

BIANCHI, ANTHONY (Tony) (1952 - 2017), writer

Name: Anthony (tony) Bianchi
Date of birth: 1952
Date of death: 2017
Spouse: Diana Bianchi (née Davies)
Spouse: Ruth
Child: Heledd Bianchi
Child: Rhiannon Bianchi
Parent: Catherine Bianchi (née Nesbitt)
Parent: George Bianchi
Gender: Male
Occupation: writer
Area of activity: Literature and Writing
Authors: Ruth Gooding, Dafydd Johnston

Tony Bianchi was born on 5 April 1952 in North Shields, Northumberland, the only child of George Bianchi (1910-1988), a policeman of Italian descent, and his wife Catherine (née Nesbitt, 1916-2001). Tony attended a Roman Catholic school in Newcastle upon Tyne. He left school with poor exam results, probably because his teachers had persuaded him to sit his exams a year early. However, in 1969, he became a student at St David's College, Lampeter. There he graduated with a first class in English and Philosophy, before staying on to write a PhD on Samuel Beckett.

At Lampeter he met Diana Davies, a militant Welsh speaker and a pacifist activist. They married in 1973, and had two daughters, Heledd and Rhiannon. Bianchi took an Ulpian course to learn Welsh; he commented 'I fell in love with Welsh like you fall in love with a piece of music.'

After graduating, Bianchi taught English at a school in Connah's Quay in Flintshire and then at the University College of Wales at Aberystwyth. His next post was as literature officer at the Welsh Arts Council in Cardiff; he eventually became head of the literature department. After his first marriage ended in divorce he lived in Cardiff with his partner Ruth.

Bianchi left the Arts Council in 2002 in order to devote himself entirely to his writing, and during the last fifteen years of his life he became one of the most prolific authors and most distinctive voices in Welsh literature. His experience at the Arts Council inspired his first novel, *Esgyrn Bach* (2006, trans. by him as *The Bone-pickers*), a satire on institutional bureaucracy. *Pryfeta* (2007, trans. by him as *Daniel's Beetles*, 2011), won the National Eisteddfod Daniel Owen Prize and was short-listed for Wales Book of the Year. This was followed by *Chwilio am Sebastian Pierce* (trans. by him as *Seeking Sebastian Pierce*, 2009) and *Ras Olaf Harri Selwyn* (2012, trans. by him as *Harri Selwyn's Last Race*, 2015), and in 2015 he won the Prose Medal at the National Eisteddfod for *Dwy Farwolaeth Endaf Rowlands* ('The Two Deaths of Endaf Rowlands'). His last novel was *Sol a Lara* published in 2016. A collection of short stories, *Cyffesion Geordie oddi Cartref* ('Confessions of an Exiled Geordie', 2011) explores memories of his upbringing on Tyneside. His one English language novel, *Bumping* (2010), is also set in his home town of North Shields. A collection of his English short stories, *Staring Back at Me*, was published posthumously in 2018. He was particularly interested in people whose lives are slipping out of synch with the world around them. Many of his central characters are obsessives and their self-deceptions and fantasies shape the intricate plots and dark humour of his novels. Having learnt Welsh as an adult, he delighted in its spoken registers and playfully exploited the oddities and ambiguities of the language.

Bianchi felt every novelist needed to create a persona and wear a mask. He commented that 'I soon discovered that it was easier to create such a mask in my second language. And the reason for this, of course, was that Welsh was itself a mask.' He also believed that writing in Welsh made it less painful for him to tackle personal subjects. *Pryfeta* drew on his mother's memory disorder, and in *Cyffesion Geordie oddi Cartref* he wrote about the bullying he had experienced at school and his difficult relationship with his violent father.

Bianchi also mastered the complex rules of traditional Welsh poetry; as well as free verse he wrote cynghanedd (a system of alliteration and internal rhyme obligatory in strict-metre poetry), winning numerous awards for his compositions in the four-line englyn metre. A collection of his poetry entitled *Rhwng Pladur a Blaguryn* ('Between Scythe and Shoot') was published in 2018. His contributions to literary criticism include a monograph on *Richard Vaughan* in the 'Writers of Wales' series (1984) and an edited collection of contemporary Welsh-language poetry, *Blodeugerdd Barddas o Farddoniaeth Gyfoes* (2005). He also did the preparatory research for a collection of **Idris Davies's** poetry which was eventually edited by Dafydd Johnston as *The Complete Poems of Idris Davies* (1994).

Bianchi supported left-wing causes all his life, although there is little overtly political in his work. He was active in the Wales Anti-Apartheid Movement and supported the campaign for nuclear disarmament. He was also an accomplished pianist. Tony Bianchi died on 2 July 2017 at his home in Pontcanna. His funeral, on 14 July, was held at Cardiff Natural Burial Meadows.

Authors

Ruth Gooding
Dafydd Johnston

Sources

Obituary, Daily Telegraph, 20 July 20 2017
[Literature Wales](#), 3 July 2017
Jim Parc Nest, 'Tony Bianchi Rhwng Pladur a Blaguryn Tribute', Wales Arts Review
Tony Bianchi, 'Author's notes', Western Mail, 17 July 2010

Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [Tony Bianchi](#)

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