



# Jules Hudson

## COUNTRY ESCAPE

As Jules yearns for Wales, where he's lived half his life, he ponders why there's no English word that captures the feeling so well as the Welsh 'Hiraeth'

Last month I prepared myself for the final of the six nations rugby, and the match between England and Wales. This was clearly going to be a cracking game, and as usual I found my loyalties torn. As someone born an Englishman, you might think there would be no problem in deciding who to support, but in truth the experience of having lived over half my life in Wales meant that in reality whoever won, I'd be happy so long as they played good rugby and deserved it.

As the afternoon drew in, I walked Iolo out over our neighbouring fields and looked out across a darkening and moody Hay Bluff towards Wales. Carried on the wind, I thought I could hear the rising din from the stadium down in Cardiff. With the eye of faith, there was almost a glow in the sky, a column rising up from the millennium turf full of expectation and thrill. Whatever happened over the next couple of hours, this was going to be a game to remember, and as I walked back to our cosy fireside to watch it, I wished I'd had tickets to go.

It wasn't the first time I'd looked back westward towards my old home and all that the last two decades had meant. But as I listened to the national anthems, and watched the cameras sweep across the crowds to reveal the fun and the festival of the match, I had a twinge within me; it's something that is hard to explain in English, but it's a feeling the Welsh have long had a word for: Hiraeth.

There are many versions of its definition, but essentially it's a nostalgic longing for Wales; it's a sense of attachment, as if the landscape and its people are a part of you. Put simply, it's about feeling at home. When I first heard of it many years ago I was talking to a Welsh friend of mine about how at home I felt in the Cambrian Mountains that virtually surrounded the village. I found them captivating and full of mystery. Standing stones left by our Neolithic ancestors, old field boundaries, disused mines, abandoned farmsteads and all the lives played out across them over the centuries, including now a part of mine. These timeless mountains had seen it all, yet at the same time they felt secure, welcoming and watchful. 'Ah, you've got Hiraeth my boy! We'll make a Welshman of you yet!' he exclaimed, with a huge grin that broke through an enormous ginger beard. We discussed it long into the night, but

ever since I've always envied the Welsh this one word that means so much to so many.

There is no equivalent in English, and I'm surprised. It's also an ancient language, and we have never been short of a poet or two to do the honours, but as yet it's a word that is still missing. Only a couple of days ago I found myself in the Malvern Hills, wishing that I had been able to challenge Elgar on this one. Since he wrote it, his music has come to symbolise much about what we

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know and love about the best of Britain. Artists too have over the years covered acres of canvas; from Gainsborough to Turner they have produced pictures that can bring a tear to the eye of many an Englishman abroad, but again as yet we can't use a single word to describe what we're feeling.

So there's this month's challenge. Can we come up with a word to match the Welsh? Answers on a postcard if you please...

But if you can't think of one don't worry, I've got just the thing; Hiraeth. As perhaps the best word from one of the worlds' oldest languages do we need another? If it's good enough for Wales it's good enough for me. Diolch!

JULES HUDSON was born in Essex but stayed in Wales after studying archaeology at Lampeter University. He has worked in television since 1996 and is a member of the Countryfile team, but is best-known as the leading face of Escape To The Country. He moved back across the Border in 2012, to Herefordshire.

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