



CAERWYN WILLIAMS

# John Ellis Caerwyn Williams

## 1912–1999

THE BRITISH ACADEMY has been fortunate to have had a succession of distinguished Celtic scholars as Fellows right from the outset. Sir John Rhys, the first Jesus Professor of Celtic in the University of Oxford (indeed one of the earliest scholars to be appointed to a university professorship to teach Celtic), was one of the Academy's Foundation scholars. Professor Caerwyn Williams was, beyond doubt, one of the most erudite, productive, and highly respected Celtic scholars of the twentieth century, renowned internationally for the breadth and high calibre of his scholarly research, the amazing abundance of his greatly varied and inspiring publications and his constant devotion to helping others.

The University of Wales, founded in 1893, has produced a fair abundance of students and teachers who have distinguished themselves in Welsh and Celtic Studies and has, especially through the establishment and funding of its Press Board and Board of Celtic Studies, encouraged the conduct of detailed and penetrating research work by both junior and senior researchers from within and from without its ranks and facilitated the publication of the results of so many of these researches. This has been greatly enhanced in the last fifteen years by the establishment of the University's Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies, to the particular importance of which, and the vital part played by Caerwyn Williams in its foundation and remarkable success, more detailed attention will be given in another part of this obituary. His notable career was also powerfully connected with so many other important cultural activities beyond

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the confines of the University, always contributing greatly to the enrichment of our perception and understanding of Welsh and Celtic culture both within Wales itself and internationally.

John Ellis Williams was born on 17 January 1912 in Gwauncaegurwen, a small mining village in the upper reaches of the Aman Valley in the County of Glamorgan. He died at Aberystwyth on 12 June 1999. He had adopted the name *Caerwyn* when he registered as a student in 1930 at the University College of North Wales Bangor in order to avoid confusion with other students with the same or a similar name and came to be known generally by his friends and acquaintances by his adopted Christian name. He was the eldest of three children. His father, John R. Williams, was a native of Groeslon in Caernarfonshire, from a slate-quarrying area, and was one of six children. He moved to South Wales following the death of his father at an early age and was unable to realise his ambition to become a minister of religion because of straitened circumstances. *Caerwyn's* mother, Maria Price, was from Brynaman, in Carmarthenshire. *Caerwyn* Williams had one brother (*Keri*, a schoolmaster) and one sister (*Morfudd*, now Mrs *Morfudd Rees*, who qualified as a state registered nurse), both of whom survived him. He felt a close affinity with communities in both northern and southern parts of Wales. He would spend his school holidays each summer in his early boyhood in his grandmother's home in Groeslon.

His North-Walian allegiance and affection for his father's origin in Caernarfonshire was always evident in his spoken Welsh and in his demeanour overall, enriching and sustaining his deep-rooted allegiance to Welsh-speaking Wales and Welsh culture overall. One could perceive and sense it at all times when one was in his company or was reading his very numerous writings in Welsh and commentaries on the history, language, and literature and the people of Wales. So many of his compatriots were held in great esteem and affection by him and he spoke and wrote so very much about them in his books, articles, reviews, and many tributes. All this became ever more clear and pervasive in the later decades of his long and very active life, reflecting all the while his keen awareness of his origins and his debt to earlier generations of Welsh people from so many strata in society. This, I am sure, was an abiding source of strength and a vital driving force in his career as a teacher and scholar whose first allegiance was constantly to his own country and people.

He was educated in *Ystalyfera* Intermediate County School, as it was known in his day, in the Swansea Valley, a school with a notably high standard overall. *Caerwyn* Williams headed the list for the whole of

Wales in the Higher School Certificate examination in Welsh in 1930. The school produced a remarkable succession of distinguished pupils who went on to hold prominent posts in higher education in Wales, especially in the Arts. The fact that he himself had strong family ties with North Wales and the renown of Sir John Morris-Jones who had been a distinguished Professor of Welsh there for so many years must have influenced the young schoolboy in choosing to become a student at the University College of North Wales in Bangor in 1930, concentrating in his studies there on Latin and Welsh. He was in Bangor in an exciting period when the College had both very distinguished, lively, and renowned teachers and a group of particularly able students (such as A. O. H. Jarman and Idris Foster). He most certainly fell under the spell of Professor Ifor Williams (Morris-Jones's successor in the Chair of Welsh) and valued Thomas Parry's inspiring teaching of Welsh literature. He qualified for the BA degree in 1934 having taken the Honours examinations in both Latin and Welsh (with First Class Honours in the latter). Thereafter he spent three years at Bangor preparing a dissertation for the MA degree, working on medieval Welsh religious literature (concentrating on *Breuddwyd Pawl* and *Purdan Padrig*). This represented the first important step leading to his becoming a renowned authority in this field of specialist research.

After two years as a scholar assistant in the Department of Welsh at Bangor he was elected to a University Postgraduate Fellowship. This enabled him to spend two particularly fruitful years studying in Dublin. He might well have gone to centres of learning in Europe, were it not for the outbreak of the Second World War. However, his departure for Dublin was a particularly significant turning point in his cultural and scholarly life, which undoubtedly laid deeper and firmer foundations for the development of his scholarship on a broad Celtic front, embracing many aspects of the history and culture of the modern Celtic countries. In Dublin he was able to benefit from the learning of several leading scholars and to discover for himself the richness of the native tradition in Irish language and literature and, the excitingly impressive living tradition of native folktale 'performances' or recitations. The combination of brilliant academic scholarship and inspiring Irish folklore transmission must have been a very enriching experience for him. Links forged during his two years in Ireland at the University College and Trinity College with both senior scholars such as Professors Osborn Bergin and Gerard Murphy and younger ones such as Brian Ó Cuív, James Carney, and Tomás de Bhaldraithe, left a lasting impression on him, leading to

important scholarly publications by him later on relating to Irish language and literature ranging from the earlier periods to the living tradition of the twentieth century.

