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Archipelagic Cartographies: Brenda Chamberlain's Western Isle

This paper is part of a wider project of literary geography – or, to be more precise, literary *cartography*: namely, a book entitled *Cartographies of Culture: New Geographies of Welsh Writing in English*.¹ It's a study that seeks to open up a dialogue between literature and the social sciences, and offers a response to Christian Jacob's question: 'What are the links that bind the map to writing?'² Rejecting the kind of 'distance reading' that uses the literary text merely as a geographical 'data field' from which to extract certain structuralist patterns that are then plotted, *Cartographies of Culture* sets out to reveal the forms of the 'cartographic imagination', the *embeddedness* of material maps in the syntax of writing and reading, and the *immanent* (not merely 'pendant') cartographies of literary discourse.³ To put it differently: the book asks the reader to consider a literary text's 'mapmindedness'⁴ in literal and figurative, textual and graphic forms – the ways in which a text triangulates not only the world, but also itself, and rehearses specifically cartographic 'forms of thinking and feeling about space'⁵

The study is offered as a contribution to the current 'interdisciplinary reorientation' of Welsh writing in English and as an intervention in what Brian Jarvis identifies as 'the politics and poetics of space, especially at boundaries and frontiers'.⁶ Of

particular interest to me are the ways in which maps emerge for twentieth-century anglophone Welsh writers as ways of both embracing and contesting geographical and cultural emplacement – in other words, as modalities of cultural and political identity. Another aim of the book is to *re-territorialise* Welsh writing in English, and expand the cultural spaces in which an anglophone literature designated 'Welsh' has hitherto been allowed to *take place*.⁷

In this lecture, I want to focus on the distinguished author, poet and painter, Brenda Chamberlain, whose hybrid creative identity has recently come back into sharp critical focus following the centenary of her birth in 1912. I wish to focus on *Tide-race* (1962) – her fabling autobiographical account of her time on Bardsey Island (in Welsh, Ynys Enlli), off the Llŷn peninsula in north Wales. I want to scrutinise Chamberlain's complex archipelagic geographies and gauge the layered 'emotional geographies' of her work – an enterprise that is part of the 'emotional turn' in the social sciences.⁸

Having briefly encountered Bardsey – known as 'the island of 20,000 saints' – in 1945 when she crossed the Sound with a Polish friend, Brenda Chamberlain, now divorced from the engraver-artist John Petts, visited again with her partner Jean van der Bijl during the harsh winter of 1946 and established a home on the island in the spring of 1947. Jonah Jones has suggested that she 'came to the island part-wounded in some way' – socially bruised, certainly, and emotionally thirsty.⁹ She would remain a permanent resident on this beautiful but often utterly forbidding island until the late 1950s. I suggest that throughout her oeuvre, Chamberlain insistently maps those aspects of her gender, sexual, cultural and imaginative identity that were permanently under pressure onto interconnected island spaces to form a series of charged archipelagos or chorographies (the term for specific cartographies). As practical instruments, talismanic forms, metaphorical figures and indeed heuristic tools, maps

were crucial aspects of her prolonged meditation on the condition of enislement. To put it less expensively: for Chamberlain, cartography is a modality of life-writing.

