

The lasting influence of R. S. Thomas



From the Chair
Tegwyn Jones

It was with great sadness that I read, shortly into the new year, of the passing of Nigel Jenkins, poet, journalist and author of creative non-fiction books, proud to be of the Gower, and who lectured in creative writing in the Department of English at Swansea University. He was one of the editors of the *Welsh Academy Encyclopaedia of Wales* (2008), and his book *Gwalia in Khasia* was awarded the Wales Book of the Year prize in 1996. In October 2010 Nigel was the guest at the Friends' Annual Meeting, where he was interviewed by Professor M. Wynn Thomas, Chairman of the Books Council and a colleague of Nigel at Swansea, and where he gave readings of some of his poems. Permit me a personal note here. In 1996, a year after *Gwalia in Khasia* was published, I took a journey with T. James Jones and the late Dafydd Rowlands to the Khasi Hills in north-east India. This was a journey that was enriched for me by two facts. Firstly, that I had just read Nigel's book before flying to India. Secondly, Dafydd had been there before with Nigel in 1993, where they had filmed a documentary centered on the life of Thomas Jones of Llangynyw and Aberriw, Montgomeryshire, the first of many Welsh Calvinistic missionaries to labour in that region from the 1840s onwards. It was shortly after returning home that I was to meet Nigel for the first time, and over the years there were to be many more meetings at various venues, where our chats would invariably at some stage take us to that far-off land which continued to fascinate us both. As lovers of Wales and all that that means to us, we are the poorer for his passing.

Sorley Maclean (*gtr, lrt clutching*) sold out. Fire Bomb tour Sain triple cd for D Walford Davies (*vel, crtel harmonium*) new century highspot. A pioneer of dark wounds and internal tensions. In old age bird song and reliable grouch. Stood, was counted, still no change. To live in Wales is to become un-assailable. 'An angel-fish' (Clarke). Expect retrospective, marvelling and statue.



Gwyneth Lewis, Professor M. Wynn Thomas & Peter Finch

The life and work of poet R. S. Thomas was the main topic of the Friends of the Welsh Books Council's annual general meeting, which was held in the National Library in Aberystwyth last November.

Throughout 2013, the poet received a great deal of attention as the centenary of his birth was celebrated. He was the focus of numerous television and radio programmes, and many publications, both biographies and literary criticisms, appeared during the year.

This year's meeting was led, once again, by Professor M. Wynn Thomas, who chose to discuss R. S. Thomas's influence on other writers, specifically his influence on some of Wales's contemporary poets. The former national poet of Wales Gwyneth Lewis, and writer and literary performer Peter Finch, also contributed to the lively discussion.

'It's been a joy to witness the celebrating of R. S. Thomas's particular gift and contribution, and I wished to extend that celebration by discussing his influence on the writers of today,' said Professor Thomas. 'I was interested to learn

if Thomas was still respected, if his work was a stimulus to other Welsh writers, and the extent of his influence on contemporary Welsh poets.'

As expected, the discussion was informative and thought-provoking, as Gwyneth Lewis remembered the poet as a kind man who was always ready to offer advice and support. Peter Finch had a different opinion – the requests he sent to Thomas for poems to include in Finch's new literary journal went largely unanswered. But despite this, both Finch and Lewis recognised Thomas's literary talent and its far-reaching influence on poetry in Wales and beyond.



R. S. Thomas

These annual meetings are highlights in the Friends' year, and a large and appreciative audience came to Aberystwyth to enjoy Professor Thomas's scholarly comments and meaningful questions.

In the past, the Friends have been privileged to enjoy the company of many of Wales's literary giants, including Professor Gwyn Thomas, Jan Morris, and Islwyn Ffowc Elis – as well as R. S. Thomas himself.