Following his return from Dublin in 1941, when the Second World War was raging across Europe, he opted for candidature for the ministry of the Presbyterian (at that time known as the Calvinistic Methodist) Church of Wales. He studied for his University of Wales BD degree at the United Theological College in Aberystwyth, qualifying for the degree in 1944 with distinctions in both New Testament Greek and Church History (throughout his life thereafter he had an abiding, deep, and truly sustaining interest in theology and philosophy, especially certain aspects of the philosophy of religion). He then spent an obligatory year's training for pastoral work at the Calvinistic Methodist Church in Wales's Theological College in Bala, although this did not lead to his full ordination as one of the Church's ministers. He was a loyal member of the denomination all his life, but his very strong interest in Welsh and Celtic prevailed and resulted in his becoming a university teacher.

In 1945 he was appointed to a lectureship in the Department of Welsh at Bangor and the following year he married Gwen Watkins, a schoolmistress from Abertridwr in Glamorganshire. They spent their honeymoon in Dingle in Ireland. His marriage to Gwen was beyond doubt one that brought him great happiness and solace for the rest of his life. She cared for him, accompanied him, comforted him, and encouraged him all the while. At no time was this more testing and sustaining than at the time of his grave illness when he was afflicted by a severe attack of tuberculosis, a terrifying disease in those days, during his second year as a young university lecturer. He was laid low and had to rest for many months in Llangwyfan Sanatorium (he once told me that he also spent some time in a 'Kurhaus' in Switzerland during that period of frailty). He was unable to return to his duties in Bangor for two years. That experience must have left its mark on him for ever after, resulting in an ever conscious and steadfast appreciation of restored and continuing good health. His caring and beloved wife, Gwen, passed away less than six months after him on 19 November 1999. They had no children.

He was tempted early in his university teaching career with invitations to more senior posts: a full-time research position at the School of Celtic Studies of the Dublin Institute for Advanced Celtic Studies, a Chair of Celtic at the University of California in Los Angeles and the Chair of New Testament Greek at Aberystwyth. However, he remained loyal to Bangor. He was preferred for the Professorship of Welsh there in 1953

and held that position with distinction until 1965, when he was invited to be the first occupant of a newly established Chair of Irish at Aberystwyth. He was reluctant to take up this new post, but it undoubtedly resulted in a remarkable extension of his already wide scope of teaching, research, and publication. He had the opportunity in that position to develop and deepen his interest in Irish linguistic and literary studies, amazingly without detriment to his long-standing and broadly based research projects relating to Welsh studies; at the same time he maintained his interest and research activity in the field of Breton studies. He was never keen to be deeply involved in administrative duties and a proliferation of committees; on the contrary, he shunned the heavier administrative chores, without shirking intervention and giving active guidance, advice, and leadership in committees, boards, and councils whenever that was important for the causes which mattered most for him at the time (this usually entailed the furtherance of the studies and researches in which he and his students, especially his postgraduate students, were involved). When committee decisions were especially important in his estimation he was particularly dexterous at preparing, almost manipulating, the course of discussion of the relevant item or items on the agenda *before* the committee had met. A sabbatical year spent at the University of California at Los Angeles (also enabling him to attend the Summer School at Harvard University) in 1968–9 was great good fortune for him. It enabled him especially to extend and further deepen and enrich his understanding and interpretation of the role of the bard in early Irish and Welsh and, more importantly, to benefit from fuller training in Indo-European studies overall.

For many years there had been a desire in the University of Wales to set up some form of Centre for Advanced Study and Research concentrating on Welsh and Celtic Studies. Advocates of such a Centre had a splendid model since 1940 in the School of Celtic Studies which had formed a flourishing and very distinguished part of the internationally renowned Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies. Influential figures in the University of Wales, notably Dr Elwyn Davies and Professor Griffith John Williams in Cardiff and Professor Thomas Jones at Aberystwyth, had striven to secure financial support for such a development, without success. However, a significant step forward was taken in the late nineteen seventies. The University College at Aberystwyth set up an appeal for financial contributions to commemorate Sir Thomas Parry-Williams (a distinguished scholar and literary figure who had been Professor of Welsh there) and other renowned colleagues in the Departments of Welsh and

Welsh History. The way had been prepared by the teachers in the College's School of Celtic Studies. The most crucial and significant lead was given by Professors Geraint Gruffydd and Caerwyn Williams. A College Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies was established in 1978. Caerwyn Williams was its Director from 1978 to 1985.

By October 1985 the Centre had been placed on a much more secure financial footing when it received specific and relatively generous grant aid from the University Grants Committee, very largely through the constructive intervention of Professor John Cannon of Newcastle and Professor Eric Stanley of Oxford. It was now recognised and adopted as a University of Wales Research Centre with a brand new attractive building in very close proximity to the National Library of Wales at Aberystwyth. Professor Geraint Gruffydd was elected as its first gifted and dynamic Director. Caerwyn Williams had worked hard all the while in support of the establishment of the new fully-fledged Centre and indeed, in very active retirement, was the Centre's Honorary Consulting Editor until his death. He, of all the Centre's distinguished supporters, had every reason to be proud of its great success as a centre of excellence in research attracting international support, welcoming many international visitors and developing a fine tradition of tackling large and many-faceted research programmes and bringing them to fruition. These programmes hitherto include the editing of all the voluminous extant medieval poetry of the Poets of the Welsh Princes (the 'Gogynfeirdd'), the writing of the social history of the Welsh language, the editing of the later medieval Welsh strict-metre poetry of the Poets of the Nobility ('Beirdd yr Uchelwyr'), the study of the visual culture of Wales and of 'Celtic languages and Celtic Identity'. Special fora, seminars, colloquia, and larger international conferences have been arranged. The Centre has, especially through the devotion and hard work of its first Directors, attracted a great deal of additional funding from a wide range of sources. Its study of 'Medieval Welsh Poetry', with Caerwyn Williams as one of its instigators, has been adopted and recognised by the British Academy as one of its official 'Academy Research Projects'. He was immensely proud of the success of the Centre at Aberystwyth and of its achievements, especially at the outset under the distinguished Directorship of Professor Geraint Gruffydd. He understandably resented some of the more recent odious friction and competition over financial resources which had quite temporarily and unsurprisingly created some counter-productive divisions and difficulties in the scholarly community within the university.

