

## LEWIS, JANET ELLEN (EILUNED LEWIS) (1900 - 1979), novelist, poet and journalist

**Name:** Janet Ellen Lewis  
**Date of birth:** 1900  
**Date of death:** 1979  
**Spouse:** W. Graeme Hendrey  
**Child:** Katrina Hendrey  
**Parent:** Hugh Lewis  
**Parent:** Eveline Lewis (née Griffiths)  
**Gender:** Female  
**Occupation:** novelist, poet and journalist  
**Area of activity:** Literature and Writing; Poetry  
**Author:** Katie Gramich

Eiluned Lewis was born on 1 November 1900, in a house called Glan Hafren ('Bank of the Severn') in Penstrowed, Newtown, Montgomeryshire, the daughter of Hugh Lewis (1860-1921) and his wife Eveline (née Griffiths, 1871-1958). She was christened Janet Ellen, and adopted the name Eiluned for her creative work. She had two sisters, Medina and May, and a brother, Peter. Her father was a landowner and proprietor of a tannery; her mother had been headmistress of the county school before marriage and was a fluent Welsh speaker. Both parents were JPs and Hugh served as Chair of Montgomeryshire County Council. Glan Hafren was a cultured household which welcomed literary visitors such as the playwright, J. M. Barrie. She attended Westfield College in the University of London and subsequently worked in London on the editorial staff of the *Daily News* and the *Sunday Times* in the 1930s. In 1937 she married Graeme Hendrey; they had one daughter, Katrina, and the family moved to live in rural Surrey. She and her husband became friends with a number of literary figures, including Anglo-Welsh writers such as [Ernest Rhys](#), Hilda Vaughan, and Charles Morgan. Later, in 1967, Lewis published an edited volume of the letters of the late Charles Morgan, which also includes a warmly appreciative memoir of him.

Her first novel, *Dew on the Grass* (1934), was both a runaway bestseller and critically acclaimed, winning the Gold Medal of the Book Guild for the best novel of the year. It is an autobiographical fiction, drawing on her memories of growing up in Glan Hafren, fictionalised as 'Pengarth' in the novel. The novel has a strong sense of place and time, and its narrative point of view is that of an imaginative eight-year-old girl, Lucy Gwyn. The child's point of view is beautifully rendered and is perhaps responsible for the widespread appeal of the book, with its nostalgic tone and accurate recollection of the sensory experiences of childhood. In common with her poetry, *Dew on the Grass* is a nature-lover's book, conjuring up vivid scenes of the natural world in the landscape surrounding 'the young Severn'. In 1937 she published a non-fiction, topographical book entitled *The Land of Wales*, co-authored with her brother, Peter, which, again, paints an affectionate portrait of Wales mainly for an English audience. Lewis's later journalism also focuses on the countryside, albeit mostly in rural Surrey where she settled with her family, rather than in the Wales of her childhood. She wrote a regular column for *Country Life* magazine under the byline 'A Countrywoman's Notes' for more than three decades from 1945 onwards.

Her second novel, *The Captain's Wife*, was published in 1943 and is based on the memories of her mother who was brought up in St David's (Tyddewi) in Pembrokeshire. It is an historical novel set in the later nineteenth century, evoking the maritime and farming life of coastal Wales in that period. The novel focuses on Lettice Peters, the 'captain's wife' of the title, who has travelled the world on her husband's ships but has now settled with her children in the little cathedral town of 'St Idris', a lightly-fictionalised St David's. The narrative perspective alternates between that of Lettice and her young daughter, Matty, creating a fictional world seen from two, often contrasting, points of view. Like her first novel, it gives an intimate representation of family life, as well as reflecting on historical change, and poignant notions of survival and continuity, ideas likely to have appealed to its Second World War readership.

Her third novel, *The Leaves of the Tree* (1953), is set in rural Surrey which was by then her familiar home landscape. Its protagonist is a young girl, Sharon Westerly, and concerns her friendship with the household of an eccentric French painter, Victor Lavelli, living nearby. Although the nature writing is familiar from Lewis's previous works, this is very much a Second World War book, centred upon the ways in which the lives of people in rural England are disrupted and sometimes destroyed by the conflict. Wales plays an offstage part in that Sharon is sent to school there and is befriended by the kindly Bowen family. This book has a wider scope than the previous novels and deals more fully with the world of adults. It ends on a note of hope, when Sharon visits the late artist's cottage and finds paintings still on the wall, hidden under the leaves. The novel concludes that 'good things are never lost.'

Her volumes of poetry were *December Apples* (1935) and *Morning Songs* (1944). These poems were unashamedly traditional, rhymed and often reminiscent of folk songs in form. Like her prose they focus on the natural world and have a

nostalgic tone which Welsh readers might identify as hiraeth. Lewis also published popular volumes of non-fictional prose, such as *In Country Places* (1951) and *Honey Pots and Brandy Bottles* (1954), drawing on her *Country Life* journalism.

Eiluned Lewis died on 15 April 1979.

## Author

Katie Gramich

## Sources

Katie Gramich, *Twentieth-century women's writing in Wales: land, gender, belonging* (Cardiff 2007)

Eiluned Lewis, Glen Cavaliero (ed.), *A companionable talent: stories, essays and recollections* (Finchcocks Press 1996)

Jane MacNamee, 'Darkness and Light: interview with Eiluned Lewis's daughter, Katrina Burnett', *New Welsh Review* 83 (Spring, 2009), pp. 16-24

Irene Walters, *Facing Annihilation: Genre, Gender, and Social Issues in the Work of Eiluned Lewis* (Unpublished MA dissertation, Trinity College Carmarthen, 1998)

## Further reading

Wikipedia Article: [Eiluned Lewis](#)

## Additional Links

NLW Archives: [NLW MS 22543C: Eiluned Lewis: Letters](#)

VIAF: [RHIF VIAF](#)

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