

PRICHARD, CARADOG (1904-1980), novelist and poet

Name: Caradog Prichard
Date of birth: 1904
Date of death: 1980
Gender: Male
Occupation: novelist and poet
Area of activity: Literature and Writing; Poetry
Author: Menna Baines

Caradog Prichard was born on 3 November 1904 in Bethesda, the youngest of the three sons of John Pritchard and his wife Margaret Jane (née Williams). (The spelling 'Prichard' was Caradog's whim.) John Pritchard worked at the Penrhyn Quarry and had been one of the 2,800 quarrymen involved in the bitter 1900-3 industrial dispute there, although he probably returned to work before the end of the strike. Caradog was only five months old when his father was killed in an accident at the quarry on 6 April 1905. The loss of the family breadwinner inevitably meant that Caradog and his brothers grew up in poverty, and their mother's subsequent mental illness cast a further shadow over their lives.

These circumstances forced Caradog to leave Bethesda County School in 1922 and find work. He worked as a sub-editor on a local weekly newspaper, *Yr Herald Cymraeg*, in Caernarfon before becoming a reporter on the same paper in the Conwy valley, where he later joined the staff of the *Faner*, another weekly. In 1923 his mother was admitted to the mental hospital at Denbigh, where she would spend the rest of her life (she died 1 May 1954). By now Caradog had started to write poetry, winning prizes in local eisteddfodau. He came to national prominence when he won the Crown at the Holyhead National Eisteddfod, 1927; aged 22, he was the youngest ever to win it, and he went on to win it twice more in 1928 (Treorchy) and 1929 (Liverpool) - the only winner ever to be crowned in three consecutive years.

In 1927 Caradog moved to Cardiff where he worked on the *Western Mail* for seven years whilst also studying Welsh and English at Cardiff University College; he graduated in 1933. During the same summer he married Mattie Adele Gwynne Evans (1908-1994), a Cardiff schoolteacher who hailed from Gilfach-goch. In 1934 they moved to London where Caradog pursued his career as a journalist. He worked as a sub-editor on the *News Chronicle* for eight years before receiving his call-up in 1942; his military training is vividly and humorously described in his journal, '*R Wyf Innau'n Filwr Bychan*' ('I'm a Little Soldier'; 1943), published under the name Pte P. He saw no action, however, spending the last two years of the war in India working for the Foreign Office in Delhi where his writing skills served the British propaganda machine. He returned to London in 1946, resuming work on the *Chronicle* until 1947 when he crossed to the other side of Fleet Street, joining the staff of the *Daily Telegraph* as parliamentary sub-editor. Caradog and Mattie's daughter, Mari, was born in the same year.

Caradog continued to write poetry in London, although his first collection, *Canu Cynnar* (1937), consisted mostly of earlier poems, written before he left Wales. The book was dedicated to his mother and her fellow patients at the Denbigh mental hospital, and many of the poems, including the three crown-winning compositions, 'Y Briodas' ('The Marriage'), 'Penyd' ('Penance') and 'Y Gân Ni Chanwyd' ('The Unsung Song'), dealt with her sufferings as her son imagined them, whilst disappointment and disillusion in a more general sense were central themes in the rest of the collection. Still a keen Eisteddfodic competitor, he nearly won the Crown a fourth time at the Denbigh National Eisteddfod, 1939; the adjudicators placed his poem highest in the competition but, controversially, concluded that it was not on the given subject, 'Terfysgoedd Daear' ('Earth's Tumults'). It was a poem justifying suicide and was included in his second collection, *Tantalus* (1957), alongside poems inspired by his childhood days and wartime experiences, and poems about some of his acquaintances.