A full survey and assessment of Caerwyn Williams's scholarly work cannot be encompassed within the limits of this obituary, because it was both voluminous and so greatly varied. However, I have tried to include here a consideration of some of his publications as representatives of the great breadth and variety of his work. I have also deliberately paid particular attention, because it is a truly major part of his services to scholarship, to his central and demanding involvement in editorial work in connection with several learned journals and series of critical works relating to Welsh and Celtic studies (reflecting in particular his abiding concern for the Welsh language and Welsh literature and culture in general).

Caerwyn Williams was an expert on both linguistics and literary criticism, spanning early, medieval, and modern periods. In linguistics he was not governed by any particular school or set of principles; he was more data-oriented than theory-oriented. He respected, overmuch perhaps, many of the old principles of historical and comparative philology, with a strong Indo-European base. He wrote valuable papers, concentrating on morphology, syntax, and semantics in the main and the quest for origins and congeners, with a particular tendency to look at patterns connected with prepositional forms, an area that is highly nuanced and notoriously difficult to manage. His ability at handling linguistic evidence (embracing especially Welsh, Irish, and Breton) in terms of comparative philology is evident in a considerable number of his published papers, reflecting especially his interest in the meaning and function of particular forms. I mention here, as a small selection of instances of this from among his comparatively early publications only, his *'\*De yn y Gymraeg'* (1948),<sup>1</sup> *'Eman fel cyplad yn y Llydaweg'* (1953), *'Cystrawen y frawddeg Lydaweg'* (1954), *'On the uses of Old Irish *fri* and its cognates'* (1956), *'Welsh *yn ei eistedd, yn ei orwedd, yn ei sefyll'** (1972) and *'Cystrawen ferfenwol arbennig'* (1974). He regularly published comparatively short notes on selected forms and idioms or expressions (mostly Welsh, but also involving comparison with kindred or cognate patterns in other Celtic languages). These appeared in a considerable variety of journals preferred by him and in *'Festschrift'* volumes, but most frequently by far in

<sup>1</sup> Throughout this obituary, whenever I note the year of publication in brackets in connection with particular publications, reference should be made for fuller details under that year in the very full bibliography of Caerwyn Williams's publications published in the *'Festschrift'* presented to him, entitled *Bardos* (published in 1982), and in *Y Traethodydd*, 154/no. 651 (published in Oct. 1999). See footnote 3 at the end of the obituary for the lists of his publications and details of several tributes paid to him following his death.

the University of Wales's *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*. One of his last contributions dealing with prepositions, published in 1999, was his paper on 'MiW gan, MiCorn gans: OIr la' in a volume in honour of the Breton scholar Per Denez.

Undoubtedly, however, his most important contributions to scholarship were concerned with the literatures of the Celtic countries in many periods, and with appraising the contributions of particular individuals and societies. This is reflected in monographs, large and small, in magisterial and greatly varied editorial work (work over which he presided directly as editor and many for which he acted in an honorary capacity), in tributes to literary and scholarly figures, and in a great proliferation of reviews.

His initial research project presented in candidature for his MA (Wales) degree at Bangor in 1936 had concentrated on medieval Welsh religious literature. This set the scene for his becoming the leading expert in this complex and demanding field of study and to many publications relating to it. These included a series of discussions and/or editions of individual texts. Here I mention only a few of these: 'Drych yr Ufudd-dod' (1938); 'Dwy Efengyl Apocryffa yn y Gymraeg' (1938); 'Ystoria Titus Aspassianus' (1938); 'Purdan Padrig' (1944); 'Ymryson ac Ymddiddan y Corff a'r Enaid' (1946); 'Buchedd Ddeiniol Sant' (1949); 'Efengyl Nicodemus yn Gymraeg' (1951); 'Efengyl Nicodemus (Peniarth 5, ff. xxx–xxxvj b)' (1952); 'Welsh versions of *Visio Sancti Pauli*' (1962); 'Buchedd Catrin Sant' (1973). His interest in this field of study continued throughout his life. Occasionally it would embrace texts in other Celtic languages, as in his 'Irish translations of *Visio Sancti Pauli*' (1950), and his detailed 'An Irish Harrowing of Hell' (1960). A high point in his publications on Welsh religious texts was his splendid plenary lecture delivered to the Second International Congress of Celtic Studies in Cardiff in 1963. It was complemented by a fuller detailed survey by him in 1974, published in Welsh, on Medieval Welsh religious prose in a composite volume on the tradition of Welsh language prose literature in the Middle Ages edited by Geraint Bowen. His special interest and expertise in this field of study is also reflected in his 1976 Henry Lewis Memorial Lecture, delivered in Welsh, on 'The Religious Poetry of the Poets of the Princes' (published as a separatum by the University College of Swansea in 1977). This clearly and powerfully foreshadowed his later more extensive and seminal study and editorial work involving the voluminous poetry of the 'Gogynfeirdd' overall, in which he played such an inspiring and truly guiding role over the final decade and a half of his life alongside many other commitments.

