital past, present, future: Accessing Hay Festival online

'I tiptoed downstairs and took refuge in a place of living, moving, breathing text, a book that continually wrote itself: the internet.'

Patricia Lockwood, Priestdaddy.¹

In Patricia Lockwood's 2018 memoir *Priestdaddy*, the writer spends her nights on the internet. The internet is not just the safe space or 'refuge' that Lockwood describes away from her life in small town Kentucky, but also the propeller for her significant relationships and literary career. She meets her future husband in an online poetry forum, and receives her first career success when a poem of hers goes viral on Twitter which then leads to the publishing deal for *Priestdaddy* itself. Her metaphor, describing the internet as a 'breathing text,' is especially pertinent in relation to the digital book cultures and communities at Hay Festival discussed in this chapter. The 'breathing text' describes the internet as a place of process, liveness, and perpetual completion, as well as an embodied thing, constantly evolving and adapting, while running alongside real life. The embodied internet informs my understanding of the relationship between books and the online world, especially at Hay Festival and its various digital platforms and projects. Hay Festival uses the internet to unite audiences from further afield with authors, in turn creating a brand-new digital community where the audience become active participants in the festival itself.²

As the final chapter of 'Places' and of this thesis, this chapter contrasts with the borders and physical spaces of Hay Festival in the previous chapter and looks at the online places that the literary festival inhabits. I will apply and scrutinise Murray's influential concept of the 'digital literary sphere' made up of five categories: performing authorship, 'selling' literature, curating the public life of literature in online literary festivals,

¹ Lockwood, *Priestdaddy*, 18.

² Murray, *The Digital Literary Sphere*, 99.

consecrating the literary in online book review culture, and entering literary discussion.³ According to Murray, at the online literary festival within the digital literary sphere, the ‘digital now serves not merely as the technological substrate for organizing a literary event but ... as the context in which the festival event itself takes place’.⁴ As *The Digital Literary Sphere* was written in 2018 before the coronavirus pandemic, I will work to update Murray’s research on online literary festivals and use Lockwood’s metaphor of the embodied ‘living, moving, breathing text’ to inform my approach.

In this chapter, I argue that Hay Festival’s digital projects – the online event archive Hay Anytime (previously Hay Player); the online book club, Book of the Month; and the digital and hybrid events streamed during and after the pandemic – all show how digital technologies, which were once an addendum to the literary festival, have become essential in accessing Hay Festival’s past and present, and enabling its future. Through these case studies I show the multiple ways audiences choose to interact with literary festivals, as well as how literary festivals and cultural organisations more widely use digital events and online engagement to strengthen and extend their geographic reach and broaden accessibility options, especially when digital engagement with the arts became indispensable for some in 2020 and 2021 during the pandemic. In this chapter, I ask: how does audience engagement and the role of the author change when an event is pre-recorded, archived, or watched out of its live moment? How does Hay Festival employ digital technology to create a space for literature to be experienced collectively online? And how has the pandemic impacted Hay Festival’s digital projects and audience engagement?

³ Murray, *The Digital Literary Sphere*, 10.

⁴ Ibid, 81-82.

Theorising digital technology at literary festivals

The dissolving boundary between our digital and physical lives is conceptualised by the writer Laurence Scott's 'four-dimensional human'.⁵ Scott ponders the solitary role of the human within the internet (what he calls the fourth dimension) accessing the digital world alone with their device – phone, tablet, computer – that brings them into contact with innumerable people online. He discusses 'the everywhere-person,' one that is like Virginia Woolf's Mrs Dalloway, equally inside and outside of the world in 'being out, out, far out to sea and alone,' and also:

Part of people she had never met; being laid out like a mist between the people she knew best, who lifted her on their branches as she had seen the trees lift the mist, but it spread ever so far, her life, her self.⁶

In both recognising human interconnectedness yet sensitive to its boundaries, Woolf's overall notion of human relations figures us as strangers to one another. And yet, the spaces of the internet in online chat rooms, social media, and the digital spaces at literary festivals such as Hay Festival, attempt to override the separation of the solitary human by placing us somewhere else with one another at once, albeit in virtual space, something Scott calls 'everywhereness'.⁷ By drawing on Woolf, Scott makes a connection between the experiences in the contemporary internet age and a significant modernist figure experimenting with fractured narratives and stream-of-consciousness prose to express a new alignment with the experiences and values of modern industrial life in the twentieth century. Applied to literary festivals, this sense of 'everywhereness' means that a person can watch archived Hay Festival events on Hay Anytime, partake in Book of the Month discussions, and tune-in to a digital festival event in whichever space they choose, often also at whatever time they choose. Digital events at literary festivals disrupt what Murray calls the traditional 'spatiotemporal

⁵ Scott, *The Four-Dimensional Human*.

⁶ Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, quoted in Scott, *The Four-Dimensional Human*, 13.

⁷ Ibid, 11.

co-presence' between author and audience at in-person festivals and transports the communal festival experiences to the interconnected realm of the internet.⁸ By collapsing space and time, Hay Festival's digital platforms such as its online archive, social media accounts, and digital events become embodied places because of their sense of everywhere-ness, acting as refuge and reality at once.

Hay Festival utilises emergent technologies to prioritise extending the temporary community established during its in-person festivals and create an embodied engagement with the festival through digital media. However, I argue that this is not an elaborately planned strategy, but a consequence of Hay Festival's status as an improvisatory organisation. The festival is flexible and takes a deft DIY approach reminiscent of its kitchen table beginnings, often reacting to its audience's needs and changing priorities, such as the pandemic and the digitising of its large archive of events and book club, with the prime goal of uniting readers and engaging a wider audience. The digital strategy reflects the festival's broader approach, summarised by Fryers: 'there will be new technologies, new opportunities, new things ... we're a pretty fleet of foot organisation; we will exploit opportunities as they come up and react to things as they change'.⁹ This chapter will track Hay Festival's responses to various digital technological advancements in the twenty-first century – including the advent of video-on-demand and streaming services, online reading communities, and digital events during the pandemic.

Digital technologies have the potential to further problematise the general conception of the literary festival as both a Habermasian public sphere and a Bourdieusian model of the literary field that exchanges ideas in public spaces linking arts and politics with tangible reading communities. Instead, the digital literary sphere and its supposed democratic

⁸ Murray, *The Digital Literary Sphere*, 101.

⁹ Andy Fryers, interview by Ellen Addis, Zoom, September 29, 2021.

accessibility leads to individual audience voices being prioritised at literary festivals through an inclusive digital literary forum of debate and critique. Enabling virtual participation with literary festivals, however, is not a long-term replacement for the preferred in-person experience, and is instead an extension of the festival, engaging audiences outside of the normal festival schedule and in times of necessity like during the pandemic. In this chapter, I will demonstrate how the digital technologies adapted by Hay Festival complicate conceptions of festivals as a part of the literary field and a coherent public sphere by proclaiming inclusivity and their drive towards accessibility.

Hay Anytime: Capturing liveness

Expanding Lockwood's metaphor of the internet as an embodied medium in a state of perpetual completion, the Hay Festival website is a microcosm of the festival, with the different pages and tabs designating 'Festivals,' 'Projects,' 'Education,' 'News,' 'Anytime,' and 'Support Us' akin to stages at the in-person site. Hay Anytime, the festival's digital archive of events, represents just one of these stages, and with it, the online audience can look back at past events, altering audience engagement through the creation of new connections with the festival and new interpretations of authors and their work.

Hay Anytime is Hay Festival's largest and longest-running digital project and is a subscription-based archive of the festival's events, in both video and audio format, part of a larger trend that Murray and Weber have identified of 'leading writers festivals' extensive online archiving of past events'.¹⁰ The platform evolved originally from a redesign of the Hay Festival website in 2018 and the 'formalising and stabilising' of the archive, as Lambert terms it, through digitising old cassettes, audio recordings, and videos and uploading them

¹⁰ Murray and Weber. "'Live and Local'?", 74-75.

onto the festival website.¹¹ The online archive changed its name from ‘Hay Player’ in February 2024 following the festival-wide rebrand after Julie Finch became CEO, signalling a shift in focus from media to temporality. Hay Anytime holds over 8,000 festival events dating back to 1995, including the festival’s year-round events, digital, and international festivals.¹² Before the digitisation of the archive, the festival’s past event footage was either freely available on YouTube or not available at all, stored instead at the festival offices in Hay-on-Wye. Hay Anytime categorises its archive by genre and festival with the different festivals presented with pictures of each year’s programme, recalling the festival’s history through its print media.



Figure 16: Hay Anytime categorises its past festivals events via its print programmes.
 © Hay Festival. <https://www.hayfestival.com/anytime/festivals.aspx?id=80>.

Lambert explicitly recalls how established free video-on-demand (VoD) services such as BBC iPlayer, and ITV Player, now known as ITVX, formed the ‘obvious tool[s]’ that the Hay Anytime platform is based on.¹³ iPlayer and ITVX showcase content from their television channels for free for users to watch either in real-time or on-demand. Unlike iPlayer and ITVX, however, Hay Anytime charges £20 annually for a subscription, a decision made to make the platform and festival more economically sustainable that proved successful during the pandemic when the audience for Hay Anytime ‘went through the roof’.¹⁴ The

¹¹ Adrian Lambert, interview by Ellen Addis, Zoom, August 12, 2021.

¹² ‘Hay Festival 2021 Report,’ Hay Festival, <https://cloud.hayfestival.com/hay-on-wye/reports/Hay-Festival-2021-Report.pdf>, 5.

¹³ Adrian Lambert, interview by Ellen Addis, Zoom, August 12, 2021.

¹⁴ Ibid.

platform encourages audience members to access events in a different format and how they wish, with one commenting that they listen to the audio recordings on Hay Anytime like ‘a podcast effectively,’ and another uses Hay Anytime to ‘rehear’ parts of events they attended in-person that they enjoyed.¹⁵

Looking towards media content providers as its model for Hay Anytime, Hay Festival utilises the display features and function of iPlayer and ITVX, married with the subscription-model of Netflix, and the curation-style film streaming service of BFI Player, a VoD platform from the British Film Institute (BFI) that mainly streams ‘acclaimed, landmark and archive films’.¹⁶ Through VoD and the act of archiving, Hay Anytime showcases Hay Festival’s own legacy and prestige as a literary institution, with its thousands of events with literary stars and significant cultural figures throughout the years. Writing about literary festival’s online event archives, Murray argues that the ‘exclusivity of witnessing an event live increases in direct proportion to the number of people who know of it but were not there in person’.¹⁷ While Hay Festival’s decision to put the majority of past events behind a paywall is indicative of its attempt to earn money and avoid rights issues, it also reveals the organisation’s desire to emulate the feeling of exclusivity born at the festival’s live events and the audience’s sense of pride in having been physically present. The paywall also ensures that Hay Anytime and its archive of events is reserved for supporters of Hay Festival, audiences who do not need to be convinced of the festival’s star-pulling power, but instead choose to subscribe out of loyalty to and interest in the festival. As an online archive, Hay Anytime extends the lives of the festival’s events, events that have been previously theorised as ‘transitory and provisional’.¹⁸

¹⁵ Speaker 6, Focus group 3, interview by Ellen Addis and Jennifer Tegg, May 28, 2023, Hay Festival, Hay-on-Wye; Speaker 5, Focus group 4, interview by Ellen Addis, June 2, 2023, Hay Festival, Hay-on-Wye.

¹⁶ ‘About BFI Player,’ BFI Player, <https://player.bfi.org.uk/about-bfi-player>.

¹⁷ Murray, *The Digital Literary Sphere*, 120.

¹⁸ Weber, *Literary Festivals and Contemporary Book Culture*, 200.

During focus groups with Hay Festival audiences, one participant drew a comparison between Hay Anytime and the National Theatre's NT at Home project, a digital streaming service housing archived National Theatre productions for at-home viewing, saying that they engage with NT at Home 'a lot more' than Hay Anytime because it is a 'more accessible' platform and is 'more advertised' on the National Theatre's social media channels.¹⁹ Emerging from the conditions of the pandemic, NT at Home brought recorded National Theatre Live (NT Live) productions usually screened in cinemas to living rooms for free in 2020 using the readily available archive of theatre performances for sixteen weeks to reach a global audience of fifteen million people.²⁰ NT at Home has since continued as a subscription-based service akin to Hay Anytime, with a sophisticated site showcasing new and classic National Theatre plays, as well as options to pay to watch a single play, or pay monthly or annually. NT at Home has the much higher subscription price of £99.99 per year compared to Hay Anytime's £20 annual cost (correct as of August 14, 2024). However, this price tag is most likely matched to the higher production costs of running and filming a high-level theatre show at the National Theatre, the filming alone for each NT Live production is between £300,000 and £500,000, compared to the relatively low-tech Hay Festival events. NT at Home is also offered to UK state schools, FE colleges, and public libraries for free.²¹ There are significantly fewer productions available on NT at Home compared to the events available on Hay Anytime (seventy versus 8,000), and every NT at Home video has

¹⁹ Speaker 6, Focus Group 1, interview by Ellen Addis and Jennifer Tegg, May 27, 2023, Hay Festival, Hay-on-Wye.

²⁰ Flo Buckeridge, 'How the National Theatre Tackled the COVID-19 Challenge,' *British High Commission Nicosia*, March 8, 2021, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/how-the-national-theatre-tackled-the-covid-19-challenge>.