Quick Reads

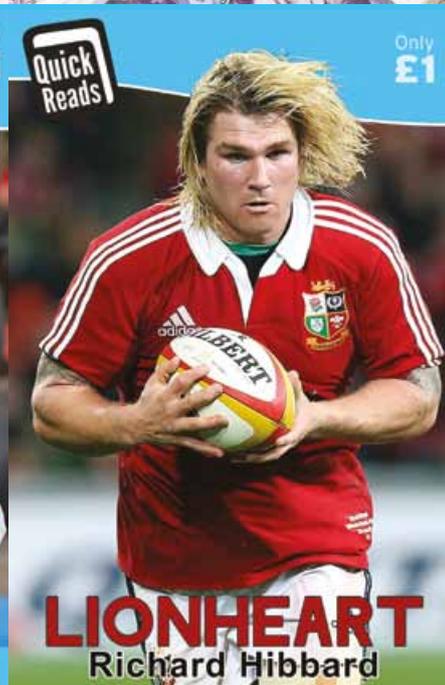
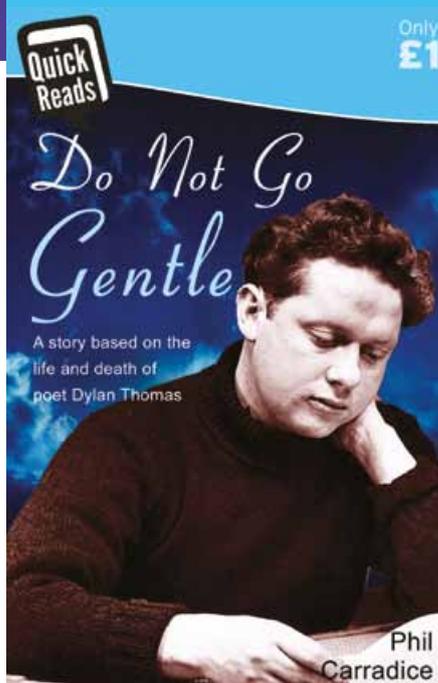
Eight new Stori Sydyn/Quick Reads titles for Wales were launched by Huw Lewis, Minister for Education and Skills, at the Senedd in Cardiff Bay on 10 February 2014.

The eight books in the series cover a wide range of topics, including mini biographies of Wales's leading young athletes Jade Jones, Aled Sion Davies, Jonathan Davies and Richard Hibbard. Alison Stokes's Quick Reads title contains a dozen inspiring true stories about entrepreneurial ideas which were turned into successful business ventures. A fictionalised account of Dylan Thomas's life is the background of Phil Carradice's Quick Reads title, commissioned as part of the Dylan Thomas centenary celebrations, while Alun Gibbard takes a look at the fascinating life of Welsh journalist Gareth Jones, who died under suspicious circumstances in 1935. There's also an entertaining novel by Lleucu Roberts whose protagonist is an eccentric but likeable character.

Angharad Tomos of the Welsh Books Council stated, 'The aim of Quick Reads, coordinated by the Welsh Books Council and supported by the Welsh Government, is to encourage people to look afresh at reading through entertaining, fun and short books. For many, both children and adults, books can often appear daunting at first, and many don't have a lot of time to pick up a hefty novel. The Quick Reads initiative is designed specifically to provide a number of short, engaging books especially written for people who have lost the reading habit or those who wish to improve their skills and confidence around reading.'

English-language titles 2014 (Accent Press)

1. *Do Not Go Gentle* (Phil Carradice)
2. *Be your own Boss* (Alison Stokes)
3. *Headhunter* (Jade Jones)
4. *Lionheart* (Richard Hibbard)



A Review of English-language Magazines in Wales

This summer, applications will be invited for a brand new funding scheme for magazines. The scheme is being set up in response to an independent review of English-language magazines in Wales commissioned by the Welsh Books Council.

The reviewing panel of experts was chaired by Tony Bianchi, who has extensive knowledge of the magazine market in Wales. He was assisted by Tim Holmes, of Cardiff University's School of Journalism, and Alex Clark, former editor of *Granta* magazine and a contributing editor to the *Observer* magazine. To supplement the survey, market research was undertaken with readers to gather their opinions.

'We were very aware of the role of Wales's English-language magazines in discussing issues from a Welsh perspective and in giving due consideration to our culture in

an international context,' said Professor M. Wynn Thomas, Chairman of the Welsh Books Council's English-language Publishing Grants Panel. 'While the Council was keen to protect financial support for the magazine sector, it was considered appropriate to conduct a survey of the field to ensure that our schemes continue to enable a wide range of good-quality magazines to be published, and that the provision offered responds to the demands of readers in order to reach the widest possible audience. As a publicly funded body we also have a responsibility to ensure value for money within our grants system.'

Under the new system seed funding will support new, innovative initiatives in order to attract new entrants to the field with exciting ideas that will target new audiences.

Funding will also be provided for magazines with the emphasis on good writing and sharp

journalism on a broad range of topics.

In recognition of the importance of protecting the provision for literature and supporting a strong reviewing culture, funding will also be available for literary magazines.

A small amount will also be allocated to provide training in areas such as digital publishing, managing small businesses and marketing for successful magazines.

All applicants will need to demonstrate value for money and plans to expand readerships. They will also be encouraged to develop digital content, and attract new readers in this way. Neither general nor literary magazines will receive more than two thirds of their total income in grant money.

'While we are aware that the new structure poses significant challenges for the sector, we feel that it lays down a firm foundation for the future,' added Professor Thomas.

Welsh Books App

Carwyn Jones, First Minister of Wales, and John Griffiths, the Minister for Culture and Sport, both attended the launch of the new Welsh Books App (Ap Llyfrau Cymru), the next step in the process of increasing the digital provision of books from Wales. It follows in the wake of a scheme set up in 2012 in order to ensure a selection of e-books in both English and Welsh.