His publications on Welsh language and literature in all periods were numerous and varied. They range from the earliest extant poetry to contemporary work and from textual criticism and analysis to the discussion of aesthetics and literary theories and involve consideration of so many varied themes and differing periods, appraisal of the work of a surprising number of learned and cultural societies, and a great number of tributes to so many scholars and literary and cultural figures, mostly from Wales, but also from the other Celtic countries. He also published a flood of thoughtful critical reviews of the work of other scholars and important editorial and bibliographical work.

I single out for mention, first and foremost and for a special reason, his labour of love in translating into English, with careful revision, one of the editorial works relating to early Welsh verse first published by his Bangor teacher and mentor, Sir Ifor Williams. This is his 1968 *The Poems of Taliesin*, issued in the Mediaeval and Modern Welsh series of texts published by the Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies. Caerwyn Williams's respect for Sir Ifor Williams was deeply held. This could be said of his great concern throughout his life that the great contributions and leadership shown by the generation of scholars preceding his own should be made evident to his own students and the generation of scholars and leading figures in the world of Welsh literature and culture coming after his own life was over. I remember distinctly how he told me in a worried tone of voice that a new generation of younger scholars had not had and could never have the privilege of knowing scholars such as T. H. Parry-Williams and Ifor Williams for themselves. I am certain that he felt keenly that one generation of scholars has a duty to transmit to the next generation a respect for the stature and vitally important achievements of others who had preceded them.

Before concentrating further on his published contributions to Welsh scholarship, I want to draw attention to his activity on a broader Celtic front, especially with regard to Irish. He had translated into Welsh in 1952 the renowned Old Irish heroic tale *Scéla mucce Meic Dathó*. His period of study in Ireland in his late twenties and close contacts, carefully maintained thereafter, resulted in an important series of other works. These include a number of translations into Welsh of some of the rich repertoire of twentieth-century Irish storytellers. In 1949 he published a small collection of translations of Padraic Ó Conaire's stories and other writings. This was followed in 1954 by another volume of translations of tales, entitled *Yr Ebol Glas a Storiâu Eraill*. These works had been inspired very largely by his having come to know western Ireland directly,

especially Conamara and the Dingle Peninsula. In 1958 the University of Wales Press published one of his most important extensive studies, *Traddodiad Llenyddol Iwerddon* ('The Literary Tradition of Ireland'). Initially this had been a series of public lectures delivered at Bangor. It is a particularly valuable handbook of Irish literary history and the result of careful reading of a welter of primary and secondary sources. It was the first comprehensive survey of Irish-Gaelic literature since the publication of Douglas Hyde's *Literary History of Ireland* in 1899. It is significant that Caerwyn Williams's work was published in Irish in augmented form in 1979, through fruitful collaboration with Máirín Ní Mhuiríosá (a friend of long standing), as *Traidisiún Liteartha na nGael*. In 1992 the University of Wales Press published an extensively revised and updated English version of the book which had been prepared in collaboration with a leading American Celtic scholar, Professor Patrick K. Ford.

His lifelong interest in medieval Irish and Welsh court poetry resulted in his writing on 'Y beirdd llys yn Iwerddon' ('The court poets in Ireland') in Welsh as early as 1954. When he was invited to deliver the British Academy's John Rhys Lecture for 1971 he chose as his topic 'The Court Poet in Medieval Ireland', published in the Academy's *Proceedings* in 1972, a much more extensive and penetrating survey than the earlier Welsh foray. It is the result of careful consideration of a most remarkably wide range of sources, ranging far beyond Irish and other Celtic works, both primary and secondary. In the same year there appeared his 256 page volume entitled *Y Storiwr Gwyddeleg a'i Chwedlau* ('The Irish Storyteller and his Tales'). This was the culmination of his admiration for and full-length exploration of the narrative skills and special quality of the rich tradition of storytelling in Ireland. The work began as Caerwyn Williams's Inaugural Lecture at Aberystwyth after he took up his post as Professor of Irish there. As late as 1985 he returned to this subject, discussing the Irish storytellers of Conamara in his article entitled 'Cynheiliaid olaf hen draddodiad' ('The last upholders of an old tradition'), published in *Y Traethodydd*, the Welsh quarterly journal he edited for so long.

His competence in the modern Celtic languages, other than his native and first language, Welsh, was impressive. Not only did he publish important works relating to Irish as described above, but he reflected in his publications his interest and ability also with regard to Breton and Scottish Gaelic. He translated from Breton a considerable number of the writings of the Breton author Jakez Riou (in 1953, 1959, and 1965—republished collectively in 1976). His *Aderyn y gwirionedd a chwedlau*

*eraill o Lydaw* (1961) is a 160 page monograph devoted to Breton tales. He contributed a detailed chapter on 'Brittany and the Arthurian legend' to the composite volume entitled *The Arthur of the Welsh; the Arthurian Legend in Medieval Welsh Literature*, edited by Rachel Bromwich, A. O. H. Jarman and Brynley F. Roberts (1991). He wrote a review article on John Stoddart's collection of translations of a selection of contemporary Scottish Gaelic poetry (1988, also 1991). He derived particular pleasure from welcoming to the Welsh Academy's Taliesin Congress in 1969 delegates from the other Celtic countries to Wales, including Máirtín Ó Cadhain, Hugh MacDiarmid, Sorley MacLean, and the Breton poet Maodez Glanndour. He was the President of the Welsh Academy ('Yr Academi Gymreig') and he edited the volume entitled *Literature in Celtic Countries* (1971), devoted to the Congress lectures and wrote the Introduction to it. Another instance of his involvement with Celtic literature on a broad front was his lecture on 'Celtic literature. Origins', delivered to an International Preparatory Conference held in Bonn in October 1982, published as *Geschichte und Kultur der Kelten* (1986), edited by Karl Horst Schmidt (he was the inspiring scholar who had the vision and drive to arrange the Conference) and Rolf Ködderitzsch. I well remember how Caerwyn Williams delivered an eloquent and touching address of thanks to the organisers of that memorable gathering of scholars in Bonn; he made a special point of declaring the great admiration and appreciation so many of us felt with regard to the great contributions made by German scholars in the past and in our day to Celtic Studies overall and he emphasised that he had himself been delighted that he had been able to have some of his ablest research students benefiting from a period of study in Germany.