²¹ Arifa Akbar, 'The Next Act: How the Pandemic Is Shaping Online Theatre's Future,' *Guardian* (London), September 21, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2020/sep/21/future-of-live-theatre-online-drama-coronavirus-lockdown>.

accessibility options, with all recordings captioned with subtitles, many offering audio description, and a selection with British Sign Language.²²

The focus group participant's statement describing NT at Home as possessing greater accessibility hints at the issues with Hay Anytime. While NT at Home is an online platform with performances specifically recorded for and with the awareness of the platform itself, until 2017, the majority of recordings on Hay Anytime were made without the archive in mind and consist of simple audio recordings resulting in no accessibility options. However, in 2017, one year before launch of Hay Anytime, more events with *both* audio and video recordings appear, potentially due to an awareness of the creation of the archive. Since Hay Festival 2022's May festival, video recordings of events from each subsequent festival have included the option for closed captions and a transcript. However, for recordings from the 2024 May festival, 45% of all events uploaded to Hay Anytime have no video recording and therefore no accessibility options, and those videos with closed captions are auto generated, and thus never fully accurate.²³ In its subscription page for Hay Anytime, Hay Festival describes the platform as supporting, maintaining and sustaining the festival's 'commit[ment] to increasing open digital access to culture, ideas, literature and the arts,' and as the platform has grown, the attempt to create accessibility options is evident, though there is a mammoth task ahead to make the platform more accessible and inclusive due to its size.²⁴

Live and recorded technologies

The audience at home watching a Hay Festival event online will experience it in two states: either in the moment it is being captured with *livestreamed* events, or some time (hours, days,

²² 'National Theatre at Home,' National Theatre, accessed August 11, 2023, <https://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/national-theatre-online/>

²³ Of the 328 events uploaded from the 2024 festival, 146 events consist of only audio recordings.

²⁴ 'Hay Festival Anytime Annual Subscription,' Hay Festival, accessed August 13, 2024, <https://www.hayfestival.com/p-1408-hay-festival-anytime-annual-subscription.aspx>.

months, years) after the event takes place with *recorded* events, as with Hay Anytime. These two different temporal digital interactions with the so-called live event drastically change how the author, text, event, and festival are perceived. Auslander explores the conception of ‘digital liveness’ and the broadening out of the term ‘live,’ wherein ‘liveness is not an ontologically defined condition but a historically variable effect of mediatization’.²⁵ Murray similarly describes liveness and mediatization as not oppositional, but existing on ‘a graded continuum of co-presence’ which can involve:

Being physically on stage with a writer; asking a question from an audience microphone; registering applause or laughter; being silently present in the same venue; being in another (onsite) venue witnessing a live-feed; viewing a recording made in the same venue; watching a recording online (long) after the event.²⁶

However, the act of recording a live event for an online audience inherently changes the event’s nature, and while it can be viewed by a larger audience on their own terms, often outside the timeline of the annual festival, the recording does not have the urgent and spontaneous nature of a live event. Fundamentally, the recorded event deviates from the in-person event as speakers are aware that the recorded event will have a traceable afterlife online, bringing a self-consciousness to their appearance on stage.

The new label for Hay Festival’s archive of recorded events, ‘Hay Anytime,’ underlines the relationship to temporality and accessibility with the platform’s goal to extend the lifetime and reach of events by embracing recording and digital technologies. Discussing theatre performance and the role of the archive, Taylor argues that while the liveness of performance and the ‘repertoire’ of embodied events exceeds the archive’s ability to capture it, the performance itself is not ephemeral and does not disappear.²⁷ In a similar way, Hay Anytime is a tool that Hay Festival uses to create an enduring legacy for its festival, ensuring

²⁵ Auslander, ‘Digital Liveness,’ 3.

²⁶ Murray, *The Digital Literary Sphere*, 102.

²⁷ Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, 20.

that the temporary nature of the annual festival has digital traces and remains. Contemporary audience engagement with the digitally archived Hay Festival event creates new interpretations and interactions with authors and their literary texts framed by Hay Festival. This relationship between the contemporary audience watching a past event causes Auslander to define liveness as ‘built primarily around the audience’s affective experiences’ and is a consequence of ‘our engagement’ with the event.²⁸ Hay Anytime therefore exists not as a replacement for the experience of attending Hay Festival, but as a new way to engage with the history of the festival and the authors that appear there.

Feel Free: Zadie Smith, Hay Anytime, and the art of archiving

Hay-on-Wye, 2004. The author Zadie Smith, four years after the release of her successful debut novel, *White Teeth* (2000), first appears at Hay Festival and reads aloud to the crowd a ‘work in progress: her new novel’.²⁹ This novel is Smith’s hugely successful 2005 *On Beauty* and would go on to be shortlisted for the Booker Prize and win the Women’s Prize for Fiction. Though Peter Florence says at the beginning of the event that ‘there is no recording, no reproduction’ of Smith’s reading, the recording exists online on Hay Anytime for audiences to revisit or find for the first time. Smith reads for twenty minutes from *On Beauty*, despite, she says, repeatedly being given the advice, ‘whatever you do, don’t read, it’s tedious’.³⁰

Hay-on-Wye, 2005. In a celebration of Penguin’s 70th anniversary year, Zadie Smith is one of three authors who read from their work at Hay Festival. Smith reads a short story titled ‘Hanwell in Hell,’ written unusually (for her, she says) in first person.³¹

Hay-on-Wye, 2006. Zadie Smith sits on a festival stage, talking to a crowded tent. She introduces the American writer George Saunders and recalls how after reading his short stories, ‘all I wanted to do was write like someone else’.³²

²⁸ Auslander, ‘Digital Liveness,’ 6-8.

²⁹ Zadie Smith, ‘Zadie Smith,’ Hay Festival, Hay-on-Wye, May 29, 2004, <https://www.hayfestival.com/p-8447-zadie-smith.aspx?skinid=16>.

³⁰ Smith, ‘Zadie Smith,’ Hay Festival.

³¹ Jonathan Coe, Jonathan Foer, Zadie Smith, ‘Penguin Breakfast 2,’ Hay Festival, Hay-on-Wye, June 5, 2005, <https://www.hayfestival.com/p-6471-jonathan-coe-jonathan-foer-zadie-smith.aspx>.

³² Zadie Smith, ‘George Saunders talks to Zadie Smith,’ Hay Festival, Hay-on-Wye, May 27, 2006, <https://www.hayfestival.com/p-1611-george-saunders-talks-to-zadie-smith.aspx?skinid=16>

Cartagena, 2019. While her words are simultaneously translated through the headphones to the Spanish-speaking audience, Zadie Smith talks to Carolina Sanín about her novel *Swing Time* (2016) and her new collection of essays *Feel Free* (2018). Smith discusses her relationship with writing, calling the process ‘very difficult in the sense that I have a lot of self-loathing when I write, but I guess what is unusual is that I write through it’.³³

These descriptions mark Zadie Smith’s four Hay Festival appearances taking place between 2004 and 2019. By merging the live event with the act of mediatisation, Hay Anytime enables the audience to trace Smith’s development as an author and the different roles she inhabits in all four events. In 2004, Smith shows the public life of the author, partaking in a typical author interview on stage and performs a literary reading; in 2005, she is the working writer, representing her publisher by reading a commissioned story; in 2006 she takes on the role of interviewer; and in 2019, Smith is the public intellectual or cultural critic, talking philosophically about her approach to reading, writing, and music. Murray and Weber call these digital archives of festival events ‘digital paratexts which may significantly affect reader interpretation of a literary work – consecrating particular interpretations with authorial approval’.³⁴ By listening to each event, the audience using Hay Anytime at home are able to track Smith’s career in books and conversations through the digital archive, tracing the time between 2004 and 2019 when her literary stardom skyrocketed and the changes in her role and attitudes to writing as her career progressed. The contemporary reader-audience’s present knowledge about Smith imparts judgements on her and changes the interpretation of the earlier event and work. In this section, I use Smith’s appearances at Hay Festival and their presentation on Hay Anytime to investigate how liveness and time is manipulated by the digital archive and how the audience’s engagement with the events enacts Scott’s ‘everywhereness’.³⁵

³³ Zadie Smith, ‘Zadie Smith talks to Carolina Sanín,’ Hay Festival Cartagena, Cartagena, February 1, 2019, <https://www.hayfestival.com/p-14765-zadie-smith-in-conversation-with-carolina-sanin.aspx?skinid=16>.

³⁴ Murray and Weber. “‘Live and Local’?”, 74-75.

³⁵ Scott, *The Four-Dimensional Human*, 11.

I have chosen Smith as an example of how Hay Anytime provides a synoptic view of an author whose career began during the start of the rise of Web 2.0. Hay Anytime makes a claim to liveness by prioritising audience engagement and allowing the audience to choose when and where it wants to engage. For example, in Smith's first Hay Festival event in 2004, she discusses her 'ultra-hyped debut,' *White Teeth*, at the time of writing her third book, *On Beauty*, and calls debuts 'a very big confidence trick' and suggests that 'when you look over author's careers, first novels are unrepeatable because it's more energy than you will ever produce in another book'.³⁶ For the Hay Anytime audience watching this event in 2024 when Smith has become a significant international cultural figure, the experience of watching the 2004 event on Hay Anytime shifts the perception of the author and their comments. Imbuing Hay Festival with the prestige by having Smith appear multiple times at the festival, the contemporary Hay Anytime audience understand Smith's career trajectory wherein she has since released nine books, including novels, a short story collection, and essay anthologies, and she is significant cultural figure, bringing a moment of liveness to a historical event. The 2004 event is not contemporaneous in itself, but, if Auslander's logic is to be followed, becomes so through the audience's conscious engagement with it. In the case of watching past author appearances at Hay Festival on Hay Anytime, it may be that the archived event solidifies or suspends an author's opinion in a moment in time, or, as I argue, that Hay Anytime disrupts the idea of continuity at all.

At her 2019 event in Cartagena, Smith emphasises the protean and surprising author, discussing her essay collection *Feel Free*. She pushes back on an audience's insistence on freezing artists and authors in a moment – or an argument, a style, a period – in an essay from *Feel Free* about changing one's mind, or 'attunement' as she calls it, with the example: 'I

³⁶ Carey Mickalites, *Contemporary Fiction, Celebrity Culture, and the Market for Modernism Fictions of Celebrity* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023), 135; Smith, 'Zadie Smith,' Hay Festival.

hated Joni Mitchell – and then I loved her’.³⁷ But, referencing her preference for Mitchell’s *Blue* album over the rest of her discography, Smith says that artists and authors cannot be still, just as ‘Joni Mitchell doesn’t want to live in my dream, stuck as it is an eternal 1971 – her life has its own time,’ and as do texts and their meanings.³⁸ Hay Anytime and the contemporary connections created to archived Hay Festival events demonstrate the extensiveness and the fluidity of texts and their interpretations and that ‘our artists want to move’.³⁹ In Cartagena in 2019, Smith reiterates her sentiment on continuity from *Feel Free*, stating that ‘a person is a constantly changing thing and the consistency is not necessary to be authentic’.⁴⁰ She likens her books to acts of ‘voyeurism’ and the writing of fiction ‘so I don’t have to be trapped in my flesh cage,’ comments which have particular relevance when the event is watched on Hay Anytime.⁴¹ The Anytime audience’s own act of voyeurism, watching the physical presence of Smith as a digital body on screen positioned in her ‘flesh cage,’ is reminiscent of Scott’s four-dimensional human and the ‘everywhere-person’ like Mrs Dalloway.⁴² In this case, the four-dimensional human on Hay Anytime is both solitary in the world yet digitally connected in the virtual space of the online archive of events. What Hay Anytime does provide is a snapshot in time of Hay Festival and its authors, moments in time and certain conversations that reveal insights into texts and audience responses.

While Smith is an example of an author whose career can be traced through the platform and its representation of the Hay Festival environment, the question remains whether Hay Anytime is a good enough replacement for those who cannot attend in-person events, or catch-up on events they missed. Rodell-Jones admits that when using Hay

³⁷ Smith, ‘Zadie Smith talks to Carolina Sanín,’ Hay Festival Cartagena; Zadie Smith, ‘Some Notes on Attunement,’ *Feel Free* (Hamish Hamilton, 2018), 106.

³⁸ Smith, ‘Some Notes on Attunement,’ 114.

³⁹ Ibid, 114.

⁴⁰ Smith, ‘Zadie Smith talks to Carolina Sanín,’ Hay Festival Cartagena.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Scott, *The Four-Dimensional Human*, 13.

Anytime, ‘there is that sense of I missed out on that true, you know, that real life experience, that moment’.⁴³ The feelings of missing out and the lack of exclusivity prompted by Hay Anytime should not be ignored. Some of Hay Festival’s audience mirror this belief that digital recordings cannot replicate the festival atmosphere, with one creating an irrevocable division between the online and in-person festival experience by saying that using the platform ‘would be like a separate activity from coming to the festival, which is to come to the festival and see it live’.⁴⁴ While iPlayer and Netflix enable viewers to watch the films and television shows largely in the format that they were conceived (with some cinematic exceptions), NT at Home and Hay Anytime both shift the original event to a different digital format, changing the experience of the event and losing the promise of the participatory audience and the co-presence between author and audience.⁴⁵

However, instead of seeing the digital recording of an event as a lack, it should be seen as a recomposition. As a digital tool to rehear, relive, or find for the first time an event, Hay Anytime slows down the festival experience, with options to rewind and repeat helping decipher events like Smith’s, with audiences being able to ‘absorb [the event] better’.⁴⁶ As the example of Smith’s festival appearances on Hay Anytime demonstrate, the digital archive enables the audience to elide time and events, making an occasion of watching events in order to create a new sense of digital liveness with the author and the text. Hay Anytime represents an experience of the changeable author and a festival that is ‘fleet of foot’ in its digital strategy, promising audience accessibility and extending the lifetime of the festival while also illuminating the complexities of ever-changing nature of authors appearing at exclusive events.⁴⁷

⁴³ Jo Rodell-Jones, interview by Rebecca Roach, Zoom, September 13, 2021.