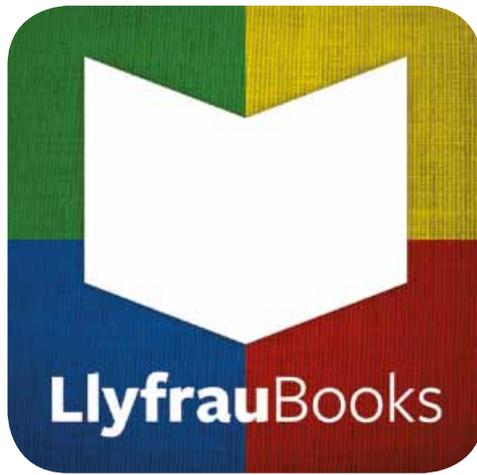
'To date, there are over 1,000 e-books on the Gwales website,' said Phil Davies, the Welsh Books Council's Director of Information and Promotion. 'The next natural next step was to respond to the demand for Welsh-language Apps and help the publishers to provide electronic titles that have a richer content.'

With support from the Welsh Government, the Books Council has been working in conjunction with Yudu, a company that specialises in the field, and five publishers from Wales – Atebol, CAA, Graffeg, Y Lolfa and Rily – are already participating in the scheme.

Other publishers are being encouraged to come on board, with readers downloading the App free of charge, then paying for individual titles.

It was decided to invest in a system which allows publishers to create ambitious titles to sell through the App at a reasonable price, with the income produced being invested to develop and maintain the scheme.

Two elements of the scheme are already up and running, with an App being offered through the App Store for use on iPad, iPhone and



iPod Touch, and an Android version available through Google Play for use on a number of other devices.

In welcoming this exciting development, Carwyn Jones said: 'In order for the Welsh language to thrive in the digital age, it's essential that Welsh-language technology and digital media are readily available.

'The Welsh Books Council and publishers in Wales have a key role to play in ensuring that there are more opportunities for people to use the language. We are pleased to have been able to support the development of this new App, which builds on the success of gwales.com and responds to the increased demand for Welsh-language digital content, including e-books.'

A Welsh Books App was created in conjunction with the Welsh-language version (Ap Llyfrau Cymru), and will contain the same selection of titles in both English and Welsh. This will enable users to enjoy the experience in their

own choice of language.

John Griffiths added: 'It's vital that we use new technology to promote Welsh books in both languages in order to attract new readers, in particular children and young adults. The launch of this App, which has been developed with support from the Welsh Government through the Welsh Books Council, is an important and welcome contribution in the process of increasing the provision of Welsh digital books.'

In response to requests from magazine publishers, a Magazines of Wales App / Ap Cylchgronau Cymru is also being developed and will be launched later this year.



Welsh Books App screenshots on iPad & smartphone

The Friends at the Denbigh Eisteddfod

A welcome reception was held once again by the Friends at the National Eisteddfod in Denbigh last August. A sizeable group gathered at the Welsh Books Council's stand, and all enjoyed the refreshments offered and appreciated the opportunity to catch up with past and present members.

Tegwyn Jones, Chairman of the Friends, thanked everyone for attending, and noted the importance and significance of the support of the Friends towards the work of the Books Council. He referred in particular to the financial support given to the Mary Vaughan Jones award, which is presented every three years to acknowledge an outstanding contribution to the field of children's literature. He also noted that the Friends supported various reading promotions.

Elwyn Jones, Chief Executive of the Books Council, also thanked the Friends for their continued support for the work of the organisation, and emphasized that one of the Council's main aims is to promote the publishing industry in Wales by working together with numerous partners in the field.

'The publishing industry in Wales has thrived over the last few months,' said Mr Jones, 'and the extensive range of books published for the Eisteddfod at Denbigh is proof of the industry's achievements. The only way we

can ensure the continuation of this success is by working together with several other individuals and organisations, and I'm delighted to regard the Friends as one of these crucial partners.'

The reception ended with Tegwyn Jones encouraging others to join, reminding all that membership forms are available from the Books Council.



Fanatics, fakes or literary geniuses...

It was only a few winters back that we convinced the Cardiff Literary Festival to offer us a slot to launch our first book at Chapter and Verse Bookshop in the city's Morgan Arcade. The bookshop has gone and so has the festival, but the arcade is still there and so is Cardiff. It was the start of an adventure.

Publishing is fun, frustrating, anarchic, meritocratic, traditional, slow-moving, mercurial and dynamic. In publishing you meet the most interesting people: fanatics, storytellers, self-publicists, fakes, writers of literary genius, as well as words in all their variety and wonder. There is always another story worth telling, worth publishing, worth reading, and I have now been publishing books for twenty-one years.