His main contribution to scholarship lies in the area of Welsh Studies, in the broadest sense of that term. He considered aspects of these studies ranging from antiquity to the Middle Ages and the full span of the modern period, including in no small measure the contemporary scene. But it is fair to say that the finest achievement of his scholarly career was his major contribution to the editing and interpretation of the vast corpus of medieval Welsh verse composed by the so-called Poets of the Welsh Princes ('Beirdd y Tywysogion'). I mentioned earlier that his Henry Lewis Memorial Lecture had concentrated on aspects of the religious verse attributed to these poets (*Canu Crefyddol y Gogynfeirdd*, published in 1977). Prior to that he had written a long article in *Llên Cymru* in 1970 entitled 'Beirdd y Tywysogion: arolwg' ('The Poets of the Princes: a survey'). In 1978 he published a much praised study of the same subject

in the 'Writers of Wales' Series with the title *The Poets of the Welsh Princes*, published by the University of Wales on behalf of the Welsh Arts Council. Revised and expanded versions of that valuable work appeared in 1994 and 1997. Two further extensive articles appeared in 1979 and 1990, the first (published in *Llên Cymru*) dealing with poems from this corpus addressed to women and their background in Wales and the Continent ('Cerddi'r Gogynfeirdd i wragedd a merched a'u cefndir yng Nghymru a'r Cyfandir'), the other considering 'The nature prologue in Welsh court poetry' (published in *Studia Celtica*). He was also a joint editor (with Eurys Rolant and Alan Llwyd) of a volume in which a collection of poems celebrating and commemorating the life and death of Prince Llywelyn ap Gruffudd, a work for which he wrote a long and learned Introduction (1984).

Caerwyn Williams was a prime inspiration behind the adoption by the Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies at Aberystwyth as its first major research project the editing of the full corpus of Welsh court poetry commonly associated with the Welsh Princes. This project was one for the completion of which, aided by a small team of editors, the Centre's first Director, Professor R. Geraint Gruffydd, devoted so much of his well-known scholarly abilities and firm leadership. The work was completed in seven bulky volumes. Caerwyn Williams, ably aided by Peredur Lynch, edited the first of these in the volume entitled *Gwaith Meilyr Brydydd a'i ddisgynyddion* ('The Work of Meilyr Brydydd and his descendants', 559 pp., 1994). He was the Consultant Editor for the whole series of volumes, undoubtedly one of the finest scholarly achievements in Welsh Studies in the twentieth century. In fact he read critically (some would probably say hypercritically) all the work of all the scholars involved in editing the full series of volumes, always full of care and advice and with remarkably good insight overall. The whole corpus, which is in general difficult and daunting, amounted to 12,600 lines. Indeed he continued to act as Consultant Editor for the second series of publications resulting from research for the second main project of research adopted and now being briskly carried forward to fruition by the Centre at Aberystwyth, namely the editing of the works of so many of the Poets of the Gentry ('Beirdd yr Uchelwyr'), who were so active and productive in the centuries following those in which the Poets of the Princes had been producing their remarkable, often highly stylised and abstruse, poetry.

It is right to stress here that he also had a particular interest in the study of stylistics and literary theory and criticism. He wrote, for example,

on the significance of metaphor (1951), on Russian formalists (1970) and the background of creative writing (1972). He was very much concerned with aspects of literary criticism in his editing of *Y Traethodydd* and *Ysgrifau Beirniadol*. His role and inspiration in all this has been described brilliantly by Dr Dafydd Glyn Jones, one of his most influential and able Bangor students, in his contribution to the fine special number of *Y Traethodydd*, edited by Dr Brynley F. Roberts, dedicated to a consideration of so many of Caerwyn Williams's talents (vol. 104/no. 651, Hydref/October 1999).

Occasionally he wrote on themes relating to Welsh history, Welsh historians, Welsh nationalism, and literary activity in particular places and particular periods. I note here only a few examples of the topics on which he wrote from time to time: an essay on the tone of eighteenth-century writing in a volume devoted to Welsh literary figures of that century (1966); the Welsh prose of twentieth-century scholars and historians (1976); a playful contribution on figures in Welsh cultural and literary activity in the early twentieth century, with Bangor looming large in it (entitled 'Y Marchogion, y Macwyaid a'r Ford Gron', 1976); hermits in the Middle Ages (1986 bis); the Bible and Welsh national consciousness (1988); the cultural background of the relationship between Lord Rhys and the 'Eisteddfod' of Cardigan in 1176 (1996 and 1997); nationalism in the Middle Ages in Wales (1993) and the nationalism of Oxford historians of early and medieval Wales (1996 and 1998). He wrote on the early history and development of the renowned Welsh language Dafydd ap Gwilym student society of Oxford University. This was first published in a volume presented to Sir Thomas Parry-Williams (1968) and was reprinted in *Cofio'r Dafydd: Cymdeithas Dafydd ap Gwilym 1886–1986*, ed. D. Ellis Evans and R. Brinley Jones (1987). In 1986, when that Society celebrated the centenary of its foundation, Caerwyn Williams was elected by it as one of three new Vice-Presidents and he was chosen to be the first to deliver the Society's Sir John Morris Jones Memorial Lecture.