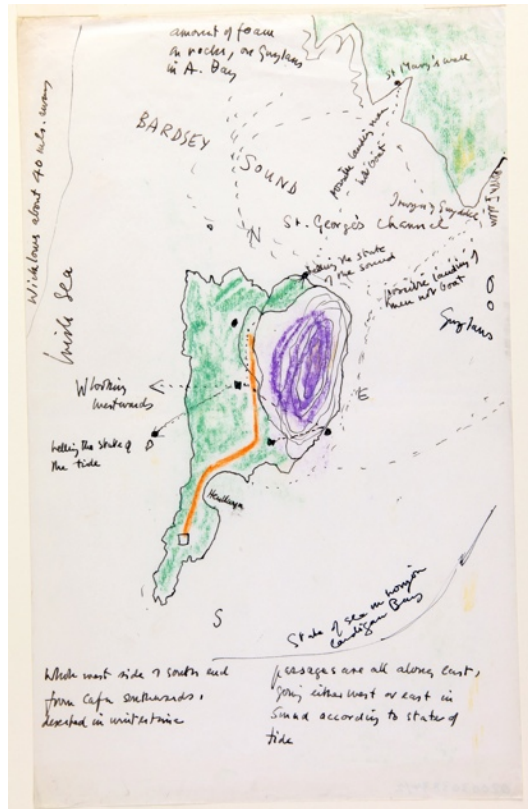
From the start of her career as artist, poet, writer and dramatist, one recognises her compulsion to reflect on boundaries both hard and permeable, on the condition of 'islandness', and on the constant need she felt for what she called 'communication across "deep water"'.¹⁰ As we'll see, her actual and imagined island coordinates range from the lyrical 'ethnoscapes' of J. M. Synge's Aran and the Isle of Man (she was Manx and Irish by blood, Welsh only by birth), to the humpbacked Bardsey of *Tide-race* and the moated German landscapes and border zones of her eerie, genre-splicing Cold War romance, *The Water-castle* (1964). From here, during the 1960s, she plotted her world along a deepening south-easterly axis to the Greek island of Ídhra, onto which she mapped her psychologically brittle self in the lyrical journal *A Rope of Vines* (1965). Her remarkable classical-absurdist play, *The Protagonists* – a response to the Right-wing Colonels' Coup in Greece in 1967 – extends the map further east to the prison-island of Léros, near the Turkish coast. She continued to map conditions of emotional incarceration back in her native Bangor, north Wales, to the very end of her life, so tragically cut short in 1971 by an overdose of barbiturates.

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I want to approach Chamberlain's *Tide-race* via two suggestive examples of her graphic cartography. In the National Library of Wales are two coloured sketch-maps of Bardsey Island, catalogued under the title given at the head of one of them: *Winter Rhythms in Island Life*.¹¹ Both inhabit the hybrid space that Chamberlain as artist-writer spent her creative life exploring: the interface of graphic art, literary discourse and cartographic inscription. Their suggestive compound notation offers an emotional and psychological

chart of Chamberlain's response to life on 'this deluding scrap of rock and turf', as she referred to Bardsey at the end of *Tide-race*.¹²

In the first, rather sketchier, chart, the island is plotted centrally in relation to the western tip of the mainland Llŷn Peninsula:



Brenda Chamberlain, *Winter Rhythms in Island Life*, Joan Rhys Collection; Size B, Box 2; Picture Store 3; 0200303834/ 1. By permission of the Estate of Brenda Chamberlain and Llyfrgell Genedlaethol Cymru/The National Library of Wales.

The chart is an image/text that articulates what Baldacchino has called 'the dialectic of islands' – 'the anxious balance between roots and routes',¹³ between incarceration and (in Chamberlain's phrase) '[s]alutation to the shores of worlds'. The dotted lines traversing 'Bardsey Sound' and 'St George's Channel' in various carefully plotted patterns on the map are labelled 'possible landing of men not boat'; they represent the choreography of the Bardsey craft as it negotiates the fierce tide-races of the potentially

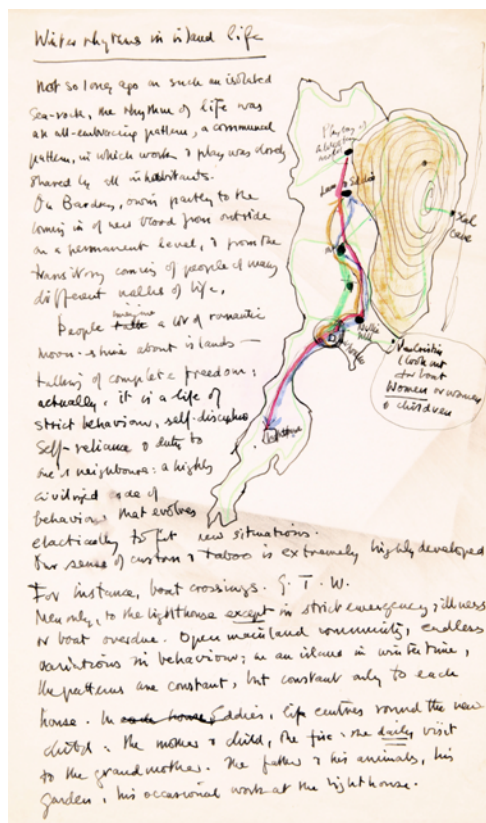
treacherous Sound. Implied in the flurry of dotted lines is the horror of being mapless. 'Possible landing': Chamberlain is careful to emphasise the contingent nature of these projected (life)lines to the mainland. These perforated lines across turbulent water also enact fantasies of (female) passage that Chamberlain had already explored in her published prose, which I'll come to later.