December 2013 saw the publication of *Rarebit*, an anthology of twenty-one stories edited by Susie Wild, with original prints by Welsh print artist and all-round bohemian John Abell, and, since January, Griff Rhys Jones has been *Insufficiently Welsh*, travelling from Ynys Môn to Chepstow. Griff starts his book with: 'I saw wonders. I gobbled up the scenery. I ate well. Slept well and I learnt a lot: From the ambitions of Edward I to the appetites of the dung beetle. What a country. What variety. What people.'

This seems like a good place to start outlining Parthian's programme for the next few months.

March is Dan Tyte as the wolf of Westgate Street emerges with a scathingly funny account of generation Y in *Half Plus Seven* (which is the age of the youngest person you are allowed to date, being half your age and add seven – according to Dan).

April starts with a novel: *Until our Blood is Dry* by Kit Habianic, which uses an Idris Davies poem to frame a story of love and strife against

the political background of the south Wales miners' strike thirty years ago.

May arrives with a spell-binding first novel from Carly Holmes entitled *The Scrapbook*. It's about women and the mistakes they make with their mothers and daughters, husbands and lovers, and how, despite their best intentions, the mistakes recur across the generations. Carly Holmes is originally from the Channel Islands and studied at Carmarthen and Lampeter, where she completed her doctorate.

William Roberts is one of Wales's leading novelists and we are delighted to be able to publish the English translation of his Welsh Book of the Year winning novel *Petrograd* in June. We have always been committed to translation at Parthian and have award-winning Welsh novels by Robin Llywelyn, Sonia Edwards and Caryl Lewis in our backlist, in addition to novels translated from Catalan, Spanish, German and Norwegian. This connection with a wider literary world continues in June with *The House of the Deaf Man* by the award-winning Slovakian writer Peter Krištúfek. It's a novel about a small country at the centre of Europe continually being cut up and parcelled out in other countries' wars of ambition.

In July we venture further east with *Sunbathing in Siberia* by M. A. Oliver-Semenov, a true-life story about a Welsh poet who meets the Russian translator of his work at a conference in Paris. They fall in love and he moves to Russia. He is now known as the Welshman of Siberia and writes a column about surviving in the wild East for the *Siberian Times*. This is his story.

And August? We have a month off in August, like the French publishers.

I'll stop at September, but will close with Griff Rhys Jones's words: 'What a country. What variety. What people.' Thanks, Griff.

book of the month

The Book of the Month promotion scheme is by now well established, with publishers welcoming the opportunity to submit titles for possible selection. Unlike the Welsh-language scheme (Nofel y Mis), the title selected to be the English-language Book of the Month can be either fiction or non-fiction. A number of booksellers participate in the scheme and receive a supply of the featured title each month, as well as attractive promotional materials to draw the book-buyer's attention.

Here's a sneak preview of our new and upcoming Spring titles. Which book will you choose?

Book of the Month: March
We that are Left – Juliet Greenwood (Honno) £8.99

Elin lives a luxurious but lonely life at Hiram Hall. Her husband, Hugo, loves her but he has never recovered from the effects of the Boer War. Now another war threatens to destroy everything she knows.

Book of the Month: April
Great Welsh Walks – Derek Brockway (Y Lolfa) £9.95
Eighteen walks in all parts of Wales from the TV series by the renowned Welsh weatherman Derek Brockway.

Book of the Month: May
Until our Blood is Dry – Kit Habianic (Parthian) £10
A novel of passion and love, betrayal and decisions in a time and a place when a people were forced to fight for their future.



Meet Lucy

Meet Lucy Thomas, Head of the Publishing Grants Department at the Welsh Books Council

Where were you born and brought up?

Llanberis in Snowdonia, north Wales.

Where do you live now?

Tal-y-bont near Aberystwyth.

Since when have you been at the WBC?

March 2010.

Where did you go to school?

Brynrefail School, Llanrug.

What was your first occupation?

One of my first jobs was working in a bookshop – I loved it!

What was your favourite book as a child? *Llipryn Llwyd* and *The Tiger who came to Tea*.

Who's your favourite author now?

And what are you currently reading?

I have so many, I don't think I could choose just one but I have recently read *Yn y Tŷ Hwn* by Sian Northey, *Breision* by Jon Gower, *Stoner* by John Williams and *Cosmic Latte* by Rachel Trezise.

Do you have any hobbies?

I like walking, reading and kayaking!

What makes you happy?

Swimming in the sea in Ynys-las.

What makes you angry? To be honest, nothing much infuriates me – even though a few people succeed now and again!

What is your favourite food?

Yorkshire pudding and gravy.

What is your favourite place in the world? Cwm Du'r Arddu above Llyn Du'r Arddu in the Snowdonia National Park.

What do you cherish most in the world?

My tent. I love to go camping.

What makes you laugh? My parents' dog, Bob Morus. He has a wonderful nature.

Any other secrets you'd like to share with us? I have a brown belt in karate.