⁴⁴ Speaker 8, Focus Group 1, interview by Ellen Addis and Jennifer Tegg, May 27, 2023, Hay Festival, Hay-on-Wye.

⁴⁵ Driscoll, *The New Literary Middlebrow*, 170; Murray and Weber, “‘Live and local’?”, 74.

⁴⁶ Jo Rodell-Jones, interview by Rebecca Roach, Zoom, September 13, 2021.

⁴⁷ Andy Fryers, interview by Ellen Addis, Zoom, September 29, 2021.

Book of the Month: Creating online reading communities

As a living, moving, breathing text, the internet offers an abundance of what is termed ‘book talk’: online bookshops, videos of archived literary festival events, authors’ social media accounts, celebrity-led informal book clubs, and sections of and whole social media platforms solely dedicated to the discussion of books.⁴⁸ The influx of book talk causes Murray to observe that the ‘challenge for contemporary bibliophiles is not to locate literary content of interest online but, rather, to sift the perspicacious and illuminating wheat from the chaff of vapid adulation and naked self-promotion’.⁴⁹ Hay Festival interacts with the growing online book talk through its multiple digital platforms, social media accounts, and projects, all of which aim to extend the festival experience to all-year round. One of these arenas of book talk that the festival capitalises upon is online book clubs, creating its own reading group initially titled ‘Book of the Month’ (BOTM) in August 2018, coinciding with the launch of Hay Anytime, in the hope to extend the ‘significant book-related community’ established at its festivals.⁵⁰ Beginning the same year, both BOTM and Hay Anytime worked in tandem to promote engagement with and conversation about Hay Festival’s past events. Similar to the response of Hay Anytime to the emergent technology of VoD and streaming services, BOTM capitalises upon the influx of online celebrity and user-generated book clubs on social media.

BOTM is described by Hay Festival as ‘our monthly recommendation of a title we love and think holds particular resonance today,’ and is seen as the festival’s ‘chance to celebrate great works of fiction, non-fiction and poetry – new and old’.⁵¹ The Hay Festival

⁴⁸ Murray, *The Digital Literary Sphere*, 1.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 1.

⁵⁰ Long, *Book Clubs: Women and the Uses of Reading in Everyday Life*, 218. To keep consistency, I have continued to use ‘Hay Anytime’ to describe the online event archive, despite the platform being called ‘Hay Player’ when BOTM began.

⁵¹ ‘Hay Festival Book of the Month, May 2023,’ Hay Festival, accessed June 11, 2024, <https://www.hayfestival.com/book-of-the-month-may-2023>.

BOTM follows the template of contemporary digital book clubs in that it chooses books each month in order to bolster and praise them and create discussion online whether it is in Hay Festival moderated live chat boxes during livestreamed events or book talk on social media. BOTM was established seven years after the *Guardian*'s own reader-led online Reading Group began in 2011 and has similarities in format – providing further reading resources and hosting interviews with the authors of chosen books online – and I will draw comparison between the two.⁵²

Since it began, BOTM has had two different formats, but has repeatedly switched between them. First, it was simple. BOTM would choose a book which had featured at the festival, linking to its corresponding event on Hay Anytime and encouraging discussion on social media. In 2020 during the pandemic, it changed format and hosted exclusive online livestreamed interviews with the author of each book, extending the book club style to include audience interaction and discussion in the live chatbox and question options. In 2022, the book club returned to its original format, linking the chosen books' corresponding events, either on Hay Anytime or upcoming at the festivals. Finally, in 2024, BOTM returned to its 2020 format with livestreamed author interviews each month. Both formats seek to extend the experience of the book for the reader through supplementary materials and facilitating online discussion with an author interview, either livestreamed to the Hay Festival website, or by promoting the relevant past or future Hay Festival event available on Hay Anytime. BOTM's mercurial shifts and varying levels of group engagement, as well as its establishment at a similar time to Hay Anytime, gestures to the festival's wider DIY digital strategy as improvisatory in its reaction to new emergent technologies and circumstances such as the

⁵² Hosted by Sam Jordison, *Guardian*'s Reading group featured a book chosen each month by readers. Jordison provided the background of the chosen book and author, while 'experts' responded to reader's points and authors appeared via a 'live web chat' for discussion with readers ('Reading Group,' *Guardian* (London), accessed August 13, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/series/reading-group>).

pandemic, and its aim to reach as broad an audience as possible while engaging with its extant festivalgoers.

In this section, I will ask if Hay Festival's BOTM is simply what Murray calls a 'vapid adulation and naked self-promotion' of its past events and connections to literary celebrities, or if it can also be an attentive and discerning effort to create an embodied online reading community, reminiscent of Lockwood's conception of the internet as a bookish 'refuge'.⁵³ I seek to find out the value of BOTM as either a way to introduce and recommend books sold to Hay Festival by publishers to its already captive audience, or as a way of promoting discussion through challenging texts, using the various online arenas of book talk.

Book clubs as tastemakers

Book of the Month epitomises the wider Hay Festival strategy to provide agency for its audience: from those looking for an online community to have bookish discussions with, individuals who want to win books, and fans of Hay Festival who wish to experience past events. Historically, the term 'book club' has had multiple meanings. In *Book Clubs and Book Commerce* (2019), Corinna Norrick-Rühl explores four meanings of 'book club,' some of which overlap, including: a 'book-distribution institution' that sells products via a subscription model; a 'book collectors club'; literary societies in the eighteenth and nineteenth century that borrowed books from libraries; and a discussion or reading group.⁵⁴ The development of mass culture in the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries resulted in the emergence of a quicker circulation of books and the beginning of the Book-of-the-Month Club (BOMC), a mail order scheme that distributed one

⁵³ Lockwood, *Priestdaddy*, 18.

⁵⁴ Corinna Norrick-Rühl, *Book Clubs and Book Commerce*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108597258>, 5-7.

book each month to its members across the country.⁵⁵ BOMC is a descendent of women's reading groups in the nineteenth century known as 'literary clubs' which themselves grew out of the French salon movement, bringing together women in broad-based social movements to discuss books. Elizabeth Long's study of women's reading groups in the southern United States in the early 2000s attributes literary clubs as forebearers of the contemporary book club and seeks to understand the social reading practices of these clubs to interrogate the prevailing image of reading as a solitary experience.⁵⁶

Hay Festival's book club falls under Norrick-Rühl's final meaning, the discussion or reading group category. As the book club of a large literary festival, BOTM chooses books that appeal to a large audience, 'across a variety of tastes' that reflect the wider literary programming of the festival itself.⁵⁷ In her history of the pioneering mail-order subscription book club, Book-of-the-Month Club, Janice Radway describes the club as an 'activity of recommendation' selling 'the very idea of taste itself' in the twentieth-century, contributing to the creation and consistent readership of bestsellers.⁵⁸ Similar to Radway's description of the judges of the Book-of-the-Month Club, who recommended books matching their 'readers' desires, needs, and tastes' and acted 'as social facilitators or mediators trying to foster connections between readers, books, and their authors,' Hay Festival's book club choices attempt to engage its audience with the festival and its authors by creating an online reading community that reflects the wider taste in literature of the festival itself.⁵⁹

Hay Festival's BOTM began with a primary focus on interaction, agency, and book talk between readers. In 2018, the festival promoted the new online book club on its

⁵⁵ For more, see: Radway, *A Feeling for Books: The Book-of-the-Month Club, Literary Taste, and Middle-Class Desire*.

⁵⁶ Long, *Book Clubs: Women and the Uses of Reading in Everyday Life*, 47-59.

⁵⁷ Norrick-Rühl, *Book Clubs and Book Commerce*, 61.

⁵⁸ Radway, *A Feeling for Books*, 271, 5.

⁵⁹ Radway, *A Feeling for Books*, 271.

Facebook page by prioritising audience engagement, asking ‘Haymakers’ (the moniker for its festivalgoers) for their book suggestions, ‘to celebrate and ignite conversation around current and backlist books that resonate today ... discussing online, running giveaways, and sharing great festival content from the archive’.⁶⁰ Throughout the six years that it has been running, BOTM has had a varied recommendation list, not constrained by genre or form, mixing fiction and non-fiction, though all are popular authors, and choices include Toni Morrison’s canonical magical realist novel *Beloved* (1987) in September 2018; Robert Macfarlane’s meditation on walking and writing, *The Old Way* (2012), in March 2019; Afua Hirsch’s *Brit(ish): On Race, Identity and Belonging* (2018), a non-fiction exploration of Britain’s imperial past and present; and Mieko Kawakami’s novel set in contemporary Japan, *All the Lovers in the Night* (2011). Including authors who have appeared at the festival past and present, Hay Festival’s BOTM is not as base as Murray’s ‘vapid adulation and naked self-promotion,’ but promotes a general form of book talk, enabling, at times, the Hay Festival audience to become participants through digital media through the book club’s differing formats. Looking at BOTM’s changing formats provides an insight into Hay Festival’s broader changing digital priorities and an indication of its DIY approach to digital technologies and audience engagement. The question remains, what type of reading do these book communities encourage? Is it critical? Emotional? At all in-depth? And where does Hay Festival’s own online reading community, Book of the Month, fit in? Behind the jostling of commercial and cultural priorities, an online book club’s recommendation of book is not always an endorsement, though it does reflect the taste of the festival and places the recommender – Hay Festival in this case – as part of the conversation about a book.

⁶⁰ Hay Festival, ‘Haymakers, your suggestions please...Tomorrow we’re launching a new Hay Festival Book of the Month,’ Facebook, July 31, 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/hayfestival/posts/10156643872294777>

Social media, book clubs, and Ali Smith's The Accidental

At its inception in 2018, the BOTM selection would derive from a previous Hay Festival archived event on Hay Anytime, with promotional material linking the event video to entice people to subscribe to the streaming service. The simple cause and effect strategy had the benefit of using Hay Festival's vast archive and the critical discussion from these events. In February 2020, influenced by the author's upcoming event at the May festival, the Hay Festival team chose Ali Smith's novel *The Accidental* (2005) as BOTM, encouraging 'Haymakers' to share their thoughts on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, using the hashtags #HayBookoftheMonth and #HBOM. In choosing a book from 2005 that is firmly rooted in the early 2000s moment (the book references 9/11, the Iraq war, and the killing of Damilola Taylor, among other traumatic news stories at the time) and a book that had its own author event at the festival in 2005, Hay Festival performs an act of self-reference, enabling the festival to promote Hay Anytime and the past event, as well as to cement a connection with the pre-eminent writer Smith.

The festival introduced *The Accidental* as the February 2020 BOTM pick via an excerpt clip on its Instagram from Smith's 2005 Hay Festival event with Francine Stock, with the caption: "'Beginning, middle and end... Once you have this arc of chronology, you have an arc of morality...' -Ali Smith on *The Accidental* at Hay Festival 2005'.⁶¹ Quoting Smith's discussion of temporality within *The Accidental* stresses the time passed between her festival event in 2005 and the 2020 BOTM selection, bolstering Smith's previous connection to Hay Festival via social media. At Hay-on-Wye in 2005, Smith considers temporal linearity and narrative, saying that the 'beginning produces a middle which then produces an end ... "End" in itself as a concept is always a new beginning, about something starting again'.⁶² *The*

⁶¹ Hay Festival (@hayfestival), "'Beginning, middle and end... Once you have this arc of chronology, you have an arc of morality...' - Ali Smith on *The Accidental* at Hay Festival 2005,' *Instagram*, February 20, 2020, accessed January 11, 2021, <https://www.instagram.com/p/B8yjr-RJCG0/>

⁶² Ali Smith, 'Ali Smith talks to Francine Stock,' Hay Festival, Hay-on-Wye, May 29, 2005.

Accidental, like all BOTM picks, was available for purchase in the festival's online bookshop, validating the claim that writers' festivals are enmeshed between cultural and commercial discourses which connect them intrinsically with the role of the literary celebrity.⁶³

Without the livestreamed author interview for the Smith selection, Hay Festival in 2020 relied on social media to generate discussion and an online reading community. The creation of online book communities reflects the new dynamic and hybrid relationship between participatory reading and interactions in the digital literary sphere where book interactions are placed online, and readers search for new environments to extend their experiences of books. Experiments with facilitating book clubs using new technologies such as television and social media have been variously successful, such as Oprah's Book Club (beginning in 1996), Richard & Judy's Book Club (beginning in 2004) on daytime television, and the actor Reese Witherspoon and the rapper Noname's book clubs starting on Instagram in 2017 and 2019 respectively. These reading groups spearheaded by celebrities transport popular literary culture into domestic settings, with David Carter describing book clubs as possessing a 'dual commitment to culture and to its wider diffusion'.⁶⁴ However, more recently, book clubs such as Hay Festival's have turned away from traditional celebrity endorsement and towards the role of the book influencer, or 'bookfluencer,' on social media to promote their book clubs.