As Chamberlain's annotations, adrift on the white tide of the map-text, make plain, everything depends on 'the state of the tide' and 'the state of the sea'. The map charts acts of strained watching across bodies of water. It asks us to join Chamberlain in 'looking westwards' from the safety of her house, 'Carreg' (denoted by a black square at the very centre of the island), out to the Irish Sea, and south-west to Carreg yr Honwy, the rock whose shape mirrors in miniature that of the island as a whole. This form would become a haunting emblem for Chamberlain as she moved away from figurative representation towards what I would like to call cartographic abstraction; towards the end of her life she would declare: 'I don't make paintings in the conventional sense: I make talismans'.¹⁴ At the north-east tip of the island and on Bardsey Mountain on the eastern coast, black circles mark lookout points where one can tell 'the state of the sound' and judge the likelihood of death by water (one of Chamberlain's central motifs). This is a map encoded with the tensions of a sensibility on the stretch. More expansive archipelagic vistas and alignments are also sought by this map: Chamberlain notes that the Wicklow hills in Ireland are 'about 40 mls' west. Encircled by the 'N', 'S', 'E' and 'W' of the compass points, the island form she has drawn becomes itself a huge compass needle, pointing south-west 'towards South America . . . towards the shipping lanes'. Moreover, in its *linguistic* miscegenation – 'Gwylans', 'Bardsey', 'Henllwyn', 'Trwyn y Gwyddel' – the map also offers a *linguistic* chorography that identifies this ground as culturally contested space.

Further dotted lines link Chamberlain's house to the southernmost dot – 'Tŷ Pella', home of William and Nellie Evans, fictionalised as Jacob and Rhiannon Lloyd in *Tide-race*. The path from Chamberlain's house to the lookout post on the north coast gives another black dot a wide berth – the double farmhouse called Nant, occupied by Thomas 'Twm' Griffiths, prototypes for the tormentor Cadwaladr Tomos and his farm, 'Pant', in *Tide-race*. Chamberlain's stippled lines can therefore be seen to sketch bonds of attachment and antagonism that divide her island space into zones, triangulating the island 'feud' she described as 'handed down almost without variation . . . from year to year'.

In a strikingly literal way, the Llŷn peninsula, shaded green at the top right of the map, reveals the extent to which cartography, despite its claim to scientific objectivity and universality, is always local and partisan: the lozenge-pattern of the table cloth covering the very surface on which Chamberlain was working on Bardsey Island when she drew the map is clearly visible as a tracing.

The second *Winter Rhythms* chart (which we can date to Chamberlain's final years on the island)¹⁵ is another composite text in which discursive prose flows around a coloured, annotated map of Bardsey:



Brenda Chamberlain, *Winter Rhythms in Island Life*, Joan Rhys Collection; Size B, Box 2; Picture Store 3; 0200303834/ 2. By permission of the Estate of Brenda Chamberlain and Llyfrgell Genedlaethol Cymru/The National Library of Wales.

The prose runs as follows:

Winter Rhythms in Island Life

Not so long ago on such an isolated sea-rock, the rhythm of life was an all-embracing pattern, a communal pattern, in which work & play [were] closely shared by all inhabitants. On Bardsey, owing partly to the coming in of new blood from outside on a permanent level, & from the transitory coming of people of many different walks of life, people imagine a lot of romantic moon-shine about islands – talking of complete freedom; actually, it is a life of strict behaviour[,] self-discipline, self-reliance & duty to one’s neighbours: a highly civilized code of behaviour that evolves elastically to fit new situations. Our

sense of custom & taboo is extremely highly developed[.] For instance, boat crossings . . . Men only, to the lighthouse except in strict emergency, illness or boat overdue. Open mainland community, endless variations in behaviour; on an island in wintertime, the patterns are constant, but constant only to each house. In Eddies['], life centres round the new child: the mother & child, the fire: the daily visit to the grandmother. The father & his animals, his garden, his occasional work at the lighthouse.

