

PENNAR, ANDREAS MEIRION (1944-2010), poet and scholar

Name: Andreas Meirion Pennar
Date of birth: 1944
Date of death: 2010
Gender: Male
Occupation: poet and scholar
Area of activity: Poetry; Scholarship and Languages
Author: Heini Gruffudd

Meirion Pennar, the eldest of the five children of **W. T. Pennar Davies** and his wife Rosmarie (née Wolff), was born in Cardiff 24 December 1944. Geraint, Hywel and Owain were his brothers, Rhiannon was his sister. His mother was born in Detmold, Germany but because of her Jewish ancestry, she was forced to flee from the family home in Berlin, where her father was a family doctor, before World War 2.

Pennar Davies was a minister in Cardiff from 1943 to 1946 when he was appointed to the staff of Coleg Bala-Bangor, Bangor. The Davies family moved to Bangor in 1946 and then, in 1950, when **Pennar Davies** was appointed to Coleg Coffa, to Brecon where Meirion spent his formative years as a youth. He claimed to have had a 'un-literary upbringing' in his youth but he began writing poetry in English for the Brecon Boys' Grammar School eisteddfod under the guidance of his father who was his mentor and inspiration throughout his life. The college later moved to Swansea and Meirion began writing poetry in Welsh as a 6th-form pupil at Dynevor Grammar School, Swansea. Though he subsequently forsook the abstruse style of his early poems - his juvenalia - he followed his father's literary, cultural and religious interest. He graduated in Welsh at Swansea University College in 1966 and then entered Jesus College, Oxford, as a research student. He gained his DPhil in 1975 for his work on women in medieval Welsh literature.

Following a period with the Welsh Schools' Council he was appointed to a lectureship in Welsh in University College Dublin where he met Carmel Gahan whom he married 3 January 1974. Some warm poems derive from this period. He was appointed to a Welsh lectureship at St David's University College, Lampeter in 1975 where he remained for 19 years until 1994. Their son Gwri was born 15 September 1976 but Meirion and Carmel separated later. Carmel Gahan published a book of poems, *Lodes fach neis*, in 1980. During this period too Meirion suffered from depression, plagued by concerns about the human condition and the fate of his nation.

When he discovered the French and German impressionists and early surrealists of the 20th century, he was entranced by their work seeing in it an honest attempt to find a form that would express some of the impossible dualities of life. He immersed himself in the Mabinogi and early Welsh poetry and in Greek and Roman myths. Meirion followed these impressionists in his first book of verse, *Syndod y Sêr* (Gwasg y Dryw, 1971), rejecting artificial forms of poetry and choosing, rather, to write poems without pattern or punctuation to give unhindered voice to his thoughts and emotions. His aim was to create poems like 'a web from my own belly'. Some of the subjects of his complex imagination were the passion of love, sex and eternity, all combined with a wide knowledge of Celtic and classical mythology. Like his father's poems with their broad span and wonder at life, they demand long and deep reflection.

His second book of poetry, *Y Pair Dadeni* (Gwasg Gomer, 1977), consists of a long poem that recreates the story of Efnisien and Bendigeidfran from the second branch of the Mabinogi. He published two other long poems, 'Saga' (1972) and 'Y Gadwyn' (1976) and his translations of old Welsh literature proved popular: *Taliesin* (Llanerch Press 1989), *The Poems of Taliesin* (Tern Press, 1989), *The Black Book of Carmarthen* (Llanerch Press, 1989, Tern Press, 2007), *Peredur* (Llanerch Press, 1991), 'Cad Goddau' (Tern Press, 1993). He was translating the Gododdin poem when he died. Another book of verse, *Glesni*, remained unpublished at the time of his death. This bilingual, Welsh-English, book contains moving poems following the death of his father and others of a personal nature, including some dealing with the experiences of his youth in Brecon and the surrounding area, an area to which he owed a great debt.

Meirion was totally non-materialistic by nature, and his conversation, that could be both playful and severe, would quickly turn to the condition of Wales and his sharp, anarchic lash would fall on the enemies of Wales and capitalist, warmongering politicians. Because of his sensitive nature it was not easy for him to cope with personal and career difficulties. A committed nationalist, he took part in the early campaigns of the Welsh Language Society and he stood as Plaid Cymru candidate in the Swansea West constituency in the difficult 1983 general election. On his early retirement in 1994, he moved to Swansea to care for his mother and his brother Geraint.

He suffered ill health in his final year and underwent surgery, the effects of which led to his untimely death. Meirion Pennar died in Swansea 9 December 2010.

Author

Heini Gruffudd

Sources

Personal knowledge

Information from his brothers Owain Pennar and Hywel Pennar, and his son, Gwri Pennar

The Independent, 28 December 2010

Western Mail, 18 December 2010

Y Cymro, 24 December 2010

Barn, February 2011

Meic Stephens, ed. *The Oxford Companion to the Literature of Wales* (1986)

Meirion Pennar's notes in *Glesni*

Gerallt Jones, 'Yn llygad goleuni', *Barn*, 185, June 1978, 229-30

Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: **Meirion Pennar**

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