Such is the power of the bookfluencer, that Fuller and Rehberg Sedo claim that '[i]f there is one type of reader who can create a bestseller, it is a social media influencer who recommends books'.⁶⁵ These bookfluencers, they write, are 'a new category of cultural

⁶³ Driscoll, *The New Literary Middlebrow*, 153.

⁶⁴ David Carter, 'Middlebrow Book Culture,' in *Routledge International Handbook of the Sociology of Art and Culture*, eds.

Laurie Hanquinet and Mike Savage (London: Routledge, 2015), 355.

⁶⁵ Danielle Fuller and DeNel Rehberg Sedo, *Reading Bestsellers: Recommendation Culture and the Multimodal Reader*, (Cambridge University Press: Elements in Publishing and Book Culture, 2023), 33.

intermediary' of 'passionate readers who use social media platforms to share their love of books and connect with fellow readers,' practising 'loving a book in public'.⁶⁶ Bookfluencers are small celebrities who create a brand of 'reader' on social media, either YouTube, Instagram, or TikTok, gaining attention and social status as a trusted source of recommendations. Each platform has an appropriately bookish nomenclature to match: 'BookTube,' 'Bookstagram,' 'BookTok'. In these spaces, bookfluencers share their own reading taste to define themselves as 'authentic' and 'relatable' book lovers, while also 'lending both legitimacy and visibility to the books that they review, discuss, and display across social media platforms'.⁶⁷ As cultural intermediaries, bookfluencers connect readers with books and publishers to readers. Since 2020, Hay Festival has interacted extensively with bookfluencers, encouraging online BOTM discussion by targeting bookfluencer spaces, and making TikTok its digital media partner in 2022, producing in-app festival content with BookTok influencers and TikTok-focused events, with the aim 'to bring the magic of #BookTok' to the festival and 'reach more diverse audiences'.⁶⁸

The reader participating in the reading recommendation culture that bookfluencers promote is a 'multimodal reader 'cubed'' or 'MMR³' according to Fuller and Rehberg Sedo, reading in three dimensions in an era when digital and print cultures coexist and reading materials could be codex books or transmedia objects.⁶⁹ This coexistence exists in what Alexandra Dane and Weber call a 'post-digital' world, wherein digital and analogue technologies both 'exist with simultaneous relevance'.⁷⁰ Florian Cramer uses the popularity

⁶⁶ Bronwyn Reddan, 'Social reading cultures on BookTube, Bookstagram, and BookTok,' *Synergy* 20, no.1 (2022), <https://slav.vic.edu.au/index.php/Synergy/article/view/597>; Fuller and Rehberg Sedo, *Reading Beyond the Book*, 200.

⁶⁷ Reddan, 'Social reading cultures on BookTube, Bookstagram, and BookTok,' 1; Fuller and Rehberg Sedo, *Reading Bestsellers*, 33.

⁶⁸ 'TikTok Announced as Digital Media Partner to Hay Festival 2022,' Hay Festival, accessed August 13, 2024, <https://www.hayfestival.com/news/blog.aspx?post=1538>.

⁶⁹ Fuller and Rehberg Sedo, *Reading Bestsellers*, 5.

⁷⁰ Dane and Weber, *Post-Digital Book Cultures: Australian Perspectives*, 1.

of the codex, record players, and film cameras as examples of the post-digital world, wherein materiality remains resilient within digital environments through the revival of seemingly ‘old’ media technologies.⁷¹ Seeing online reading communities as post-digital and a part of Murray’s digital literary sphere is a useful way to understand how books can also collapse the distance between in-person and digital engagement, creating embodied experiences online. Like the book club ventures that came before, bookfluencers create their own bookish reading community on social media, through their reviews, pictures, videos, and comment section discussion, with trusted recommendations and ‘authenticity’ at the core. Enabling online book interactions to flourish and create what Lisa Nakamura calls ‘intimate social relationships’ and ‘new social valences of reading,’ the bookish corners of social media illustrate Lockwood’s ‘living, moving, breathing’ internet in a state of perpetual completion and change, where personal responses to books are shared publicly.⁷²

Hay Festival sent the February 2020 BOTM pick *The Accidental* to bookfluencers to promote the book and generate online discussion. Mainly, this social media attention took place on Bookstagram, a bookish community based on the photo app Instagram that prioritises an appealing aesthetic of books with artistically composed pictures where the ‘book has pride of place’.⁷³ One Bookstagrammer that spotlighted *The Accidental* and prompted a particularly lively discussion was an account run by Derek Addyman and Anne Brichto who own Addyman Books, a group of three successful bookshops in Hay-on-Wye. Addyman Books has over 28,000 followers on Instagram and typically posts creative pictures of books from around the shop. As a bookseller, Addyman Books is distinct from other Bookstagrammers in that its online success results in commercial gain for its shop. Further,

⁷¹ Cramer, ‘What Is ‘Post-digital’?’ 12.

⁷² Lisa Nakamura, “‘Words with Friends’: Socially Networked Reading on Goodreads,” *PMLA: Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 128, no. 1 (2013): 238, <https://doi.org/10.1632/pmla.2013.128.1.238>; Patricia Lockwood, *Priestdaddy*, 18.

⁷³ Thomas, *Literature and Social Media*, 73.

the bookshop's location also changes the interaction with Hay Festival due to its pre-standing relationship which leads to the bookshop promoting the festival's events via Instagram.

The Accidental BOTM pick provoked a long post by Addyman Books, and an even longer comment thread on Instagram, beginning the post with a statement: 'As a bookseller I sell and promote a range of books that I wouldn't read ... so why did I feel so uncomfortable when I received the @hayfestival's book of the month selection?'.⁷⁴ This strikingly personal opening, made possible by the open forum allowed due to the mutually-beneficial relationship with the festival, immediately relegates Smith's novel as a book they would not normally read and sets the precedent for an informal and critical conversation enabled through the semi-anonymity of social media.

However, a tension exists between writing under the commercial identity of Addyman Books and the personal critique of *The Accidental*. Addyman Books typically sells a colourful mix of mystery and true crime fiction, horror, poetry, and art books among others. Smith is not in the bookshop's typical remit and it criticises her work by writing, 'I don't know what it was about her style of writing – she said too much for you to have the joy of joining the gaps that most story tellers leave but not enough for it to be streams of consciousness you want to follow'.⁷⁵ Addyman places Smith's voice at the centre of its discussion of the text and emphasises the reliance upon the choice of popular authors for Hay Festival to provoke online discussion. In return for a copy the book, Addyman uses a poll and asks their followers to 'comment read this or don't bother below'.⁷⁶ The informal and dismissive tone prompts reader debate and encourages a more negative appraisal of the book in the comment section of the post. By not relying on Hay Festival's own arena for book discussions, the BOTM conversation on social media can be lively and unbridled, allowing

⁷⁴ Addyman Books (@addymanbooks), 'As a bookseller I sell and promote a range of books that I wouldn't read...' *Instagram*, February 18, 2020, accessed October 12, 2020, www.instagram.com/p/B8tRtkcnRwX.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

space for the criticism that is missing from celebrity book clubs that often revere literary fiction rather than critique. Nonetheless, the example of Addyman Books shows that when online book talk is unregulated, it can also be antagonistic to rich and generative discussion, instead falling on extreme sides of opinions and a ‘like/disklike’ binary rather than asking how the author’s style affect the book itself.

Another Bookstagrammer’s post reveals the influence Hay Festival’s BOTM as a recommendation tool has on its participants. Interacting with *The Accidental* in the form of a book review on Instagram, Kelly Contrary (@contraryreader) opens her review writing that though she has never read any of Smith’s books as Smith ‘just hasn’t really caught my eye with enough fervour to make me take the leap. But if the Hay team think it is worth my time, then my time I should surely give it’.⁷⁷ Her review is mainly positive, writing, ‘[t]here is so much more depth and so many more threads to explore here, and the experimental, knowing tone won’t be for everyone but I for one have been left wanting more,’ and concludes it by asking her followers ‘[h]ave any of you read any Ali Smith? What are your thoughts? Where should I head next?’.⁷⁸ This Bookstagrammer’s review promotes Hay Festival’s BOTM as a trusted recommendation source for readers, opening discussion and reviews around the chosen book, especially appropriate on Instagram where long form posts and comments generate discussion, compared to the complex system of ‘star ratings,’ virtual shelves, reviews, comments, and discussion forums available on the user-generated book review site, Goodreads.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Kelly Contrary (@contrarybooks), ‘February’s #haybookofthemoth was #TheAccidental by #AliSmith,’ *Instagram*, March 1, 2020, accessed June 12, 2024, <https://www.instagram.com/p/B9NDGslgPiB/>.

⁷⁸ Kelly Contrary, ‘February’s #haybookofthemoth was #TheAccidental by #AliSmith.’

⁷⁹ Beth Driscoll and DeNel Rehberg Sedo, ‘Faraway, So Close: Seeing the Intimacy in Goodreads Reviews,’ *Qualitative Inquiry* 25, no. 3 (2019): 250, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1077800418801375>. For more on Goodreads Reviews, see: Simone Murray, ‘Secret Agents: Algorithmic Culture, Goodreads and Datafication of the Contemporary Book World,’ *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 24, no. 4 (2021): 970-989, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1367549419886026>; Nakamura, “‘Words with Friends’”; Melanie Walsh and Maria Antoniak, “‘The Goodreads ‘Classics’: A Computational Study of Readers, Amazon, and Crowdsourced Amateur Criticism,” *CA: Journal of Cultural Analytics* 4, (2021), doi:10.22148/001c.22221.

Without the option of a live chatbox, public interaction with BOTM is kept on social media. Scott argues that social media ‘makes a moment four-dimensional by scaffolding it with simultaneity, such that it exists in multiple places at once’.⁸⁰ Yet cross-platform engagement can facilitate flattened, two-dimensional interactions with literature. In posting a negative review, however, in opposition with the majority of online book talk steeped in adulation, Addyman Books, prompted by Hay Festival’s BOTM, creates a critical forum of discussion, inviting participation to the bookshop’s followers. However, this format of book clubs relies upon a social media audience to stimulate conversation about the BOTM elsewhere, not on Hay Festival’s own platforms, and consequently, the festival becomes a minor participant in this form of book club, opening up discussion but not hosting it. This is in contrast to the *Guardian*’s online Reading Group which was reader-led and had substantial guidance and contributions from its host, Sam Jordison. Each month, the newspaper’s book club participants would nominate a book within a theme such as ‘Black and British,’ ‘climate science fiction,’ and a ‘book about love’ (the final choice being picked out of a hat), and Jordison would publish articles discussing the book’s background, reception, and critical discourse, answering reader’s questions and comments on the website.⁸¹ The *Guardian*’s Reading Group developed an online reading community in these comment spaces, with the extra reading material providing critical and nuanced discussion while also encouraging interaction between readers in the often lively and thoughtful comments. Recycling archived events, Hay Festival’s first format of BOTM limits the author’s discussion to the festival

⁸⁰ Scott, *The Four-Dimensional Human*, xv.

⁸¹ The ‘Black and British’ pick for July 2020 was Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth*, Harry Harrison’s *Make Room! Make Room!* was the March 2020 ‘climate science fiction’ pick, and for the ‘book about love,’ the Reading Group chose James Baldwin’s *Giovanni’s Room*. Jordison would film the book choice being picked out of the hat and upload it to YouTube (see: Sam Jordison, ‘Reading Group October 2020,’ YouTube, October 4, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fzHL_wyIDwc).

environment, and while it does encourage reader interaction online, it does not produce new interactions with readers and authors.

The author's role in the online book club

In July 2020, beginning with Inua Ellams's *The Half God of Rainfall* (2019), Hay Festival's BOTM changed to introduce exclusive livestreamed author interviews with the book club picks. Bringing in authors to the discussion, the festival became an active host for the BOTM as opposed to a passive facilitator in the previous format, using its cultural capital as a successful literary festival to attract authors. Moving to livestreamed digital events radically changed the nature of the book club to a participatory online reading community, similar to mass mediated book clubs such as Oprah's Book Club and other established celebrity book clubs on social media. For the first time, Hay Festival hosted a platform wherein the audience had agency to ask the author questions, outside of the annual in-person festival. The choices for this livestreamed period were often newly published books, where the author was in the throes of their book tour interviews, as opposed to previous books where the linked event and publication could be decades old, as with Ali Smith's *The Accidental*.