Generically and stylistically, this little essay is characteristically hybrid. Its poetic title offers a narrativised, lyrical opening befitting a folk tale; the idiom, however, immediately cedes to anthropological discourse: 'communal pattern', 'new blood', 'transitory coming'. The phrase 'sea-rock' conjures the very imaginative fantasies (or bourgeois idealism or naïve Neo-Romanticism) that the passage goes on to decry as 'romantic moon-shine'. And in Chamberlain's account, aboriginality contends with outsidersness, settlement with transhumance, 'freedom' with 'strict behaviour' and 'self-discipline'.

This intriguing island testament goes on to outline not merely a practical division of labour but also a gendering of island space according to the internalised imperatives of 'custom & taboo'. The lighthouse is an exclusively male site, just as the boat crossings mapped in the first *Winter Rhythms* map were strictly gendered. Such gender anathemas prompted contesting female fantasies of action that were given rein in Chamberlain's prose and poetic works. This gendering of space is also registered on the map alongside 'Pen Cristin' – the headland to the south of the mountain, which Chamberlain designates as the 'look out for boat [-] Women or women & children'. This, now, is female space, the site of fretful female watching and waiting – a paradigmatic, 'fated' and fateful stance

adopted (and contested) by so many of Chamberlain's fictionalised selves. Another female space – or rather a space of shifting gender identities – is marked on the map: the 'Seal Cave', that nodal point of *Tide-race* and of Chamberlain's lyric poetry. This is resonant perimeter space (both rock and sea) where reality and history are transmuted into myth, the human and non-human commune, and gender and sexual identities are fantastically porous.

While Chamberlain's friendly neighbours, 'Jane & Eddie' and 'Nellie [&] Will' are plainly named on the map next to symbols of their dwellings, her island antagonist Twm Griffiths is, on this second map, given a satirical alias – 'Playboy of the Western World', thus transforming the chart into a literary map. Twm Griffiths is mapped onto self-mythologising Christy Mahon, the opportunistic individualist of Synge's play. The Mayo/ Aran world of Synge is summoned – and rooted – here as place, text and person, revealing the Irish genetics of Chamberlain's 'fictions' of her own western isle.

Indeed, I see Chamberlain's representations of island space in *Tide-race* as being insistently mapped onto Synge's cartographies of Aran, Wicklow and Mayo, to the extent that Bardsey becomes a cultural palimpsest gesturing westwards to Irish ground in an act of intertextual cartography and archipelagic accommodation. The three plays, *The Shadow of the Glen*, *Riders to the Sea*, and *The Playboy of the Western World*, together with *The Aran Islands* offered Chamberlain compelling templates for her portrait of island existence. Clearly, this is not to say that Chamberlain's Bardsey is not its own, unique environment. Rather, it is to emphasise that Synge – and for that matter, subsequent literary charts of Irish islands by such writers as O'Flaherty, O'Donnell, O'Sullivan, O'Crohan, and in particular Robin Flower – could not easily be elided.

Anthony Conran – one of Chamberlain's most nuanced critics – has, however, forcefully articulated a contrary view, arguing in 1972 that a comparison with Synge

yields little. Conran claims that Chamberlain did not share Synge's ethnographic interests, and that 'the Bardsey Islanders . . . were not remnants of a tribal past like the men of Aran, but a relatively heterogeneous collection of fairly recent colonists'.¹⁶ I'd suggest Conran's categories are too narrow to allow Chamberlain's Hiberno-Cambrian alignments to emerge. Brenda Chamberlain found in Synge's plays and in the complex cultural anthropology of *The Aran Islands* a model for a subversive chorography in which national myths of belonging are submitted to rigorous critique. Further, Synge showed Chamberlain how bounded, 'marginal' territory could be the very ground of the pan-European imagination. As Chamberlain puts it in *Tide-race*: '[Bardsey island] has succeeded in making me love mankind; crowded Piccadilly, quaysides, foreign cities, exotic fruits, faces, gatherings, le Corbusier's architecture'. Synge's anthropology of Aran was also a literary lesson in how to incorporate the mythological within a sceptical frame of reference, and how to demystify the island self in the very act of yielding (self-consciously) to an atavistic Celticism and the essentialist discourses of primitivism and eroticised orientalism. As Synge writes: 'Their red bodices and white tapering legs make them as beautiful as tropical sea birds, as they stand in a frame of seaweeds against the brink of the Atlantic'.

