

EMES, MARION GRIFFITH (WILLIAMS, GWLADYS MARION GRIFFITH) (1921-2007), historical novelist

Name: Marion Griffith Eames
Date of birth: 1921
Date of death: 2007
Gender: Female
Occupation: historical novelist
Area of activity: History and Culture; Literature and Writing
Author: J. Beverley Smith

Marion Eames was born in Birkenhead, 5 February 1921, the second of three daughters of William Griffith Eames (1885–1959) and his wife Gwladys Mary (née Jones) (1891–1979). Her maternal grandparents had moved to Merseyside from Anglesey and Caernarfonshire, followed as a very young man by her father. Her upbringing was that of a Welsh-speaking family, her parents members of Woodchurch Road chapel, who tried, with less than complete success, to ensure that their children too spoke the language fluently. The memory of her forebears' quest of a livelihood on Merseyside would provide the setting of her novel *I Hela Cnau* (1978), trans. *The Golden Road* (1990), which tells of the emigrants' efforts to adjust to an English urban environment, but her own experience was the exact opposite.

In later years Marion Eames recalled her discomfiture when, four years old, her parents moved to Dolgellau where her father became a shopkeeper. She was at once thrust into the Welsh ambience of the Council School, and subsequent attendance at Dr Williams's School underscored the English orientation of her literary interests and creative inclinations. She spoke with great warmth of Dorothy Davies, English mistress at the school, whose encouraging influence she recalled with gratitude.

After school, denied the opportunity to proceed to the higher education for which she was well suited, Marion Eames worked as a librarian first at the County Library in Dolgellau and then at the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth, each position bringing her to a closer acquaintance with literature in the language in which she would undertake her creative writing. A return to Dolgellau as a political agent for Plaid Cymru was followed a few years later by her first entry into journalism as editor of the weekly newspaper *Y Dydd*.

It was only later that she was able to fulfil an enduring but hitherto unrequited aspiration when she entered the Guildhall School of Music to study piano and harp. In London she met the journalist (and Quaker) Griffith Williams, whom she married in 1955, a marriage of great joy and, for the writer that Marion then became, an abiding source of strength and encouragement. Making their home in Pimlico they had briefly the benefit of a cosmopolitan interlude that has its resonances in her later work. They both secured appointments in Cardiff, Marion as a radio producer with the BBC in 1955, a post from which she retired in 1980.

By then Marion Eames had established herself as a writer with the publication of three historical novels, each characterized by careful preparation that lent authenticity to her work without inhibiting her natural creativity. In *Y Stafell Ddirgel* (1969), trans. *The Secret Room* (1975), and its sequel *Y Rhandir Mwyn* (1972), trans. *Fair Wilderness* (1976) she took, first, the setting in the neighbourhood of Dolgellau of the courageous resolve and tribulations of the small Quaker congregation and, then, that of their experience in Pennsylvania following their inexorable exile. The novels saw a skilful blending of historical and imagined persona, her prose enriched by her sensitivity to the textures of the seventeenth-century writings with whose spirituality she had much sympathy.

I Hela Cnau which followed was an evocation of her parents' remembrance of Birkenhead, enhanced by her own searching. The sense of place mattered greatly in her writing, and this was particularly meaningful in inspiring *Y Gaeaf Sydd Unig* (1982), a work that owed its beginnings to her coming, by chance and alone, upon Castell y Bere soon after the grievous loss of her husband in 1977 and at a time when she was herself confronting a recurrence of the illness to which she was eventually to succumb. Placing her work in the context of the thirteenth-century princes called for assiduous investigation of unfamiliar sources, and the particularly difficult mix of her historical and fictive characters was secured by placing those of her creation in the foreground of her narrative with the known figures upon its fringes.

In *Y Seren Gaeth* (1985) and *Y Ferch Dawel* (1992) the setting is more contemporary, each revealing that an author of deep compassion and faith in the inherent goodness of others was by no means unable to confront the harsh realities of marital relations or the discomfiting complexities of incestual relationships. There is throughout her work a robustness that reveals, alongside a trusting in human virtue, an abiding recognition of the need for resolute adherence to the guidance of conscience, an instinct that enabled her even to her last years to identify with the aspirations of a younger generation and take great joy in their company.

Marion Eames, who was awarded an honorary degree of the University of Wales, wrote for children, *Sionyn a Siarli* (1978), *Huw a'r Adar Aur* (1987), *Y Tir Tywyll* (1990), and an introduction to Welsh literature for English-speaking readers, *A Private Language* (1997). She participated generously in the activities of literary organizations and adjudicated at the National Eisteddfod. She left a body of autobiographical work and discussions of her writing practice. These reveal her constant reading in the classics of the literary traditions in English and Welsh, and in contemporary writing, and she never failed to enjoy the company of those who shared, or influenced, her taste in reading.

Marion Eames, who long endured illness with great fortitude, moved from Cardiff to Aberystwyth and then to Dolgellau, and died there on 3 April 2007. On 24 April cremation at Aberystwyth was followed by a service of thanksgiving at Salem, Dolgellau. Her ashes were placed in her husband's grave in the churchyard at Pendine, the village where he had spent his early years.

Author

J. Beverley Smith

Sources

NLW Archives: [Papurau Marion Eames](#)

Richard R. Evans, *Marion Eames* (2004), a critical study, with list of the author's writings and further studies

J. Beverley Smith, *Journal of the Merioneth Historical and Record Society*, 15 (2006-9), pp. 233-9

The Independent, 6 April 2007

Tribute by Llinos Beverley Smith (delivered at the service, Salem, Dolgellau)

Personal knowledge

Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [Marion Eames](#)

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