In 1961 Caradog published *Un Nos Ola Leuad* ('One Moonlit Night') - his only novel but one which made a lasting impact on the Welsh literary world. It was a thinly-veiled account of the author's own upbringing in Bethesda, convincing in its vivid portrayal of childhood and harrowing in its description of the protagonist's fate as his world disintegrates around him. Set during the First World War, and reflecting its devastating impact on the community, the novel pushed Welsh fiction in new directions, embracing hitherto taboo subjects such as madness, suicide and sexual perversion, employing a stream-of-consciousness technique and abandoning the formal literary language in favour of colloquial Welsh, specifically the dialect spoken in the Bethesda area. Since its publication there have been various radio, television, stage and film adaptations. The novel had a significant influence on the course of later Welsh fiction and has been translated into many languages including English (in Penguin's Twentieth-Century Classics series), French, German, Dutch, Italian, Greek, Czech, Danish and Hebrew.

In 1962 Caradog won the National Eisteddfod Chair in Llanelli. His poem, 'Llef un yn Llefain' ('The Voice of One Crying [in the Wilderness]'), presents the musings of a disillusioned priest who feels he has failed in his vocation - a vocation Caradog himself had considered. It was the title poem in his third poetry collection, but there were very few if any new poems in the book. His next publication was a collection of short stories, *Y Genod yn ein Bywyd* ('The Girls in our Life', 1964); being heavily autobiographical, they cast some interesting light on his life but have little literary value.

Caradog was actively involved with the London Welsh Society but his quiet, behind-the-scenes work with them (such as editing their paper, *Y Ddinas*, in the 1940s and again in the 1950s) was in complete contrast to his extrovert wife Mattie's centre-stage role in the same society. The cultural Welsh events she organized in the Albert Hall attracted hundreds of ex-patriots, while her soirées at the Prichard family home in St John's Wood were very popular. Practical and determined by nature (and a staunch Liberal while Caradog was a Conservative), she was a stabilising influence in his life, helping him through his battle against alcoholism and bouts of depression.

Although he retired from the *Daily Telegraph* in 1972, Caradog continued to do occasional journalistic work; for instance he would send reports to the *Telegraph* from the National Eisteddfod and had a column in the *Bangor and North Wales Weekly News*. He published a candid and entertaining autobiography, *Afal Drwg Adda* ('Adam's Rotten Apple'; 1973), and a complete collection of poems (1979). Both books, along with many of his articles, reflect a preoccupation with the theme of exile; the fact that he spent over half his life in London, far away from his Welsh roots, was a constant source of guilt but also the stimulus for much of his literary work. It is also true that as a Tory, royalist and an Anglican he stood outside the predominantly Nonconformist and nationalist Welsh literary establishment of the second half of the twentieth century.

Caradog Prichard died on 25 February 1980, aged 75, and was buried at Coetmor Church cemetery, Bethesda.

Author

Menna Baines

Sources

Caradog Prichard, *Afal Drwg Adda* (1973)

his papers at NLW

Menna Baines, *Yng Ngolau'r Lleuad: Ffaith a Dychymyg yng Ngwaith Caradog Prichard* (2005)

Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: Caradog Prichard

Additional Links

VIAF: [49265927](#)

Wikidata: [Q3250688](#)

Published date: 2015-09-08

Article Copyright: <http://rightsstatements.org/page/InC/1.0/>

PDF Print Cite

The Dictionary of Welsh Biography is provided by The National Library of Wales and the University of Wales Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies. It is free to use and does not receive grant support. A donation would help us maintain and improve the site so that we can continue to acknowledge Welsh men and women who have made notable contributions to life in Wales and beyond.

Find out more on our sponsorship page.



APA Citation



Baines, M., (2015). PRICHARD, CARADOG (1904-1980), novelist and poet. *Dictionary of Welsh Biography*. Retrieved 10 Nov 2024, from <https://biography.wales/article/s10-PRIC-CAR-1904>

Copy to Clipboard

Privacy & Cookies
Copyright
The Project
Help
Contact

LGC
NLW

LLYFRGEL
THE NATION



Noddi gan
Llywodraeth Cymru
Sponsored by
Welsh Government