Coinciding with its publication, the November 2020 BOTM pick was Caleb Femi's book of poems and photographs reflecting on life for young Black men from South London, *Poor* (2020). The BOTM involved a livestreamed interview between Femi and the novelist Max Porter on Crowdcast and was uploaded to YouTube for free, opening out engagement and access to those without a Hay Anytime subscription. Porter introduced Femi, asking the at-home audience to 'clap in your living rooms' for the poet, before interviewing him.⁸² The event closed with questions from the audience about the UK government's decimation of

⁸² November Book of the Month Live Q&A – Caleb Femi talks to Max Porter: *Poor*, Hay Festival, November 10, 2020, <https://www.hayfestival.com/p-17142-caleb-femi-talks-to-max-porter.aspx?skinid=16>.

funding for youth clubs, and another about how Femi finds inspiration to move past writer's block.⁸³ Structuring BOTM through an exclusive author interview and giving the audience the opportunity to contribute questions live to Femi, Hay Festival make its book club a digital space of interactivity, with the audience cast in the role of 'co-creators'.⁸⁴ The live chatbox during the livestreamed event included an overwhelmingly positive response from the audience reflecting on the emotional conversation taking place about the widespread socioeconomic deprivation in Britain.⁸⁵ However, with discussion pivoting around the author, there was little room for the audience to express critique or much nuance, making the book talk most likely one of adulation rather than evaluation, especially as Femi's event came soon after the release of *Poor*. Displacing the typical reading group wherein rich literary discussion and meaning making through books can become 'integral to the constitution of both social identity and sociocultural order,' Hay Festival's BOTM is concerned with replicating its festival events and selling books through a pattern of recommendation rather encouraging in-depth readerly conversations.⁸⁶

Hay Festival's BOTM continued this format for two years, returning to its first format in 2022, encouraging participants to read along and share their responses on social media, reducing the livestreamed events most likely due to the oversaturation of digital events experienced during the pandemic and the concept of 'Zoom fatigue' or 'digital fatigue' which describes the feeling of mental exhaustion from the extended time online and looking at computer screens.⁸⁷ But without the livestreamed author interviews and live chatbox, the level of intra-activity between festival and audience was lost from BOTM. Each BOTM selection thereafter linked to the Hay Festival event for the corresponding book, an archived

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Murray, *The Digital Literary Sphere*, 1, 99-105.

⁸⁵ 'November Book of the Month Live Q&A.'

⁸⁶ Long, *Book Clubs*, xvi.

⁸⁷ Heather Salisbury, interview by Rebecca Roach, Zoom, September 20, 2021.

event from Hay Anytime, or a booking page for an event about the book selected at an upcoming festival. Two years later, in January 2024, Hay Festival returned once more to the interactive BOTM format with special livestreamed interviews with each author, enabling audiences to communicate with the author and other readers in a more traditional book club style discussion. Coinciding with the wider Hay Festival rebrand in 2024, BOTM adopted the simple moniker ‘Hay Festival Book Club’ where selections are described as ‘[u]nconstrained by genre or form’.⁸⁸ Online book clubs such as Hay Festival’s bring together amateur readers, such as the ones that Radway explores, into public and interactive literary discussion, with the literary festival playing the role of tastemaker.⁸⁹ Joining geographically scattered readers who exist in different time zones and live different lifestyles, online reading communities capitalise upon the social aspect of book culture.

BOTM’s changing format is an example of Hay Festival’s DIY and improvisatory digital approach. Hay Festival’s digital strategy primarily aims to broaden the festival’s remit, extend the festivalgoer’s experience, and solidify the festival’s legacy through acts of self-reference. As a trusted source of cultural knowledge, Hay Festival’s BOTM functions as a book recommendation tool for its audience, with its established brand acting as a source of ‘trust’ for readers.⁹⁰ The digital strategy derives not from a grand plan, but from a necessity, with the aim to encourage discussion and promote Hay’s relevance. The changing format of BOTM shows its adaptability to the current digital climate, and the festival’s return of the BOTM to a vehicle to promote its past and future events signals towards its commercial priorities, wherein reading is tied so intimately with book-buying and book talk is wrapped up in recommendations.

⁸⁸ ‘Hay Festival Book Club,’ Hay Festival, accessed September 4, 2024, <https://www.hayfestival.com/book-club>.

⁸⁹ Murray, *The Digital Literary Sphere*, 142.

⁹⁰ Kelly Contrary, ‘February’s #haybookofthefestival was #TheAccidental by #AliSmith.’

‘We are where we aren’t’: Digital and hybrid literary festivals

On a hot day in late May 2020, a laptop screen shows a montage of recycled film clips: Janet Leigh begs for her life in *Psycho*, hands caress a pink blossom flower, James Stewart pleads Mr. Potter for a bank loan in *It's A Wonderful Life*, The Beatles wave to endless crowds, and gloved hands transfer perpetual amounts of money to cash registers. Over this mix of exchanges, a woman's Scottish lilt softly muses, 'the phrase "we are where we are," which so many people have been using as we've found ourselves in the coronavirus era, is only half right'.⁹¹ The screen continues to show more images of hands, now speeding up, touching each other, hands touching handbags, shower curtains, books, bread, sugar lumps. 'Actually, also, right now, we are where we aren't,' says the woman, 'we're more where we aren't than we've ever been'.⁹²

Watching the flickering images of hands on a laptop screen seems far from the collective experience of a literary festival, where an audience are gathered in the same space, rubbing elbows, and perhaps even shaking hands, with the person seated next to them. Yet this collage of recognisable and everyday filmic moments was collected by Ali Smith and her filmmaker partner Sarah Wood for the Hay Festival Digital 2020 Founders' Lecture. The short film, titled *The Beginning of the And*, overlaps Smith's narration in an attempt to mimic the collected place of the festival tent, conjuring a place 'where we aren't,' but still a virtual place where despite their physical distance, audiences can be together by watching an event simultaneously online. In this section, I will explore the context of the coronavirus pandemic from which *The Beginning of the And* arose, analyse Hay Festival's reaction to the pandemic, turning its in-person event to a fully online and social distanced digital festival, and how the pandemic has left lasting effects, with festivals and other cultural organisations embracing

⁹¹ Ali Smith and Sarah Wood, 'The Beginning of the And,' Hay Festival, online, May 25, 2020.

⁹² Smith and Wood, 'The Beginning of the And,' Hay Festival.

new hybrid technologies. I argue that Hay Festival's DIY digital strategy ultimately benefits the organisation, making it adaptable and flexible to difficult and unexpected situations such as the pandemic. I also look at the complex and fragmented community that the pandemic and digital events have created as festivals struggle to deliver both digital and live iterations of events in a post-pandemic world.

The coronavirus pandemic and Hay Festival Digital

On March 23, 2020, the United Kingdom government issued a stay-at-home order, restricting the freedom of movement and putting the country into lockdown. Throughout the next two years, the UK would have three periods of national lockdowns, and various tiered restrictions specific to local areas, limiting social gatherings and work, with many people confined indoors for more than a year. The pandemic also led to the mass closure of cultural venues and events across the UK. These closures moved arts engagement online, with cultural organisations which had previously opened their doors to audiences turning to the computer screen. As the pandemic lengthened into 2021, hybrid models of engagement and events emerged, with organisations combining digital and in-person events to reach audiences both at home and in-person to widen participation in the arts and adapt to the new ways of experiencing events.

Hay Festival's pandemic response followed suit with many other cultural event organisations in the UK such as the National Theatre that began its NT at Home project as discussed in this chapter, with overall twenty-five million people in the UK engaged with arts and culture online in 2020.⁹³ As the 2020 festival was scheduled just two months after the announcement of the first lockdown in the UK, Hay Festival cancelled the event on March

⁹³ 'National Theatre at Home,' *National Theatre*; Ana Maria Cirstea and Ntasha Mutebi, 'The Impact of Digital Technology on Arts and Culture in the UK,' *The Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST)*, May 10, 2022, <https://post.parliament.uk/research-briefings/post-pn-0669/>.

19, 2020 following UK government advice against non-essential travel and social contact. However, as 70% of Hay Festival's revenue historically derives from ticket and book sales, the festival set up an emergency fundraising Go Fund Me page to support its future under the title '#HELPHAYFESTIVAL,' with the page asking for 'Haymakers' to offer support at the festival's 'moment of maximum financial exposure' after having already committed to 'large infrastructure costs'.⁹⁴ The reliance on public donations points towards the UK government's lack of financial support for cultural organisations at this early stage of the pandemic. In written evidence for the UK government's 'Future of Music Festivals' select committee, Hay Festival calculates the economic impact of the pandemic to Hay-on-Wye and surrounding environs to be a loss of £51.2 million over three festivals (Hay Festival in May 2021 and 2022, and Winter Weekend 2020). This economic impact is calculated as not only as losses for the festival in tickets and sponsorship, but also for the local area through the depletion of accommodation bookings and retail sales, highlighting the importance of the festival to bring tourism and therefore money to the borderland area.⁹⁵

In the absence of live festivals and the huge financial loss for the festival (losing £400,000 for the cancellation of the 2020 May festival), the festival turned to securing funding and delivering an alternative digital programme of events 'to mitigate the risks' of the pandemic.⁹⁶ To support arts organisations during the pandemic, the government introduced the three-phased Cultural Recovery Fund (CRF), administered through ACE, in July 2020. Hay Festival received £185,000 from the CRF from the Welsh government in

⁹⁴ '#HELPHAYFESTIVAL,' Go Fund Me, accessed August 15, 2023, <https://www.gofundme.com/f/ncz9z-hay-festival-emergency-fund>; 'Coronavirus: Hay Festival Goes Ahead Online with £350k Donations,' *BBC News*, May 18, 2020, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-52661748>.

⁹⁵ This figure was 'measured independently by market researchers using the Government's 'EventImpacts' Economic Calculator,' Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 'Written evidence submitted by the Hay Festival.'

⁹⁶ Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 'Written evidence submitted by the Hay Festival.'

2021 and 2022, and £600,000 from CRF’s continuity support from ACE.⁹⁷ After raising over £350,000 through the GoFundMe page, Hay Festival announced on April 4, 2020 that it would launch ‘#ImagineTheWorld,’ a new digital series with a podcast and free digital events for young people, followed by the festival’s first fully digital festival in May. Hay Festival used the digital platform Crowdcast to support its first all-digital festival as it had the pre-existing livestreaming services to support its large digital audiences, with Peter Florence calling the digital festival ‘the very opposite of “social distancing.” It’s about being together, about contact and exchange’.⁹⁸ As one of the first major cultural events of the year, there was a distinct buzz around Hay Festival Digital, causing the then-prime minister Boris Johnson to term the digital event ‘Hay-on-Wifi,’ praising its fleet footed innovation during Prime Minister’s Questions.⁹⁹

Hay Festival Digital 2020 was a huge success. The in-person Hay Festival traditionally sells 275,000 tickets, with around 80,000 visitors to the festival. For Hay Festival Digital 2020, around 500,000 people watched events for free online over the festival, from over seventy countries.¹⁰⁰ The festival team attribute the success of the first Hay Festival Digital to the timing during the ‘perfect storm’ of the first lockdown where ‘everybody was shut in their houses’ and the festival subsequently had a ‘captive

⁹⁷ ‘Wales Cultural Recovery Fund Phase 2: Cultural Organisations and businesses that received up to £150,000,’ *Business Wales*, accessed July 31, 2024, <https://businesswales.gov.wales/topics-and-guidance/covid-19-support-your-business/welsh-government-economic-resilience-funds/wales-cultural-recovery-fund-awarded-organisations-phase-2>; ‘Report of the Trustee and Financial Statements for the Year Ended 31 December 2022 for Hay Festival Foundation Limited,’ 16. The shortcomings of the CRF have been examined by a Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre report that found that CRF concentrated financial support in affluent areas and those organisations with a history of public investment (Abigail Gilmore, et al, ‘When Policy Meets Place: “Levelling Up” and the Culture and Creative Industries,’ *Creative Industries Policy & Evidence Centre*, July 13, 2021, https://pec.ac.uk/blog_entries/when-policy-meets-place/.)

⁹⁸ Peter Florence, “‘A Dream Team’: How The Hay Festival Will Look Online,” *Guardian* (London), May 6, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2020/may/06/a-dream-team-how-the-hay-festival-will-look-online>. For the second all-digital Hay Festival in 2021, the festival hosted livestreamed events on its own website.

⁹⁹ House of Commons, ‘Prime Minister’s Questions,’ May 13, 2020, <https://parliamentlive.tv/event/index/c233c46c-2773-4ded-a412-e2a8ea5cc1ab?in=12:27:06>

¹⁰⁰ ‘Coronavirus: Almost 500,000 Stream First Online Hay Festival,’ *BBC News*, June 1, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-wales-52875868>.

audience’.¹⁰¹ The smallest events at Hay Festival Digital 2020 garnered 1,500 to 2,000 views, an audience of which would fill the Hay-on-Wye site’s largest tent.¹⁰² In many ways, the digital infrastructure that Hay Festival had established before the pandemic with Hay Anytime and Book of the Month gave what Kerr calls ‘a head start on the whole moving from live to digital compared to our other festivals perhaps in the sector’ when the UK did go into lockdown.¹⁰³ This digital infrastructure also left the festival ‘fairly well accustomed to operating from a streaming platform and we had a lot of the back end functionality’.¹⁰⁴ The success of Hay Festival Digital 2020 using Crowdcast led to the festival hosting livestreamed events on its own website for the hybrid festival in 2021, giving it independence after years relying upon the BBC and Sky Arts to showcase its events and bring the festival nationwide, leading Kerr to declare that ‘now we are clearly our own broadcaster’.¹⁰⁵ Capitalising upon the pre-existing digital technologies emerging from its DIY digital strategy, Hay Festival was able to make a smoother transition to all-digital festivals, also giving it the freedom to set its own programme and broadcast directly to its audience that it has built up over three decades.

The Beginning of the And: *Ali Smith at Hay Festival Digital 2020*

Hay Festival Digital 2020 transported the author talks that would take place on the Hay Festival stages to the screens of the laptop. The eighty digital events were available to attendees for twenty-four hours on Crowdcast before being uploaded to Hay Anytime. However, one event was unique from others. In the form of a short film made to be shown only once, and described as ‘[a] brief meditation on continuance recorded on an iPhone, made with images found in film,’ Ali Smith’s short fifteen minute film *The Beginning of the And*

¹⁰¹ Poppy Evans, interview by Ellen Addis, Zoom, September 23, 2021

¹⁰² Joe Fletcher, interview by Rebecca Roach, Zoom, October 4, 2021.