Moreover, I suggest that Chamberlain found in Synge's plays, which, as Oona Frawley has emphasised, 'initiated the Irishwoman into the drama in a new and significantly vocal way', a template for 'feminine tragedy' in which female agency struggles to assert itself against constricting folk and nationalist traditions.¹⁷ What Bonnie Kime Scott has identified as Synge's 'feminine models of creativity' would certainly have appealed to a writer who was forging a new writing space for herself at this time.¹⁸ Chamberlain would also have recognised in *The Aran Islands* a carefully drawn gender map of the Aran isles, where the cliff-top as much as the hearth emerges

as a female, maternal space of emotional distress. She could relate directly to Synge's isolated, watching females (in particular the central figure of *Riders to the Sea*, whose prototype was the old woman of Inishmaan 'still weeping and looking out over the sea' in *The Aran Islands*¹⁹). Chamberlain's resistance to a bourgeois mapping of Bardsey as a national (or nationalist) symbolic – masculine or feminine – can also be said to bear a Syngian signature. As for form, Robin Skelton charts in *The Aran Islands* 'a movement from a rather low-key meditative coherence to a much more vivid fragmentation'. This holds true, not only of *Tide-race* itself, but of Chamberlain's continuing experimentation with the discursive strategies of the journal in works post-dating *Tide-race*.

Chamberlain's pen drawings, which exist in creative counterpoint with the text of *Tide-race*, are graphic riffs or fractals on a cartographic theme. In these drawings, material objects such as fish, rocks and shells surrender to the flattening metaperspective of cartography; also, map-forms are given a multi-dimensionality, eroticised as whorled, spotted and cleft. Each icon communicates suggestively with the adjacent text, which is itself islanded in discrete, numbered sections that visually enact the condition of enislement on which Chamberlain meditates.

believing himself to be the only person awake at that time of night, and not having heard her coming, bellowed with fear, thinking she was a ghost.

'Can you lend me a match?' she asked, as if it were the most natural thing in the world for a pregnant woman to come on such an errand.

Now, these few days later, her time came upon her in the middle of the afternoon, but even then she kept calm. The other islanders accompanied her to the anchorage; she steadfastly refused to be carried on any sort of litter; but when the pains came on with particular violence, she lay by the roadside groaning and writhing like a cow in calf, to the amusement of the children. She was wearing a thin cotton dress and no coat though the day had turned out cold.

In the middle of the Sound, she gave birth to a son. Her husband whipped out his gutting-knife for the purpose of cutting the umbilical cord, but was stopped by Cadwaladr just in time.

She returned to the island three weeks later; and helped the men to push the boat out from the beach, wading waist-high in the sea.



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After a night of storm, through the drowned windows I saw Cadwaladr going down to the Cafn, where the boats were awash. The high spring tide had rushed up between the rocks and had dragged the anchor chains all ways, until they were hopelessly entangled. Side ropes had snapped, and several boats were in danger of being carried out to sea. There was water up to the level of the

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Brenda Chamberlain, *Tide-race* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1962), p. 81

M. Wynn Thomas and Tony Brown see the 'cosmos' of *Tide-race* as characterised by 'sexual (and gender) confusion' and Chamberlain herself as 'ever a questionable "woman" in the limiting terms of her day'.²⁰ Certainly, island space in *Tide-race* becomes a theatre for extraordinary performances of multiple gender identities and transgressive desire, mapped by the cartographic imagination. Section 5 of Part One of *Tide-race* sees Chamberlain, in the company of one of the English 'outsiders' on the island, enacting a fantasy of birth and infantile return to the mother, high up on the cliff:

I inserted myself in the entrance and wormed up into the darkness of the narrow cleft. When it became so constricting that I could push no further, and when head was bent to the breast by the roof, I cautiously put out my arm into the dank air, to find that at full stretch I could feel inside the deep nest made of

grass stems and wool; three, four, five pulsating heads. Their beaks gaped wide in a clamour for food. Carefully, I passed one chick down for Stewart to touch . . . After it had been returned to the nest, we retreated to the rocks below.