He wrote on Welsh lexicographers in his *Geiriadurwyr y Gymraeg yng nghyfnod y Dadeni* ('Welsh lexicographers in the Renaissance period', 1983). From 1965 to 1968 he was a member of the Editorial Board of *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru/A Dictionary of the Welsh Language*, and was its Consulting Editor from 1970 until his death. This has been by far the most important and impressive research project carried forward by the Board of Celtic Studies of the University of Wales. Between 1950 and 2001 fifty-seven parts have been published in 3,598 pages (proofs are now arriving dealing with forms in *T*-). His major contribution to Welsh

bibliography was his editing of *Llyfryddiaeth yr Iaith Gymraeg* ('A Bibliography of the Welsh Language', 1988). As President of 'Yr Academi Gymreig' (The Welsh Academy) he greatly encouraged the brilliant editors of the amazingly detailed and impressive *The Welsh Academy English–Welsh Dictionary* (pp. lxxxi + 1,710), edited by Bruce Griffiths and Dafydd Glyn Jones and published by the University of Wales Press in 1995; Caerwyn Williams wrote a short, but significant and eloquent 'Preface' for that very fine work of scholarship.

Various other comparatively short works were edited by him, such as *Barddoniaeth Bangor 1927–1937* (a volume of poetry composed by students of the University College of North Wales, Bangor, 1938), *Llên a Llafar Môn* (on literature and oral tradition in Anglesey, 1963) and *Llên doe a heddiw* ('Literature yesterday and today', 1964). He edited a whole number of *Y Traethodydd* (vol. 126/no. 540, October 1971) devoted to honouring the life and work of Waldo Williams, one of Wales's most able, sensitive, and greatly respected poets of the twentieth century (the editor had gathered in contributions for this notable volume from an impressive array of leading authors and critics). In 1992 he was the editor of a selection of poems composed by Waldo Williams, *Cerddi Waldo Williams: detholiad*, published (with illustration by Rhiain M. Davies) in a finely produced limited edition of 350 numbered copies by the renowned specialist Gwasg Gregynog of Newtown in Gregynog Hall, Montgomeryshire.

He made several contributions to two compendious works relating to Welsh biography and Welsh literature: (1) the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion's *Y Bywgraffiadur Cymreig hyd 1940* and its English version *The Dictionary of Welsh Biography down to 1940* and its first supplement covering the period 1941–50 (1943, 1959, 1997)—he was one of the Honourable Society's Vice-Presidents; (2) *Cydymaith i Lenyddiaeth Cymru/The Oxford Companion to the Literature of Wales*, gol.Jed. Meic Stephens (1986, revised 1992). He also contributed articles on the Irish language and on Irish literature to the *Enciclopedia Universale* (Milan 1970) and on 'Celtic Literature' to *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica (Macropaedia)*, vol. 15 (1985, 1997) and assisted with Celtic entries for the *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*.

Those who knew Caerwyn Williams are well aware of his interest in so many other scholars from Wales and the other Celtic countries and, for sure, important figures in the history of Welsh literature (mostly in the modern period, especially in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries). I have calculated that he wrote careful and caring tributes, memoirs and obituaries, critical essays and assessments relating to close on fifty indi-

viduals. Here I mention only a small selection of names, Ifor Williams and T. H. Parry-Williams (both of whom he admired greatly), Goronwy Owen and Islwyn, Morgan Llwyd and O. M. Edwards, D. J. Williams and Waldo Williams, John Gwilym Jones and Bobi Jones, J. R. F. Piette and Edouard Bachellery, D. J. Williams and Kate Roberts, Robert Jones (Rhos-lan) and Edward Jones (Maes-y-plwm), Bedwyr Jones and Ceri Lewis, Thomas Jones and R. J. Thomas, John Morris Jones and J. Lloyd Jones, Gomer Roberts and Brynley F. Roberts, A. O. H. Jarman and my late brother D. Simon Evans, Bedwyr Jones and his very close friend R. Geraint Gruffydd, and so many others. He often wrote these contributions in the journals and series of volumes and 'Festschriften' he edited (dedicating a fair number of such volumes to the individuals whose memory he wanted to celebrate). Tributes to celebrate the career and achievements of two distinguished Fellows of the British Academy were written by him in fine style, published in the Academy's *Proceedings*, namely the obituaries of the late Sir Thomas Parry (1988) and Professor Kenneth Hurlstone Jackson (1993).

He wrote contributions to 'Festschrift' volumes presented to the following scholars: T. H. Parry-Williams (1968), Glanmor Williams (1984), Brian Ó Cuív and Eric P. Hamp (1990), Owen E. Evans (1993), Daniel Huws (1994), D. Ellis Evans (1995), R. Geraint Guffydd and Brendan Ó Hehir and Derick S. Thomson (1996), Diarmuid Ó Laoghaire (1997), Per Denez and Proinsias Mac Cana (1999). In addition to that, in his regular editing of *Studia Celtica* and especially of *Ysgrifau Beirniadol* over a period extending from 1976 to 1998 he honoured a whole series of distinguished Celtic (mainly Welsh) scholars by paying tribute to them or commemorating them in what amounted to a series of volumes in their honour. He included in each a careful appreciation of the career and scholarly contribution of the scholar whom he had singled out for this form of appreciation and recognition. In 1982 Caerwyn Williams was worthily honoured himself in a scholarly Festschrift, edited by R. Geraint Gruffydd, entitled *Bardos: Penodau ar y Traddodiad Barddol Cymreig a Cheltaidd* ('Bardos: Chapters on the Welsh and Celtic Bardic Tradition').