¹⁰³ Maggie Kerr, interview by Ellen Addis, Zoom, September 27, 2021.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

sits on the border between archival and newly experimental, much like Smith's novels which flit between tenses and storytelling devices.¹⁰⁶ The film was the first of a series that Smith made with Wood for various literary festivals, including one for Edinburgh Book Festival 2020 titled *Festival*. Each film was unique, and, as Smith explains, 'made very fast, very roughly, with whatever images / technology came to hand, round a text I'd write a quick draft of then redevelop alongside the images Sarah [Wood] would suggest or find after reading the text'.¹⁰⁷ When Smith introduces herself to the dispersed Hay Festival Digital audience in *The Beginning of the And* as an author 'in film form instead,' the screen shows film clips of hands tending to and picking pink flowers.¹⁰⁸ The film's focus on touch and connection through the imagery of hands resonated deeply in the pandemic context of its screening and the physical distance of the Hay Festival Digital audience watching while scattered across the world, only conversing via social media and the live chatbox on Crowdcast. *The Beginning of the And* joined strangers through simultaneous private readings (or intimate screenings), enabled by Hay Festival's digital improvisation and foresight in enabling the cancelled festival to go ahead online.

The Beginning of the And displaces the typical author interview at the literary festival. Smith says that the decision to make a short film instead of record an interview on Zoom was a deliberate act, and that while 'Zoom and its zoomhead possibilities were a marvellous gift for all of us who really needed to see family and friends when we were divided,' it is also 'a difficult substitute for the breathing presence of being there in a room with someone, let alone a room or theatre with someone giving a talk, more a divider in this latter case rather than a means of making present'.¹⁰⁹ Attributing the experience of in-person live events to a 'breathing presence,' the internet for Smith does not replace the experience of an in-person

¹⁰⁶ Smith and Wood, 'The Beginning of the And,' Hay Festival.

¹⁰⁷ Ali Smith, interview by Ellen Addis, email, January 9, 2023.

¹⁰⁸ Smith and Wood, 'The Beginning of the And,' Hay Festival.

¹⁰⁹ Ali Smith, interview by Ellen Addis, email, January 9, 2023.

event and the feeling of ‘making present’. *The Beginning of the And* marks her intervention and experimentation with the possibilities of using another art form rather than the diminished version of the author interview, in an attempt to forge connections with the at-home audience.

Smith’s subverted truism ‘we are where we aren’t’ reflects Scott’s four-dimensional human and its state of everywhere-ness, especially Scott’s concession that ‘some would argue that all this extensiveness isn’t us at all, and that we’re still as confined as ever we were to the long-and-shorts of our bodies,’ but ‘one illusion that we’re continually perfecting is not simply how to be here and there at the same time, but how to be there while looking like we’re here’.¹¹⁰ *The Beginning of the And*, however, shows that in literary events online, there can be no easy transferral of author and audience experience due to the physical distance. While the audience’s embodied engagement with events can emulate the feelings of a live event, the author’s experience is markedly different. In the typical festival interview, the author speaks to a webcam, fields questions from a textbox, and ends the event alone in the room, with no book signing to rush to and with little of the atmosphere usually found at a festival.

In 2005, at her Hay Festival event discussing *The Accidental*, Smith describes the appeal of going to see a film: ‘[t]here in the cinema, in the dark, it comes directly to you, it’s a communal experience’.¹¹¹ *The Beginning of the And* imitates this communal experience of the cinema through the singularity of the experience not under the viewer’s control (there was no option to pause or rewatch), and is viewed at home in private, in a most likely solitary environment on a computer. The tweets during and after the film paint a picture of disembodied audience enthrallment, with one viewer claiming, ‘[p]retty sure I’m not the only

¹¹⁰ Scott, *The Four-Dimensional Human*, 14-15.

¹¹¹ Smith, ‘Ali Smith Talks to Francine Stock,’ Hay Festival.

viewer in tears right now,’ and another writing, ‘[t]oday of all days, her words and ideas are a much needed tonic (no gin required)’.¹¹² Many of the live-tweets had replies echoing the audience’s appreciation, opening up conversations and forging a semblance of an online community around the film. Live-tweeting events at literary festivals form what Murray and Weber call a ‘back channel’ which ‘lends participation in an event a multilayered density’.¹¹³ In regular in-person festival events, this comes from those physically present at the event having conversations online, overlapping live and mediated experiences, but in all-digital festival events such as *The Beginning of the And*, all public interactions take place in the online realm.

As it could only be viewed once in the live moment and is not available anywhere online, *The Beginning of the And* is distinct from other Hay Festival Digital events, and suggests the possibility of a transient digital space where a brief festival community becomes untraceable and possibly forgotten without proper recording. In its attempt to make the event special, Hay Festival risks erasing the film’s impact. Consequently, by creating a one-off film-viewing experience, perhaps more akin to a live theatre show in its fleeting temporality than a film, Smith, Wood, and Hay Festival stretch the boundaries of the digital archive and replicate a sense of unrecorded liveness. In a way, the film emulates a long-gone festival model and rite, pre-internet and recording, where to experience an event, one had to be there at the precise moment it was being shown. Smith describes the intent behind the one-off nature of the film:

So that you had to be there, so when you were watching it you’d know it was also participatory in a live way, and that you were communally watching something with others. Something about having to be there — because the films were one-offs,

¹¹² James Delyth (@delythjames), “‘We are where we aren’t’ - Ali Smith at Hay Festival Digital. Pretty sure I’m not the only viewer in tears right now. #ImagineTheWorld.’ Twitter, May 25, 2020, <https://twitter.com/delythjames/status/1264977199364558848>; Euan Tait (@Taaait), ‘The Beginning of the And. Ali Smith is a treasure. Today of all days, her words and ideas are a much needed tonic (no gin required),’ Twitter, May 25, 2020, <https://twitter.com/Taaait/status/1264979215079833606>

¹¹³ Murray and Weber, “‘Live and Local’?”, 71.

purposefully not streamed, as part of their concept — was built into the showings too.¹¹⁴

Disrupting the typical streaming model established by VoD services and adopted by Hay Festival's Hay Anytime and other digital festival events, Smith extends the realm of the digital experience of literary festivals to be at once exclusive, and online, while also emulating the communal experience of an in-person festival experience. The tension between ephemeral film and an older festival experience imbues *The Beginning of the And* with the non-linear chronology that Smith favours as she purposely disrupts the endless Hay Anytime archiving and the keeping and recording of everything.

Aside from the irony that a meditation on continuance cannot be not continually watched, the Hay Festival Digital 2020 event is transitory and difficult to get hold of, with its short, whimsical fifteen-minutes being too-short and too-transitory, too-special almost to the point of exclusion. *The Beginning of the And* sits in a space unique from the ordinary recorded or live author talk which 'becomes recorded, searchable, and infinitely replayable from among the massed archives of online content'.¹¹⁵ Though completely online, the film has left little evidence of its existence other than through live-tweets. The 'insider' status reserved for the ticket-holding attendees at the physical literary festival is now reserved for the lucky few that can catch the passing moment of liveness, prompting the familiar fear of missing out that festivalgoers feel at the in-person event with its plethora of choices and clashes. Liveness, previously equated with being physically present at the writers' festival, in the digital sphere has the potential to be more democratic, where anyone, in theory, can access events. The digital festival and a digital event like *The Beginning of the And* complicates what Murray calls literary festivals' 'twin claims to the superior experience of

¹¹⁴ Ali Smith, interview by Ellen Addis, email, January 9, 2023.

¹¹⁵ Murray, *The Digital Literary Sphere*, 85.

spatiotemporal co-presence'.¹¹⁶ Rather than providing a typical author interview, Smith and Hay Festival experiment with the new digital format of the festival to create new interactions with texts with new experiences and possibilities of embodied engagement for the festival audience. However, the potential democracy of online events is disrupted by complications in the private sphere, of having enough leisure time to access a festival in the day, and a good enough internet connectivity and the right time zones to watch something live. The exclusivity of Smith's digital event illuminates a prevalent issue with online arts events with the sense of privilege attached to accessing the event, an issue that many arts organisations including Hay Festival attempted to bridge with hybrid events.

Hybrid Models: Navigating literary festivals after the pandemic

For the second Hay Festival Digital in 2021, the UK still had some lockdown restrictions in place. Consequently, the festival held a hybrid version, broadcasting most events to an at-home digital audience from online livestreams similar to the 2020 festival, though some events were hosted from a temporary studio in Richard Booth's Bookshop in Hay-on-Wye with a very limited in-person audience made up exclusively of invited guests, with tickets not available to the public. Consequently, the overwhelming majority of the Hay Festival Digital 2021 audience were online, watching from home. The festival had 300,000 views, almost half the audience from the previous year, but still a large increase on its in-person numbers.¹¹⁷ Some Hay Festival staff see these digital events as a poor replacement for live, in-person events, with Compton saying, 'we are a live events organiser. I don't mind the digital [events] on top, but what we do really well is live events. That magic in the tent, you can't put that online'.¹¹⁸ Compton's belief that the 'magic in the tent' – meaning the energy, community,

¹¹⁶ Murray, *The Digital Literary Sphere*, 103.

¹¹⁷ 'Hay Festival 2021 Report,' Hay Festival, accessed March 17, 2022, <https://cloud.hayfestival.com/hay-on-wye/reports/Hay-Festival-2021-Report.pdf>, 13.

¹¹⁸ Penny Compton, interview by Ellen Addis, Zoom, October 6, 2021.

and located nature of live in-person events – cannot be translated online shows the diffidence felt by some of the Hay Festival team towards digital events. Promoting the live festival encounter as ‘magic’ and the digital experience as an inferior imitation, Compton highlights the difficulty of a digital festival being both accessible and democratically available. This represents a trend as seen with other literary festivals’ second fully digital years of a downward turn in attendance, which Hay Festival cite as a ‘fatigue of digital alternatives will reduce appetite’ in its written evidence for ‘The Future of Music Festivals,’ something they see as a substantial ‘risk’.¹¹⁹ In this written evidence from May 2021 the festival states that while ‘[t]here have been some important benefits to working digitally, especially with regard to audience development ... it is no substitute for the live experience’.¹²⁰ For Compton and seemingly the wider Hay Festival team, digital events are an addendum developed out of the necessity of the pandemic, and the crux of the festival’s work is live events. Hence, as the UK loosened its lockdown restrictions, Hay Festival began to explore what a festival that combined both live and digital elements would look like.

A hybrid event is defined as when the ‘network infrastructure includes both a physical (event) environment and a virtual (online) component’.¹²¹ Hybrid events can have interactive content such as a chatbox for questions and comments, where audiences who are not present physically can watch online from wherever they are, aiding in the creation of a digital community. The term ‘hybrid’ became popular during the pandemic when the workforce in Britain split their time between working from home, or remotely, in combination with working in-person in a traditional office environment. Reflecting on the ‘digital pivot’ at the Edinburgh Festivals during the pandemic, Greg Richards and Maria del Pilar Leal Londoño ask questions about the future relationship between events and technology: ‘Will there be a

¹¹⁹ Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, ‘Written evidence submitted by the Hay Festival.’

¹²⁰ Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, ‘Written evidence submitted by the Hay Festival.’

¹²¹ Ilja Simons, ‘Events and Online Interaction: The Construction of Hybrid Event Communities,’ *Leisure Studies* 38, no. 2 (2019): 146, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02614367.2018.1553994>.

return to more localised embedding of events, or a trend towards greater global reach supported by new technologies? Or can globalisation and localisation be combined through hybrid events attracting physical audiences locally, and digital audiences worldwide?’.¹²² Hybrid events have the benefit of catering to the already-established Hay Festival audience and reaching different audiences online, including those who have accessibility requirements due to geographic location, disability, socioeconomic status, and access to culture. As such, Weber argues that ‘literary festivals are accessible only to those individuals who possess the cultural and social knowledge to engage,’ and therefore ‘replicate the kinds of marginalisation that are present in the communities in which they are situated, and consequently cannot provide the all-conquering remedy to social and economic ills that creative industries discourse promises’.¹²³

Hybrid events are not new for Hay Festival. Before the pandemic, the festival held a form of hybrid events through livestreaming. In collaboration with the British Library’s Living Knowledge Network, the festival streamed popular festival events live from the festival into eight public libraries around the UK in 2018 to mark Hay Festival’s thirtieth anniversary.¹²⁴ In 2023, this rose to forty-three libraries following the ‘shared goal ... to make Hay Festival events accessible to as many people as possible,’ showing the increase in Hay Festival’s hybrid output in the five years since 2018.¹²⁵ During the pandemic, Hay Festival’s hybrid events evolved and were a large feature for the Winter Weekend in 2021, its first in-person festival Winter Weekend for two years. For at-home audiences, the festival produced a ‘Digital Pass’ offering a selection of certain higher-profile events for a fee. Since the Winter

¹²² Greg Richards and Maria Del Pilar Leal Londoño, ‘Festival Cities and Tourism: Challenges and Prospects,’ *Journal of Policy Research in Tourism, Leisure and Events* 14, no. 3 (2022): 9. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19407963.2022.2087664>.