Here, Chamberlain is at once the mother in childbirth, delivering midwife and returning child; in psychic terms, the rock 'cleft' is at once prison and sanctuary. Peering through 'a narrow fissure' down into the fabled, fabling Seal Cave, Chamberlain then sees a seal cow; suddenly, a bull seal emerges, patrolling his 'harem', 'smooth and black as oil, nine feet of solid flesh', his 'black bull head dripping'. The description summons the sexual presence and pent-up violence of her real-life island antagonist, Cadwaladr – significantly nicknamed 'the Bull-neck'. Also called 'Caliban Cadwaladr' in *Tide-race*, he plays the brutish man-fish to Chamberlain's Miranda.²¹ Bardsey is thus mapped onto the island of *The Tempest* – that hybrid space of magic and political terror, sexual desire and regulatory control, exile and colonial anxiety. Following the birth-fantasy on the cliff, Chamberlain carves out for herself a strange 'personal folklore' of human-animal metamorphosis.²² We learn how the seal cow takes 'the lonely woman living on a desert beach, without husband, without children' down to her 'deepest roots nurtured on legend and fantasy'. This is a cultural return *ad fontem* that goes hand-in-hand with a maternal instinct that turns transgressive:

One day, [the seal cow] said, so great had been my desire to be a mother that I stole a baby seal[,] silken-haired and innocent, from a rock that spray blew over . . . It screamed with the voice of any human child. The bereft cow roared and came up from the surf to beat my door and windows with her flippers . . . After a time, my adopted child grew listless, the fight went out of it, and at last it

pined away, dwindling inside its long fur. It died; then, because I feared the vengeance of its real mother, I went to live far away from the seal's breeding ground.

Mapped onto the folk tale, I suggest, is the psychic turbulence of (childless) Chamberlain's cultural unbelonging, maternal desire and post-war disillusionment. She continues with a remapping of her failed marriage to the artist John Petts, absent perforce from their home in the mountains of Snowdonia during the war. 'Was it your baby I stole sometime in a former life?', she asks the seal cow, before rooting 'deeper in legend' for another uncannily layered narrative:

But one night . . . I went to the shore to gather driftwood by the moon's light. A bull seal had risen from the sea and lay resting on a rock. He was singing with a human voice, an old song, 'I am a man upon the land, I am a silkie in the sea'.

The shock of it made me scream; and hearing me, he gave a great bellow of disgust because I had seen him as he really was, and flapped away into his true element away from me for ever.

Thomas and Brown are right to claim that *Tide-race* 'affords examples aplenty of Chamberlain's 'borderline mental states'²³

The lookout posts over the angry Sound, logged on the first *Winter Rhythms* map, are nodal gendered sites throughout *Tide-race*. They are the points from which the island boat is watched going 'into the offing' – always 'to the lamentation and foreboding of those women left behind'. This vista becomes a compulsive psychological aperture through which Chamberlain frames her creative and emotional health. As I've suggested,

such lookouts are also coordinates that connect Bardsey to Aran, offering Chamberlain platforms for what Kate Holman has called her 'Celtic keening spirit'.²⁴ *Tide-race* is a moving meditation on the condition of the female watcher – fated, it seems, to be forever associated with the memorialisation and verbalisation of grief in perimeter space.²⁵ The book also articulates Chamberlain's struggle *against* this deathly role and thus against the model found in Synge. The Pen Cristin vantage point recorded on the second *Winter Rhythms* chart is verbally mapped in *Tide-race* in a *tour de force* set-piece in which life-writing is channelled into a visionary mode. Chamberlain positions herself in a space of 'grey watchers among grey stone'. Suddenly, the self is disorientatingly doubled, mythologised, classicised, made Syngian; the writing fluctuates tidally between vision and ethnographic record:

I have seen her on other nights when we have been returning over the sea, the shrouded figure standing motionless in a corner of the cliff: high on the mountainside over the white, the wine dark red, the mussel blue ramparts. She is not this or that familiar woman of the island, but a symbol. Monumental in patience, the woman watches the Sound . . . This is a woman of the island: shawled in garments like a nun's, with face almost yellow in pallor; her grey eyes large and clear, black-lashed. Over them arch thick-haired brows that meet at the root of the primitive nose . . . She has the face of one haunted by the imminence of death . . . but however weak in health, strength of custom and the power of love draw her feet up the hill path through the bracken to the place where she has the extent of the water between the isle and the mainland.

Here, precise topography is a theatre for gendered allegory, life writing, a keening lyricism whose tones are partly Synge's, and anthropological record. These are suffused with visionary psychodrama and Chamberlain's own Welsh island gothic, through which she seeks both to confirm her own insertion in this female-death equation, and to write herself out of it.