One other rightly renowned feature of Caerwyn Williams's career was his devotion to the editing of journals and of a rightly renowned series of volumes devoted to critical writing (mostly on literary topics). These are the publications entitled *Y Traethodydd*, *Studia Celtica* and *Ysgrifau Beirniadol*. He was properly proud of all three, but it is fairly evident that he valued most of all, I think, his connection with *Y Traethodydd*. This quarterly periodical was first published, after much discussion and

negotiation, in 1845, with markedly strong connections with the Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Church from the outset. It catered specifically for the publication of contributions dealing with religion, theology, philosophy, and literature. The intention was that it should fulfil the role played by journals such as *The Edinburgh Review* and *Blackwood's Magazine* in England. It generally catered for all the important fields of study for which it was initially designed, without a break right through to our day. It was carefully nurtured by a succession of distinguished and conscientious editors. Caerwyn Williams took over the editorship in 1965, as joint editor, until the publication of the April 1969 issue. After that he was the sole editor until his death (other renowned editors prior to him during the twentieth century were Ifor Williams and J. R. Jones). The high esteem in which he held *Y Traethodydd* was particularly evident when the hundred and fiftieth anniversary of its foundation was celebrated in 1995. In the January issue for that year he wrote a detailed article tracing the background of its foundation in 1845. He had discussed aspects of this theme in earlier articles (1981, 1982, 1987). In the late eighties and increasingly in the nineties he was greatly concerned that it was receiving such niggardly financial backing from the Welsh Arts Council. He furiously and justifiably railed against that body. When Caerwyn Williams lost patience with various bodies and individuals who failed to recognise the importance of *Y Traethodydd* he resorted to very bitter and sobering statements, not mincing his words. I am thinking now in particular of his 'Editorial Notes', issuing dire warnings full of foreboding in a most awesomely sad and yet cutting and firm manner, in the July 1999 issue of the journal. He roundly condemned one individual for foolishly suggesting the merging into one publication of three diverse and disparate Welsh language journals, including *Y Traethodydd*. In 1996 a special collection of eight of his contributions to *Y Traethodydd* was published by Gwasg Pantycelyn, Caernarfon, the Press which had regularly published the periodical since 1913 to the present day on behalf of the Presbyterian Church of Wales. Under the title *Diwylliant a dysg: llyfr anrheg i'r Athro J. E. Caerwyn Williams i ddathlu 30 mlynedd o'i olygyddiaeth o 'Y Traethodydd'*, that collection was published in a special edition limited to only four copies (edited by Brynley F. Roberts, his successor as Editor), celebrating thirty years of his editorship of *Y Traethodydd*.

*Studia Celtica* first appeared in 1966, edited by Caerwyn Williams for the Language and Literature Committee of the Board of Celtic Studies of the University of Wales. By 1992 he had edited twenty seven volumes of the journal (twenty of them appeared biennially as double volumes).

This periodical ranked among the leading academic journals devoted to a wide range of aspects of Celtic Studies with a highly respected international reputation. After 1992, in a difficult period of rationalisation of financial resources in the University of Wales it was merged with *The Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, which had been published regularly since 1921. Professor Williams was Consulting Editor of the new joint periodical.

The third major editorial contribution made by Caerwyn Williams to the enrichment of the Welsh language literary scene was his lead in the establishing and editing of a truly invigorating series of quite bulky volumes entitled *Ysgrifau Beirniadol* ('Critical Essays'), published annually by the renowned Welsh publishing firm, Gwasg Gee ('Gee Press') of Denbigh. The first volume appeared in 1965 and Caerwyn saw twenty-five of these volumes through the press by 1999. They concentrated on literary criticism and related topics. It is well recognised that this series reinvigorated the study of Welsh literature, reflecting contemporary critical trends and respecting the need for a new outlet for critical appraisal of Welsh literature and Welsh culture overall. It may not have satisfied the more 'avant-garde' critics. However, it was a major and sustained production of lively and learned appraisal of the work of a host of authors and of literary and other subjects. Some of the volumes were presented as a tribute to writers who had devoted their lives to enriching Welsh literature and critical scholarship in general.

Caerwyn Williams produced very many reviews of works relating to Welsh and Celtic Studies throughout his career. He also adjudicated a whole succession of literary competitions, both minor and major, in the Royal National Eisteddfod of Wales. I have noted twelve occasions on which he was involved in this activity over a period spanning the years 1956 to 1977. He was also often called upon to write Prefaces for the works of other authors (usually well-established Welsh scholars and on one occasion a controversial study by a brilliant scholar whose health had broken down). In response to the success and dominance of the successful English language 'Writers of Wales' series of publications devoted to Welsh authors (supported by the Welsh Arts Council) he argued strongly in favour of a Welsh language counterpart in a contribution to *Llais Llyfrau* in 1981. This resulted in the publication of a valuable series of Welsh language studies of the work of a host of significant figures in the history of Welsh literature. The series was titled 'Llên y Llenor' ('The Literature of the Literator'). He was the General Editor of this admirable series. Between 1983 and 1999 at least thirty one volumes were published in this series.

He was invited to deliver a considerable number of special named lectures, including the Sir John Rhys Lecture of the British Academy (1971), the Henry Lewis Memorial Lecture (1976), the Charles James O'Donnell Lecture at Oxford (1980), the Dr Daniel Williams Lecture at Aberystwyth, the Sir John Morris Jones Lecture at Oxford, and the R. T. Jenkins Lecture at Bangor (all three in 1983). He was not a particularly eloquent or fluent speaker, but all his public lectures were very carefully prepared and always reflected his great learning. He did not in any of his writings indulge in coruscating on thin ice. He was elected to a Leverhulme Fellowship for 1963–4 and to a Visiting Professorship at the University of California at Los Angeles in 1968. He was elected a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries in 1975, a Fellow of the British Academy in 1978 and an Honorary Member of the Royal Irish Academy in 1990. He was awarded an Honorary D.Litt. Celt by the National University of Ireland in 1967 and an Honorary D.Litt by the University of Wales in 1983. The British Academy honoured him with one of its highest accolades by awarding him its Derek Allen Prize in 1985 for outstanding published work in Celtic studies (annual awards are made in turn in musicology, numismatics, and Celtic studies).