¹²³ Weber, *Literary Festivals and Contemporary Book Culture*, 192, 215.

¹²⁴ ‘Hay Festival and the British Library Announce Free Streaming Day for Living Knowledge Network,’ Hay Festival, accessed August 30, 2023, <https://www.hayfestival.com/wales/blog.aspx?post=180>.

¹²⁵ ‘Hay Festival 2023 Report,’ <https://cloud.hayfestival.com/hay-on-wye/reports/Hay-Festival-2023-Report.pdf>, 4; ‘Living Knowledge Network,’ Hay Festival, accessed September 5, 2024, <https://www.hayfestival.com/living-knowledge-network>.

Weekend in 2021, the Digital Pass has been a feature and gives at-home or further afield audiences the opportunity to engage with Hay Festival online even after the pandemic. In charging for digital events, Hay Festival reengages with the idea of exclusivity that the live in-person events have and changing the audience's relationship with the hybrid events. However, Lambert argues that the idea of free events creates access also 'isn't true' from an economic standpoint for the festival, arguing 'we've got sustain the festival as well'.¹²⁶ Undeniably, by choosing to charge the audience for its hybrid festival pass, Hay Festival create another barrier to inclusion, making the early days of the pandemic and its free digital events seem utopian. Charging for the online pass also represents the improvisatory nature of the Hay Festival digital strategy, as Venables calls the choice an attempt by the festival to 'see how they land'.¹²⁷

Since the pandemic, many other literary festivals and arts organisations have continued to integrate digital technologies in their event delivery to cater for the new audiences gained in the pandemic with hybrid events, and free digital content has been a large discussion for organisations as they emerge from all-digital events during the pandemic. For example, NT at Home is now a subscription service for £99.99 annually. Edinburgh Book Festival calls digital events 'the cornerstone of accessibility at the Festival' and offers a 'pay what you can' model for online events with a suggested fee, whether livestreamed or watched on-demand.¹²⁸ Adelaide Writers' Week operates a community streaming project, livestreaming select events at libraries, community centres, retirement villages, and schools across South Australia for free.¹²⁹ However, other festivals, such as TIFA, have chosen to not

¹²⁶ Adrian Lambert, interview by Ellen Addis, Zoom, August 12, 2021.

¹²⁷ Aine Venables, interview by Rebecca Roach, Zoom, October 8, 2022.

¹²⁸ 'Digital,' Edinburgh International Book Festival, accessed June 14, 2024, <https://www.edbookfest.co.uk/the-festival/whats-on/themes/digital-369>.

¹²⁹ 'Adelaide Writers' Week 2024 Program Guide,' Adelaide Writers' Week, accessed June 14, 2024, <https://www.adelaidefestival.com.au/about/archive/2024/>, 4.

host any hybrid offerings of its events, due to high costs and low audience interest, a difficult decision made by a festival with a scattered global audience.

The shift towards online engagement with the arts is explored by ACE's 2021 report 'The Role of the Arts during the COVID-19 Pandemic'. The report concludes that digital platforms offer cultural organisations opportunities to be further explored, such as providing workers new creative opportunities, supporting people in rural communities access to the arts, as well as those isolated or face psychological or physical barriers to in-person participation.¹³⁰ For the recovery of the arts and culture sector, the report argues, a hybrid model of digital-physical engagement, in preparation for future pandemics, is best suited. However, other major barriers need to be addressed, such as ensuring all audiences have access – including those living in digital poverty – and further research needs to be undertaken to determine if digital participation in the arts has the same benefits as in-person participation.¹³¹ Instead of prioritising fully digitised arts experiences, it is important to understand which cultural activities most benefit from being digitised.¹³² I argue that literary festival events would benefit from being both digitised and in-person as they the typical author talk requires little technical and artistic demands of other arts such as theatre or dance.

Online portals: Patricia Lockwood's No One Is Talking About This

To explore the development and changing approaches to hybrid events and futures at Hay Festival during and after the pandemic, I will look at two events at Hay Festival held one year apart (2021 and 2022) focused around Patricia Lockwood's debut novel *No One Is Talking*

¹³⁰ Alexandra Bradbury, Katey Warran, Hei Wan Mak, and Daisy Fancourt, 'The Role of the Arts during the COVID-19 Pandemic,' (London: University College London and Arts Council England, August 31, 2021), 6, https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/UCL_Role_of_the_Arts_during_COVID_13012022_0.pdf.

¹³¹ Bradbury et al, 'The Role of the Arts during the COVID-19 Pandemic,' 6.

¹³² Ibid.

About This (2021).¹³³ Hay Festival’s DIY approach to its digital strategy and hybrid events mirrors the ‘[c]oncepts of malleability, portability and accessibility’ that Murray and Weber argue define the digital continuum.¹³⁴ The first Lockwood event was held at Hay Festival Digital 2021 and was streamed online, not from Booth’s Bookshop. It formed part of a series of events at the festival called ‘10@10: New Writers’ made up of thirty-minute Q&As held with ten debut authors discussing their books at 10pm, in an attempt to provide what Lambert calls ‘a platform for new voices and new authors,’ showing the festival’s interest in nurturing and showcasing new literary talent.¹³⁵ Lambert’s comment reveals the importance of literary celebrities in the survival of literary festivals, ‘because these people are going to be the Ian McEwans and the Margaret Atwoods of the future. If you invest in those people now, then, hopefully, not only will their careers grow, but they’re hopefully happy to come back when they’re massive celebrities and support you, because that helps keep the festival alive’.¹³⁶ Hay Festival views its literature programme sometimes as a transactional relationship, with the festival helping the author with publicity and vice versa. One of these authors for 10@10 in 2021 was American poet, essayist, and novelist Lockwood who talked to British author Nina Stibbe about *No One Is Talking About This*.

No One Is Talking About This follows a woman known for her viral social media posts, whose entire existence revolves around the internet, specifically Twitter – what she terms ‘the portal’. The word ‘portal’ is commonly defined as a website that provides access to several sources of information, such as a directory or search engines.¹³⁷ Also meaning gate or

¹³³ I have written about Lockwood’s *No One Is Talking About This* and Hay Festival Digital elsewhere. See: Ellen Addis, ‘Portals of Potentialities: Patricia Lockwood’s *No One Is Talking About This* and the Digital Literary Festival,’ *Participations: Journal of Audience and Reception Studies* 19, no. 3 (2023), <https://www.participations.org/volume-19-issue-3/>.

¹³⁴ Murray and Weber, “‘Live and Local’?”, 74.

¹³⁵ Adrian Lambert, interview by Ellen Addis, Zoom, August 12, 2021.

¹³⁶ Adrian Lambert, interview by Ellen Addis, Zoom, August 12, 2021.

¹³⁷ ‘portal, n.5 and n.1a.’ OED Online, Oxford University Press, accessed December 5, 2021, <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/148114>

doorway, in coining Twitter ‘the portal,’ Lockwood suggests a sense of mysticism and absorption, with social media acting as a passage to new world of possibilities.¹³⁸ In this section, I examine the twofold and hybrid ‘portal’ of the book as a portal for readers that explores both private and public realms through its coded language, and Hay Festival Digital and its hybrid iterations as a portal for readers to further connect with authors and offer new interpretations of the book itself.

At the Hay Festival Digital 2021 event, Lockwood discusses how ‘absolutely perverse’ it is that authors are told by editors to not write about the internet due to a fear of irrelevance in the fast-moving ephemeral online world.¹³⁹ Lockwood’s novel alternatively celebrates the evanescent digital space as one that dissolves boundaries and can represent the intersection of our online and physical lives within literary texts, stating: ‘these are the things people do with their days, why are we not talking about them?’¹⁴⁰ Lockwood’s Hay Festival 10@10 event was a pre-recorded online talk, creating an exclusive and wholly digital space, not one constrained by temporality. While the audience who watched the Lockwood event ‘live’ at 10pm were not able to ask Lockwood questions, they were able to engage and discuss with other audience members through the event’s live chatbox, producing a sense of co-presence with other attendees. Ostensibly, the audience does not need to be present to ask questions to experience the immediacy of the event; what is important is how the audience choose to interact and engage – either through seen forms such as public chats and live-tweeting, or unseen forms such as thinking, listening, and taking one’s own notes.

In *No One Is Talking About This*, Lockwood transplants the language of the internet to the pages of the codex, melding new media technologies with old print and bringing new meaning and hybridity to the immediacy and liveness of the internet on the written page. The

¹³⁸ ‘portal, n.5 and n.1a.’

¹³⁹ Patricia Lockwood, ‘10@10: Patricia Lockwood talks to Nina Stibbe,’ Hay Festival, online, May 28, 2021.

¹⁴⁰ Lockwood, ‘10@10: Patricia Lockwood talks to Nina Stibbe,’ Hay Festival.

narrator discusses their surprise in finding out that some internet information and trends such as popular TV shows that everyone seems to be watching and dieting fads are ‘planted’ in the digital sphere. They say: ‘When we learned that they had been planted there on purpose by people who understood them to be poisonous, who were pointing their poison at us, well. Well. WELL! 🤝W🤝E🤝L🤝L🤝!!!’.¹⁴¹ While emphasising the logographic nature of the virtual world through the transfer of digital emojis to the pages of the physical book, Lockwood also crosses a boundary between new media and material which is usually upheld, alluding to the post-digital world. Transcribing digital forms reserved entirely for screens onto print matter skips the dimensions by altering interactions with the book, jolting readers out of their normal reading experience, and helps to accentuate the themes of hybridity within the novel. *No One Is Talking About This* enacts a judder through the use of internet emojis, references, and the short paragraphs jarred by line-breaks and dashes, which, much like digestible tweets themselves, read like a long thread of stream of consciousness thoughts (and interruptions) on the page and illustrate the protagonist’s blurring of digital-material experiences.

In her second Hay Festival event about the novel, Lockwood appeared via video-link from the USA as the recipient of the Dylan Thomas Prize 2022, and was interviewed by a judge for the prize, Alan Bilton, English Literature professor at the University of Swansea, where the Dylan Thomas Centre is based.¹⁴² Lockwood appeared virtually at the event on a large screen behind Bilton, looking over the in-person audience with headphones on and a slight lag between responses. She answered questions from Bilton about her debut and its lauded reception (as well as winning the Dylan Thomas Prize, it was shortlisted for the Booker). Lockwood’s appearance at the Hay Festival event integrated digital technology into

¹⁴¹ Patricia Lockwood, *No One Is Talking About This* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021), 92.

¹⁴² Patricia Lockwood, ‘Patricia Lockwood: The Dylan Thomas Prize Winner talks to Alan Bilton,’ Hay Festival, Hay-on-Wye, June 3, 2022.

the live event, making it hybrid, and was in part due to her long covid condition that made her ‘largely housebound’ and meant that she ‘can’t type due to the arthritis’ she developed.¹⁴³ The hybrid event about the novel mirrors the themes of hybridity found within *No One Is Talking About This* and the mixing of material and digital. Lockwood’s virtual appearance at the in-person event also highlights the accessibility possibilities that hybrid events provide, not just for the audience at home, but for the authors themselves.

Hybrid Hay Festival events widen the Hay Festival audience and the authors that the festival is able to programme, additionally bypassing exponential costs and ecological problems ‘by beaming people in rather than flying people’ to the festival.¹⁴⁴ While the festival still had its ‘loyal following,’ as Salisbury calls it, the new digital offering during the pandemic has ‘really broadened our reach’ and has continued ‘alongside’ the festival, not usurping it.¹⁴⁵ Embracing hybrid events helps to extend and try to replicate Compton’s ‘magic in the tent’ to those that cannot be there and showcases the experience of Hay Festival to the world online, the festival’s chatboxes and Q&A enable digital audiences to feel a semblance of the community that those live audiences experience. Hay Festival staff recognise that digital events are not more democratic because ‘there’s clearly still people who don’t have access to technology, either financially or socially, and as you go around the world, there is far less access to it’.¹⁴⁶ Seeing digital offerings, then, not as a direct replacement but a representation of the live festival is the way Hay Festival approaches the new hybrid model.

The pervasiveness of the internet as a space which frames and closes off a scene, while also expanding out of it, is shown by the presence of Lockwood at both Hay Festival

¹⁴³ Hadley Freeman, ‘Patricia Lockwood: “That’s What’s so Attractive about the Internet: You Can Exist There as a Spirit in the Void”’, *Guardian* (London), January 30, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2021/jan/30/patricia-lockwood-thats-whats-so-attractive-about-the-internet-you-can-exist-there-as-a-spirit-in-the-void>.

¹⁴⁴ Andy Fryers, interview by Ellen Addis, Zoom, September 29, 2021.

¹⁴⁵ Heather Salisbury, interview by Rebecca Roach, Zoom, September 20, 2021.

