

JONES, SARAH RHIANNON DAVIES (1921 - 2014), author and lecturer

Name: Sarah Rhiannon Davies Jones

Date of birth: 1921

Date of death: 2014

Parent: Laura Jones (née Owen)

Parent: Hugh Davies Jones

Gender: Female

Occupation: author and lecturer

Area of activity: Literature and Writing; Education

Author: Haf Llewelyn

Rhiannon Davies Jones was born on 4 November 1921 in Llanbedr, Meirioneth, the second daughter of Hugh Davies Jones (1872-1924), a Baptist minister, and his wife Laura (née Owen, 1887-1977), a teacher. She had one sister, Annie Davies Evans (née Jones). Her father was brought up near Oswestry, but his original family home was Derwen Fawr farm, Corwen, which the family had to leave in the 1880s when his father was ejected for voting contrary to the wishes of his landlord. Rhiannon Davies Jones inherited her family's liberal values, and her background on her father's side in the marches and her mother's side in Ardudwy had a strong influence on her work.

Hugh Davies Jones came to Ardudwy as minister of Salem Chapel in Cefnycymerau, Llanbedr, and he was minister there when the artist Vosper painted his well-known portrait of Siân Owen. Following Hugh Davies Jones's death in 1924 when Rhiannon was two years old the family moved to live with her grandmother on her mother's side at Penbont, Llanbedr, and Rhiannon attended primary school in Llanbedr for a short time, then in Llanfair near Harlech, where her mother was a teacher. At Barmouth Grammar School she was introduced to the history of 'christendom' by the Headmaster E. Pugh Parry, and those lessons later inspired research for several of her novels. She was also introduced by her Welsh teacher, Aneurin Owen, to works of literature which influenced her. She went on to University College Bangor in 1940 and there she came into contact with a number of influential people such as [Professor Ifor Williams](#), [Professor Thomas Parry](#) and [Professor R.T. Jenkins](#).

In 1945, after leaving college and gaining a Certificate of Education, she became a teacher at Brynhyfryd Grammar School, Rhuthin. It was there that she began writing, encouraged by the support of acquaintances with literary interests in the area. There she also met Robert Clwyd Parry who became a close friend, but died at a young age in 1960. In 1963 Rhiannon Davies Jones was appointed to a lectureship at Caerleon College in Monmouthshire, and moved on in 1965 to the Normal College in Bangor, again as a Welsh lecturer, where she remained until her retirement in 1983. She made her home in Menai Bridge.

Whilst she was at school and college, poetry was Rhiannon Davies Jones's main medium, but none of her early work survives except the collection of poems for children, *Hwiangerddi* ('Lullabies', Gomer, 1973). She recalls being advised by

[Professor Thomas Parry](#) to choose between poetry and prose, and not to mix the two. She appears to have taken the advice, going on to become one of the foremost Welsh novelists of her time. She won prizes for short novels at the National Eisteddfod in Aberystwyth in 1952 and in Aberdâr in 1956, but these were never published. Then in 1960 she won the Prose Medal at the Cardiff National Eisteddfod with *Fy Hen Lyfr Cownt* ('My old account book'), an imaginary diary of the hymn-writer [Ann Griffiths](#). She went on to win the Prose Medal again at the Swansea National Eisteddfod in 1964 with *Lleian Llan Ll r* ('The nun of Llan Ll r'), a novel coloured by her grief at the loss of her partner Clwyd Parry. This novel proved very popular and was reprinted in 1967 and again in 1990.

Rhiannon Davies Jones was a Welsh Nationalist, and her beliefs and responses to political events of the period are clearly reflected in her work. The events relating to the Investiture of 1969 influenced *Llys Aberffraw* ('The court of Aberffraw'), a novel about [Owain Gwynedd](#) which won the Crown at the Anglesey Eisteddfod in 1973 and was published in 1977. Similarly in the case of *Eryr Pengwern* ('The eagle of Pengwern', 1981), a novel set in the time of the Heledd saga poetry, which the author says that she wrote in response to the threat by [Gwynfor Evans](#) to go on hunger strike for a Welsh television channel.

Dyddiadur Mari Gwyn ('The Diary of Mari Gwyn', 1985) is a novel dealing with the persecution of Catholics in the reign of Elizabeth 1 focusing on the life of the writer and theologian [Robert Gwyn](#). After the failure of the devolution campaign in 1979, Rhiannon Davies Jones was inspired to create the outstanding trilogy *Cribau Eryri* ('The peaks of Snowdon', 1987), *Barrug y Bore* ('Morning frost', 1989), and *Adar Drycin* ('Birds of tempest', 1993), covering the period between the reign of [Llywelyn Fawr](#) and the fall of [Llywelyn the Last](#).

In 2002 when she was suffering from ill-health and failing eyesight, her last volume was published, *Cydio Mewn Cwilsyn*, in which she returns to the diary format, the imaginary diary of Elizabeth Prys, daughter-in-law of [Archdeacon Edmwnd Prys](#) from the Stuart period. That volume also contains a number of autobiographical essays noting some of the influences on her work.

Rhiannon Davies Jones was an inspiring teacher and lecturer, and her passionate interest in her subjects is evident from the detailed research which is the hallmark of her work. Her unique prose style places her amongst the finest Welsh prose writers of the twentieth century.

Rhiannon Davies Jones died in Penrhos Stanley Hospital, Holyhead, on 22 October 2014, and was buried in the cemetery of the Salem Baptist Chapel in Llansilin near Oswestry.

Author

Haf Llewelyn

Sources

Gruffydd Aled Williams, [Jones \(Sarah\) Rhiannon Davies](#), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2018)

Rhiannon Davies Jones, *Cydio Mewn Cwilsyn* (Caernarfon 2002)

Personal acquaintance

Further reading

Meic Stephens, '[Rhiannon Davies Jones: Welsh-language author whose impassioned historical novels carried a nationalist message](#)', *The Independent*

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