The dotted lines over Bardsey Sound in the first *Winter Rhythms* map inscribe not only the 'possible landing[s]', as Chamberlain calls them, of the Bardsey menfolk, but also personal fantasies of passage between homeland and outland. The fraught voyage across the Sound that she imagines in *Tide-race* first appeared as a short story, 'The Return', in the September 1947 issue of *Life and Letters*, at the end of her very first summer as a Bardsey resident.²⁶ In that earlier piece, Chamberlain triangulates the relations between the consumptive Captain Alec Morrison; his wife Ceridwen, who 'had refused to live on the Island' but whose return is imminent; and Bridget Ritsin, who is emotionally and physically involved with the ailing Morrison, and thus the subject of the 'filthy jokes' of the mainland village. Bridget's solo passage back to Alec across perilous Bardsey Sound, which becomes a space for distressful self-analysis ('But how have I sinned? I didn't steal another woman's husband') is the cultural taboo around which Chamberlain's triangulation of emotional lives is drawn: 'My dear Mrs. Ritsin, no woman has ever before navigated these waters. Why, even on a calm day the Porthbychan fishers will not enter the Race'. This early in her Bardsey life, Chamberlain was already imaginatively contesting the gender roles she was later to record (and challenge) on the two *Winter Rhythms* maps. In the short story, it is the woman who is the voyager, the man the deathly watcher: 'he will be standing in the door wondering that I do not come'. And yet the pull of contemporary *normative* constructions of the female's domestic role asserts itself throughout: 'When you get home, will you come to me, be my little wife?'

The voyage across the Sound is haunted by the phantoms of Alec and the vengeful Ceridwen, and has the quality of nightmare; surely, the story dramatises anxiety regarding Chamberlain's move to Bardsey. Sublimated here too, clearly, is a fretfulness regarding Chamberlain's (unmarried) partnership with Jean van der Bijl in the wake of her failed marriage to John Petts. Bridget Ritsin safely makes landfall, though not without much trauma, which includes an encounter with a siren-like seal-cow and a dream-vision of an ascent of Bardsey Mountain 'under a sky dripping with blood'. Towards the end of the story, she stands naked in Morrison's kitchen in the early morning light, her body a sensual island form:

Little channels of moisture ran down her flanks, water dripped from her hair over the points of her breasts . . . he watched the skin stretch over the fragile ribs. He touched her thigh with his fingers, almost a despairing gesture.

Emotional and physical fulfilment are denied, however, as Bridget lies down beside the ravaged Alec in a deathly bed. Here, Chamberlain's revisionary gender cartography of Bardsey Sound culminates in a ghastly map of the body: 'His face was bleached, the bones too clearly visible under the flesh . . . his face was like a death mask . . . What will become of us, what will become of us?' It is an autobiographical fantasy in which a power beyond the protagonist's control, beyond the socially-constructed proscriptions of island life – death itself – thwarts female desire.

Tide-race remaps the story as first-person life writing. While it preserves the fantasy (and it was emphatically a fantasy) of lone female passage, it significantly alters the emotional tenor of the original story by concentrating on two, not three, human coordinates: the personae of Chamberlain and her partner Jean. However, the emotional

complexities and sexual fantasies of 'The Return' still haunt the tale. Accompanying the retelling in *Tide-race* is one of the most disturbingly ossific pen drawings in the book: a piece of Bardsey-shaped driftwood or bone, shadowed and hollowed out:



Tide-race, p. 164.

To conclude, then. As Duncan Campbell has recently noted, 'It looks like we're all psychogeographers now'. As commentators have said, literary critics' negotiations with what used to be called 'the politics of landscape' have in recent years become more authentically informed by the insights of social geography.²⁷ In turn, imaginative writers, authors of creative non-fiction, and indeed literary critics and theorists have offered social geographers rich enactments of the ways in which 'space' – always necessarily discursive and textual – conditions our emotional and intellectual lives as solitary and social animals. That equation was recognised, smartly conceptualised, and movingly reimagined by Brenda Chamberlain throughout her career.

¹ Damian Walford Davies, *Cartographies of Culture: New Geographies of Welsh Writing in English* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2012).

² Christian Jacob, *The Sovereign Map: Theoretical Approaches in Cartography throughout History*, trans. Tom Conley, ed. Edward H. Dahl (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), p. 189.

