

MORGAN, THOMAS JOHN (1907-1986), Welsh scholar and writer

Name: Thomas John Morgan
Date of birth: 1907
Date of death: 1986
Gender: Male
Occupation: Welsh scholar and writer
Area of activity: Literature and Writing; Scholarship and Languages
Author: Brynley Francis Roberts

T. J. Morgan was born on 22 April 1907 in the village of Glais, Swansea Valley, a largely monoglot Welsh-speaking area at that time. He was the younger of the two sons of William Morgan, coal miner, and his wife Annie. He received his early education in the local primary school and then at Pontardawe secondary school before proceeding to Swansea University College where he played rugby for the college team and gained first-class honours in Welsh in 1928. Professor Henry Lewis, the head of department would nurture a generation of outstanding researchers in linguistics over the following years and T. J. Morgan was drawn to research the syntax of the verb in Middle Welsh. He spent the academic year 1929-30 in University College Dublin studying Old Irish with Osborn Bergin and he submitted his MA (Wales) dissertation in 1930. He was elected to a University of Wales Fellowship but he was unable to take it up as he was appointed Assistant Lecturer in Welsh at the University College of South Wales in Cardiff where W. J. Gruffydd was professor.

He lectured in the Welsh department in Cardiff and published regularly until 1951 (he spent 1941-45 at the Ministry of Labour and National Service) and that year he was appointed Registrar of the University of Wales in Cardiff. He remained in that post for 10 years before returning to academic life in 1961 as professor of Welsh at the university college in Swansea. He retired in 1975 having spent 1971-75 as Academic Vice-principal. 'TJ' was active in many public circles in Wales; he was a regular adjudicator at the national eisteddfod and served on its Council and committees and he was chair of the Welsh Arts Council's literature committee 1967-72. He was one of the founders of yr Academi Gymreig and a member of the courts of the National Library and National Museum. His main research publications gained him his D.Litt. (Wales) in 1952 and he was awarded a LL.D. honoris causa (Wales) in 1976. He was joint editor with W. J. Gruffydd of *Y Llenor* 1946-51 and he edited the W. J. Gruffydd memorial number in 1955.

T. J. Morgan began to publish his research on verbal syntax in the *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies* in 1931 soon after his appointment to his post in Cardiff and he continued to publish from time to time linguistic notes on syntax, phrases and individual words. He never lost his informed interest in Welsh syntax (as evidenced in his severe review of *Cystrawen y Frawddeg Gymraeg* (Melville Richards, 1938) in *Y Llenor*, 17 (1938), 238-48), and this reached its apogee in *Y Treigladau a'u Cystrawen* (1952). This is the only thorough analysis of the variations in the syntax of initial mutations in Welsh, a study based on manuscript and printed texts of all periods together with a wide knowledge of the spoken language of many areas. As well as his work on linguistics T. J. Morgan published extensively on literary topics, especially Daniel Owen, T. Gwynn Jones, T. H. Parry-Williams, and more analytically on literary stylistics, e.g. of the cywydd and awdl (1946-47), Welsh prose (1948) and the poets of the princes (1950); a number of his articles were collected in *Ysgrifau Llenyddol* (1951).

His articles, reviews and adjudications are the fruit of sustained reflection upon the work of writers and literary compositions, and not unnaturally the character of T. J. Morgan's publications changed a little between 1951 and 1961 when he was involved full-time in administration. He had been a literary author since the beginning of his career and he published collections of essays in 1937 *Dal Llygoden*, 1945 *Trwm ac Ysgafn* and 1948 *Cynefin*. Throughout his life he continued to compose poetry and literary essays that appeared in journals and then as collections in 1966, 1969, 1971 and 1972. Many of his essays have a strong autobiographical element, not in the sense that they are personal and family reminiscences but rather that they reveal how the community in the Swansea Valley where he was brought up shaped his attitude to life and gave a view of a civilised society and its standards. 'TJ's love of and respect for the culture of that society - its music making, its eisteddfodau, its communal spirit especially - is clear. He described his upbringing in a radio talk published in 1971 in *Y Llwybrau Gynt* (ed. Alun Oldfield-Davies) and the subject of his inaugural lecture in Swansea in 1961 was 'Peasant Culture', later expanded and published in Welsh in *Diwylliant Gwerin* (1970), which also contains a collection of literary criticism essays. The everyday Welsh of this community gave 'TJ' his wealth of language and his gift of writing in an interesting style on all manner of topics and in a way that retained the attention of readers even in complex scholarly discussions like *Y Treigladau a'u Cystrawen*. T. J. Morgan was a man of wide culture with interests in literature, music and fine art, and literary history and criticism reappeared as major themes as he returned to university teaching; he continued to publish articles and notes up to his death. His final research project was different from everything that he had done previously. In December 1985 he published jointly with his son Prys, *Welsh Surnames*, a pioneering study of Welsh surnames and the development of the Welsh naming system.

'TJ' was a fine teacher, an astute committee man and administrator with a good sense of humour. In a superficially light-hearted poem (in *Cynefin*, p.127) he expressed his hopes for heaven, but he would gladly forgo all academic writing and explaining this and that, all ambition to be a prominent figure, as long as he could handle a ball (not a round one) and experience the old excitement of Saturday afternoons, remembering forever the fellowship that he used to know, the gentle pleasures of words and syntax and the desire to plait the locks of the muse.

In 1935 he married Huana Rees (who had graduated in Welsh at Swansea) and they had two sons, Prys, a well known historian, and Rhodri, a prominent politician. T. J. Morgan died suddenly at his home in Bishopston, Gower, 9 December 1986. The funeral service was held at Bethel chapel, Sketty, Swansea 15 December, followed by interment in Coed Gwilym cemetery, Clydach.

Author

Dr Brynley Francis Roberts

Sources

Personal archive, 1936-87, T. J. Morgan Papers, National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth

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Stephen J. Williams, *Y Fanner*, 19 Rhagfyr 1986

Y Cymro, 17 Rhagfyr 1986

The Times, 19 December 1986

Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [T. J. Morgan](#)

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VIAF: 13767350

Wikidata: Q7668365

Published date: 2016-05-11

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APA Citation

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Roberts, B. F., (2016). MORGAN, THOMAS JOHN (1907-1986), Welsh scholar and writer. *Dictionary of Welsh Biography*. Retrieved 10 Nov 2024, from <https://biography.wales/article/s11-MORG-JOH-1907>

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