I have said very little about Caerwyn Williams's remarkable qualities as a person. However, I am convinced that I came to know him well enough over many decades in so many greatly varying circumstances and capacities to enable me to say confidently that he would not have valued a prolonged final eulogy. But some matters do need stressing. He was unquestionably one of the most learned and versatile Welsh scholars of the twentieth century. I use the term 'Welsh' in the sense of a person both proud of his Welsh origin and deeply caring about Wales overall. He was always greatly concerned about the native language and culture of Wales, its Christian (especially Protestant) religious heritage and tradition. Welsh national identity was particularly important for him and he did all he could to safeguard that identity. His endeavours were not those of one who cared at all about being politically active, but rather those of a devoted scholar who all the while sought to nurture, protect, and safeguard so many elements in that special identity, the continuity and enrichment of which were always important in his life. Caerwyn Williams was a prodigiously hard worker and a voracious reader and collector of books from far and wide. Nurturing and sustaining an awareness of the sense of community among scholars mattered greatly to him. He was genuinely modest, unassuming and unostentatious but would not compromise on those matters of principle about which he was deeply concerned. I stress

above all at the end of this obituary that he cared especially about his students, not least his postgraduates who benefited so much from his guidance (they were and still are, I am quite certain, among his greatest admirers).<sup>2</sup> I know in many ways how much he went out of his way to the very end of his life to support them, including (to mention obliquely only one example) the seeking of fair and proper support for the publication of a work presented for publication by a worthy scholar he had taught and encouraged many years before in his days as a teacher in Bangor. I, along with many others, had personal experience of his caring, supportive and very sympathetic advice when that really mattered. An annual Caerwyn Williams Memorial Lecture in honour of his remarkable talent and contribution to Welsh and Celtic scholarship has been established by the University of Wales Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies. It will be delivered in successive years at the Centre and constituent institutions of the University of Wales at Aberystwyth, Bangor, Cardiff, Swansea, and Lampeter. The first Memorial Lecture will be delivered by his very close friend, Professor Emeritus R. Geraint Gruffydd, in 2001. Professor Gruffydd, towards the end of the deeply touching tribute he paid to Caerwyn Williams at his funeral service in Aberystwyth, declared that if he had to choose one word to describe him it would be the word *grasol* ('gracious'). That one apt word was well chosen. Caerwyn cared about people in many ways; he cared about Wales and so many aspects of its culture, past and present. *Bendith ar ei enaid. Gorffwysed Gwen ac yntau mewn tragwyddol hedd.*<sup>3</sup>

D. ELLIS EVANS

*Fellow of the Academy*

<sup>2</sup> I am particularly grateful to Dr Marged Haycock, one of his many able postgraduates, for her kind and detailed correspondence with me on this particularly striking and memorable feature of his career and several other aspects of his caring attitude in relation to both his own work and in relation to that of so many others. She has informed me that a special volume, dealing with various topics relating to medieval Welsh texts, to honour the memory of Caerwyn Williams, edited by four scholars whose postgraduate doctoral theses were supervised by him (Dr Haycock herself, Professor Dafydd Johnston, Dr Iestyn Daniel, and Dr Jenny Rowland) is being prepared for publication, as now planned, in 2003 when the Twelfth International Congress of Celtic Studies will be held in Aberystwyth.

<sup>3</sup> A full bibliography of Caerwyn Williams's publications was published in the following two major sources: Gareth O. Watts, 'Llyfryddiaeth yr Athro J. E. Caerwyn Williams', in *Bardos: Penodau ar y Traddodiad Barddol Cymreig a Cheltaidd cyflwynedig i J. E. Caerwyn Williams, golygydd gan* [edited by] R. Geraint Gruffydd (Caerdydd, 1982), 214–26; Huw Walters, 'Yr Athro Emeritus John Ellis Caerwyn Williams: Llyfryddiaeth 1980–1999', *Y Traethodydd*, 154 (1999), 257–76. Obituaries were published in *The Independent* (Meic Stephens), *The Irish Times*

31 July 1999 (unsigned) and *The Times*, 2 August 1999 (unsigned). Other tributes known to me are as follows: Marged Haycock, 'Y Sgolor Mawr: teyrnged', *Barn* (Gorffennaf/Awst 1999), 68–71; *Y Traethodydd*, vol. 154, ed. R. Brynley Roberts, part 650 [a Special Number commemorating Caerwyn Williams published in October 1999], 197–276, with contributions by Derwyn Jones, Mary Burdett-Jones, R. Geraint Gruffydd, Brynley F. Roberts, B. Vivian Morgan, Pryderi Llwyd Jones, Gwyn Thomas, Dafydd Glyn Jones, Proinsias Mac Cana and Huw Walters; Proinsias Mac Cana, 'J. E. Caerwyn Williams 1912–1999', *Studia Celtica*, 33 (1999), 354–7; Geraint H. Jenkins, 'Ein Pennaf Ysgolhaig: John Ellis Caerwyn Williams' (1912–1999), *Taliesin*, 107 (Hydref 1999), 87–97. I wish to add here my sincere thanks for the very generous and invaluable encouragement, advice, and information given to me by Mrs Morfudd Rees (Caerwyn Williams's sister) and by two steadfast and very good friends from Aberystwyth, Professor Emeritus R. Geraint Gruffydd and Dr Marged Haycock—*diolch yn fawr am bob cymorth hael a gwybodaeth dra gwerthfawr*.