³ See John Pickles, 'Texts, Hermeneutics and Propaganda Maps', in Trevor J. Barnes and James S. Duncan (eds), *Writing Worlds: Discourse, Text and Metaphor in the Representation of Landscape* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 193, 223 and Jacob, *The Sovereign Map*, p. 175.

⁴ P. D. A. Harvey's term, quoted in D. K. Smith, *The Cartographic Imagination in Early Modern England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), p. 8.

⁵ Wylan Curnow, 'Mapping and the Expanded Field of Contemporary Art', in Denis Cosgrove (ed.), *Mappings* (London: Reaktion Books, 1999), p. 256.

⁶ Brian Jarvis, *Postmodern Cartographies: The Geographical Imagination in Contemporary American Culture* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1998), p. 113.

⁷ See Angharad Saunders, 'Literary Geography: Reforging the Connections', *Progress in Human Geography*, 34, 4 (2010), p. 445.

⁸ See Miles Ogborn and Charles W. J. Withers (eds), *Georgian Geographies: Essays on Space, Place and Landscape in the Eighteenth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), p. 1; David C. Harvey et al. (eds), *Celtic Geographies: Old Cultures, New Times* (London: Routledge, 2002); and Joyce Davidson et al. (eds), *Emotional Geographies* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), in particular the chapter by Owain Jones, 'An Ecology of Emotion, Memory, Self and Landscape', pp. 205–18.

⁹ Brenda Chamberlain, *Tide-race* (Bridgend: Seren, 1987 reissue), p. 225.

¹⁰ Brenda Chamberlain, *The Green Heart* (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), p. 35.

¹¹ National Library of Wales, Brenda Chamberlain Manuscripts, Joan Rhys Collection (Size B, Box 2; Picture Store 3); 020030384/1 and 2.

¹² *Tide-race* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1962), p. 220–1. Hereafter *TR*.

¹³ See Godfrey Baldacchino, 'Islands, Island Studies, Island Studies Journal', *Island Studies Journal*, 1, 1 (2006), 5; and Pete Hay, 'A Phenomenology of Islands', *Island Studies Journal*, 1, 1 (2006), 24.

¹⁴ Alan Twelves, quoting Chamberlain; cited in Katherine Elizabeth Holman, 'The Literary Achievement of Brenda Chamberlain' (unpublished MA thesis, University College of Swansea, 1976), p. 245.

¹⁵ The mention of 'Jane & Eddie' on the this second map gives a *terminus post quem* of 1958, the date of their marriage. I am very grateful to Christine Evans for information regarding the Bardsey families.

¹⁶ Anthony Conran, 'The Writings of Brenda Chamberlain', *The Anglo-Welsh Review*, 20, 46 (Spring 1972), 22.

¹⁷ Oona Frawley, '*The Shadow of the Glen and Riders to the Sea*', in P. J. Mathews (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to J. M. Synge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 16, 19.

¹⁸ Bonnie Kime Scott, 'Synge's Language of Women', in Edward A. Kopper, Jr (ed.), *A J. M. Synge Literary Companion* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), pp. 185, 182.

¹⁹ J. M. Synge, *The Aran Islands*, ed. Robin Skelton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 111.

²⁰ See Tony Brown and M. Wynn Thomas, 'The Problems of Belonging', in M. Wynn Thomas (ed.), *A Guide to Welsh Literature, Volume VII: Welsh Writing in English* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003), p. 189.

²¹ See *TR*, pp. 95, 203, 222. The *Guardian* reviewer of *Tide-race* noted that Chamberlain 'has an Ariel-like delight in wind and wave and wing. Reading Miss Chamberlain is the next best thing to being shipwrecked' (an arch and ambiguous comment, quoted on the back cover of Chamberlain's 1964 novel, *The Water-castle*).

²² Anthony Conran, *The Cost of Strangeness: Essays on the English Poets of Wales* (Llandysul: Gwasg Gomer, 1982), p. 207.

²³ Brown and Thomas, 'The Problems of Belonging', p. 188.

²⁴ Holman, 'The Literary Achievement of Brenda Chamberlain', p. 290.

²⁵ For the debate about islands and 'hard edges', see Hay, 'A Phenomenology of Islands', pp. 22–3.

²⁶ *Life and Letters*, 54, 121 (September 1947), 215–27.

²⁷ See Denis Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels (eds), *The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the Symbolic Representation, Design and Use of Past Environments* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 1–2.