¹⁴⁶ Andy Fryers, interview by Ellen Addis, Zoom, September 29, 2021.

events. In 2021 and 2022, the author is framed by the square of the event's screen and projector, discussing her iteration of the internet and her book which is, in a way, a window (or portal) into the online world through her written text. In the novel, the conflict of digital and material is reflected in the narrator's statement:

It was in this place where we were on the verge of losing our bodies that bodies became the most important, it was in this place of the great melting that it became important whether you called it *pop* or *soda* growing up, or whether your mother cooked with garlic salt or the real chopped cloves ... You were zoomed in on the grain, you were out of space, it was the brotherhood of man, and in some ways you had never been flung further from each other. You zoomed in and zoomed in on that warm grain until it looked like the coldness of the moon.¹⁴⁷

The collective pronouns of 'we' and second person 'you' interpolate the reader into the internet and its desperate attempt to find community and co-presence in anything, reminiscent of Scott's four-dimensional human and the connection between Mrs Dalloway's solitary existence while also being 'part of people she had never met'.¹⁴⁸ Lockwood's 'brotherhood of man' implies what the cultish nature that 'being online' and disembodied entails, while simultaneously juxtaposing the idea that the internet disconnects and makes people aware of their own bodies. The author's interplay between 'zoomed' also conjures images of the conference software Zoom, a portal of split screens and split bodies connected in the same digital room while being concurrently distant, an image amplified by Lockwood's video-link appearances at Hay Festival. Furthermore, the poetic language and imaginings of the internet's dichotomy between intimacy, immediacy, and distance breeds a situation that is echoed at Hay Festival events. While in 2021, Stibbe and Lockwood are next to each other on the screen, in 2022, Bilton and Lockwood are in different rooms, time zones, and mediums (one online, the other in-person). In both events, the interviewer and interviewee discuss writing, and the novel itself, though there are connection lapses and actual lapses in time

¹⁴⁷ Lockwood, *No One Is Talking About This*, 12-13.

¹⁴⁸ Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, quoted in Scott, *The Four-Dimensional Human*, 13.

zones as the physical distance between them is vast, tightened only by a connection of literary and book-talk.

Lockwood creates a coded language in *No One Is Talking About This*, something both private and public, known to those that are there – in the online space – and indecipherable to those who are not. In her Hay Festival 2021 event, Lockwood states that she is ‘less online’ nowadays, though she does ‘think that it was worth having been there’ as it has become a part of her.¹⁴⁹ As *No One Is Talking About This* progresses to part two, the protagonist becomes consumed by her sister’s pregnancy and subsequent tragedy, but the internet persists; ‘she still uses these images, she still uses this language, it has given her something, it was a place of human connection that improved her to observe’.¹⁵⁰ Coalescing the portal and the written book, Lockwood’s corresponding Hay Festival events represent the hybrid medium of *No One Is Talking About This* by enacting the various portals at play: the portal of the internet through which Lockwood appears, the portal of the discussion which brings insights to the novel, and the portal that is the text itself. The book, the events, and the audience themselves become entwined in a reading community marked by being online, in ‘a place of human connection’ where discussion comes freely, and hybrid literary festival events can blur the boundaries between material and digital experiences into one. In 2022, the audience attending the hybrid literary event about a novel that explores the split between online and in-person lives, transforms the novel as they experience the same hybridity as explored in the book.

In this chapter, I have argued that Hay Festival transports the physical and the so-called ‘live’ experience, the experience of spatiotemporal co-presence, and the ‘precise, located, unique, and comparatively exclusive’ nature of in-person literary festivals that makes them so successful to the digital realm by embracing digital media and improvisatory, DIY

¹⁴⁹ Lockwood, ‘10@10: Patricia Lockwood talks to Nina Stibbe,’ Hay Festival.

¹⁵⁰ Lockwood, ‘10@10: Patricia Lockwood talks to Nina Stibbe,’ Hay Festival.

techniques.¹⁵¹ Experimenting with emergent digital technologies, Hay Festival have attempted to replicate the type of exclusive, precise, located, and unique experience of in-person festivals for the digital audience. Hay Anytime, Book of the Month, and the digital and hybrid festivals work to create interactive encounters between author and reader, expanding definitions of liveness and existing alongside each other, preserving previously transient in-person events online while also creating new content and opportunities for dispersed audience engagement, extending the temporary community created by the festival. In turn, this justifies literary festival's claims to public funding amid dwindling cultural policy budgets.¹⁵² While no replacement for the one-off special live encounter, the festival's branding and community are cultivated through its online presence, resulting in it being impossible to distinguish which place comes first in the festivalgoer's experience – the physical or virtual.¹⁵³

¹⁵¹ Murray and Weber, ““Live and local”?”, 74.

¹⁵² Murray, *The Digital Literary Sphere*, 15.

¹⁵³ Murray and Weber, ““Live and Local”?”, 67.

Conclusion

'Festivals are powerful communal live experiences. Festivals celebrate, communally, in the moment, from live moment to live breathing moment, our presence, whether as audience or artist or both, and the place where the art meets the imagination, which is why a really well curated festival is a unique and deeply creative and exciting one-off experience, a breathing creation in its own right. There aren't very many communal experiences like them anymore.'

Ali Smith (2023).¹

Shown in her playful approach to her Hay Festival Digital event as explored in chapter five, Ali Smith repeatedly advocates for the importance of 'communal live experiences' of literary festivals. A 'breathing creation,' Smith sees the literary festival as an overwhelmingly positive experience: celebratory, unique, and, most of all, social. I have explored in this thesis how Hay Festival produces these creative and exciting communal experiences, developing from an amateur arts festival into a 'cultural powerhouse'.² I have used the examples of its programming, location, acts of archiving, digital events, and year-round and international projects to examine Hay Festival's establishment as a fixture in literary culture today and a powerful British literary institution. To finish, I will reflect briefly on the next chapter for Hay Festival, looking in particular at the role that its archive at the British Library might play in its immediate future.

Recently, there has been a generalisation of literature festivals into 'festivals of ideas,' broadly meaning cultural festivals that bring together a range of topics, including arts, humanities, and social sciences. The cartoon by Tom Gauld that opened this thesis marked an attempt to show this dilution of literature and Hay Festival's own move towards a festival of ideas model. This shift is marked none more clearly than by a statement by Hay Festival's

¹ Ali Smith, interview by Ellen Addis, email, January 9, 2023.

² Glaister, 'From Heaney's Poetry to Rushdie's Surprise Appearance.'

new CEO in 2023 that the festival's programme is 'moving away' from being 'just about books,' and Fryers' declaration that he does not think of the festival 'as a book festival,' but instead as 'a festival of ideas and celebration'.³ In its written evidence for the 'Future of Music Festivals' select committee, Hay Festival describes the evolving market of festivals and how the 'competition for "Festivals of Ideas" has grown significantly' with market contest arising 'not only from regional, smaller literary Festivals but also from various media companies too'.⁴ In describing itself as a 'Festival of Ideas' (and in its inclusion in a DCMS report about music festivals), we see Hay Festival's reorientation towards a more simplified label of 'festival' where literature is one genre amongst many. Conversely, this thesis and its use of literary analysis has attempted to make a case for the 'literary' in the literary festival. The emergence of the festival of ideas model could be fertile ground for future researchers to examine further, with analysis focusing on the levelling out of the arts into a catch-all approach in accordance with governmental funding requirements.

These future researchers will have the invaluable resource of the Hay Festival archive at the British Library to study the evolution of the festival and its role in British contemporary literary culture. As a material archive with letters, contracts, accounts, programmes, and photographs, the archive provides excerpts from Hay Festival, but it does not tell the whole story. The product of decisions by cultural workers at the festival for over three decades, the archive, as explored, has gaps, amplified by the predominantly born-digital resources that populate the archive in the 2000s causing a reduction in material remains. However, as Prescott and Wiggins write in their introduction to *Archives: Power, Truth, and Fiction*, 'as our understanding of the archive expands, so likewise the performativity of engagement with

³ 'Hay Festival: TikTok "Attracting More Young People",' *BBC News*, May 25, 2023, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cn4e0eq3n54o.amp>; Andy Fryers, interview by Ellen Addis, Zoom, September 29, 2021.

⁴ Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 'Written evidence submitted by the Hay Festival'; Andy Fryers, interview by Ellen Addis, Zoom, September 29, 2021.

the archive becomes more wide-reaching and varied'.⁵ The core challenges that face festival archives are born-digital records and the difficulty in documenting seemingly ephemeral events. Digital archives such as the Internet Archive and its Wayback Machine, will be integral to working around these challenges and protecting the digital lives of literary festivals and cultural organisations more broadly.⁶ In spite of the obstacles facing festival archives, it is clear that the accession of the Hay Festival archive into the British Library marks the festival's national institutionalisation. Far from its modest beginnings, the archive exemplifies Hay Festival's success and its status as a key purveyor of literary culture in Britain. By examining, cataloguing, and creatively engaging with the archive, this thesis has been able to tell the story of Hay Festival.

While the archive is a key resource in understanding Hay Festival's road to professionalisation and institutionalisation, the precarious future of literary festivals is reflected in Hay Festival's most recent history with sponsors and funding. This project took place in a moment of extreme insecurity for arts organisations in the UK. During a time of austerity and pressures on public funding, the UK government introduced the 'income diversification solution' for arts and cultural institutions (i.e., reducing the reliance on public funding and pushing towards private and often commercial income streams), plunging them into 'continued uncertainty and precarity'.⁷ This has affected literary festivals in the UK variously. The Scottish literary festival Aye Write was briefly under threat in April 2024 after not receiving its usual funding from Creative Scotland and is now relying upon a private

⁵ Prescott and Wiggins, *Archives*, 13.

⁶ The Internet Archive is free and advocates for an open and archived internet. The Wayback Machine tackles the issue of web content disappearing when the website changes or shuts down by allowing users to see archived versions of web pages through time. It has been an invaluable resource throughout this project in understanding the evolution of Hay Festival's website and digital presence. 'About the Internet Archive,' Internet Archive, accessed September 13, 2024, <https://archive.org/about/>.

⁷ Daniel Ashton, 'Funding Arts and Culture: Everyday Experiences and Organisational Portfolio Precarity,' *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 26, no.3 (2022): 399-400, <https://doi.org/10.1177/13675494221118386>.

donation from a lottery fund winner to fund smaller pop-up events.⁸ Bristol Ideas folded in 2024 following the removal of its place as an ACE National Portfolio Organisation.⁹ But, as the third chapter of this thesis explored, even this turn to commercial investment can bring instability, evidenced in the most recent downturn of Baillie Gifford's literary festival sponsorship. Writing about the FFB and Baillie Gifford sponsorship fiasco, the *Observer* describes the UK's literary festivals as 'part of an extremely fragile ecosystem. It has taken decades of hard work on the part of their organisers, as well as armies of local volunteers, to get them to where they are now, popular and vibrant'.¹⁰ Plainly put, the future of literary festivals in the UK is in danger. Without capital investment and with the downturn in government arts funding, festivals and the rich literary culture that they represent on stage risk being dredged.

However, there are opportunities for hope. The afterlives of this thesis and of Hay Festival offer ways to understand how literary festivals can transform from simple annual events that create 'temporary community,' into world-leading and influential cultural institutions.¹¹ That Hay Festival today thrives at the forefront of the global literary festival circuit – albeit in a more commercial form than its beginning – is as a consequence of the characteristics that made it so successful in the first place: its border and booktown tourist location that attracts visitors, its strong artistic and wealthy connections, and its broad utopian and optimistic ambitions. Why the festival has such success is hinted at by one audience member's reflection about why they keep returning to the festival, twenty years since their

⁸ Ella Creamer, 'Cancelled Glasgow Book Festival Aye Write Receives Lifeline Donation,' *Guardian* (London), April 17, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2024/apr/17/cancelled-glasgow-book-festival-aye-write-receives-lifeline-donation>.

⁹ Simon Cook, 'Closure of Bristol Ideas: Farewell Event,' Bristol Ideas, May 11, 2024, <https://www.bristolideas.co.uk/read/closure-of-bristol-ideas-farewell-event/>.

¹⁰ 'The *Observer*

View on Baillie Gifford Sponsorship Row: Writing Is on the Wall for Book Lovers,' *Observer* (London), June 8, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/article/2024/jun/08/the-observer-view-on-baillie-gifford-sponsorship-row-writing-is-on-the-wall-for-book-lovers>.

¹¹ Driscoll, *The New Literary Middlebrow*, 170.

first visit: ‘to my mind, I come because it gives me a sense of the zeitgeist in thinking and a sort of commonality’.¹² Even as Hay Festival has changed under often difficult circumstances, transforming from a pre-eminent literature festival into a charity with a wide array of festivals, projects, and events worldwide, its flexibility and its ‘fleet of foot’ response to challenges has ensured its longevity.¹³ While the future is unknown, Hay Festival’s archival accession offers one route by which its sustained contributions to the zeitgeist and celebratory commonality of festivals might be preserved.

¹² Speaker 3, Focus group 2, interview by Ellen Addis and Jennifer Tegg, May 27, 2023, Hay Festival, Hay-on-Wye.

¹³ Andy Fryers, interview by Ellen Addis, Zoom, September 29, 2021.

Appendix: Interview List

Hay Festival staff (job title as of interview date)

Adrian Lambert	Chief of staff	August 12, 2021
Gareth Howell-Jones	Bookshop manager	September 8, 2021
Jo Rodell-Jones	Sponsorship executive	September 13, 2021
Heather Salisbury	Programme manager	September 20, 2021.
Poppy Evans	Digital content creator	September 23, 2021
Maggie Kerr	Development director	September 27, 2021
Georgie Cooke	Production director	September 28, 2021
Andy Fryers	Sustainability director	September 29, 2021
Joe Fletcher	Technical director	October 4, 2021
Penny Compton	Box office manager	October 6, 2021
Aine Venables	Education director	October 8, 2021
Cristina Fuentes La Roche	International director	June 6, 2022

Other

Ali Smith	Author	January 9, 2023
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