

JONES, Sir CYNAN (ALBERT) EVANS ('Cynan '; 1895 - 1970), poet, dramatist and eisteddfodwr

Name: Cynan (Albert) Evans Jones
Pseudonym: Cynan
Date of birth: 1895
Date of death: 1970
Spouse: Menna Meirion Jones (née Jones)
Spouse: Ellen Jane Jones (née Jones)
Parent: Hannah Jane Jones (née Evans)
Parent: Richard Albert Jones
Gender: Male
Occupation: poet, dramatist and eisteddfodwr
Area of activity: Eisteddfod; Literature and Writing; Poetry
Author: Thomas Parry

Born 14 April 1895, the son of Richard Albert Jones and Hannah Jane (née Evans), Pwllheli, Caernarfonshire. He received his education at the elementary school and the County School at Pwllheli, and University College, Bangor (on a Baptist scholarship), where he graduated in 1916. In the same year he enlisted in the R.A.M.C., serving in Salonika and France as a member of the 86th Field Ambulance, and later as chaplain. After the war he entered Bala (CM) Theological College, and in 1920 he was ordained and inducted pastor of the Presbyterian church at Penmaen-mawr. In 1931 he relinquished his pastorate on appointment as Regional Tutor for Anglesey under the Extramural Department of University College, Bangor, and from 1936 until his retirement in 1960 he was Staff Tutor in the Department, specialising in Drama and Welsh Literature. He continued to accept preaching engagements regularly.

Cynan, as he was generally known, was a prominent figure in the life of Wales through his links with the National Eisteddfod. (He adopted the pseudonym Cynan on becoming a member of the Gorsedd of Bards, and retained it in his title on being knighted). He was appointed Recorder of the Gorsedd in 1935, and joint-secretary of the National Eisteddfod Council in 1937. From 1950 till 1954 and from 1963 till 1966 he held the post of Archdruid, the only instance of a person being elected to a second term in this office. Soon after his appointment as Recorder of the Gorsedd he initiated changes and reforms. Endowed with a keen sense of drama and pageant, he realised that the Gorsedd ceremonies were capable of being made attractive to the crowds. He brought order and dignity to the proceedings, and introduced new ceremonies, such as the flower dance. He renounced all the Gorsedd's former claims to antiquity and links with the Druids, and openly acknowledged that it was the invention of [Iolo Morganwg](#) (Edward Williams). He succeeded in gaining many new members, including some academics. In 1935 a start was made on the reorganisation of the Eisteddfod which resulted in the establishment of the Court and the Council, and in this Cynan played a prominent part. He was appointed President of the Court in 1967.

He was also prominent as a National Eisteddfod competitor. In 1921 he won the crown at Caernarfon with his poem ' Mab y Bwthyn ', the story of a young Welshman's experiences in the 1914-18 war. So topical was the subject and so simple and straightforward the style and the versification that the poem attained immediate popularity. The subject of Cynan's second prize poem, ' Yr Ynys Unig ' (Mold 1923), the story of Father Damien's mission to the lepers, made this an equally popular composition. His third crown poem, ' Y Dyrfa ' (Bangor 1931), described a rugby match, the first time such a topic was attempted. The influence of contemporary English poets, especially John Masefield and J.C. Squire, is evident in these eisteddfodic poems, but it has been so thoroughly assimilated as to make the poems completely and distinctively Welsh. In the Pontypool *eisteddfod* in 1924 Cynan was awarded the chair for a poem ' I'r Duw nid adwaenir ', which is a unique achievement in that the poem is in the metre known as 'tri thrawiad', which is not one of the recognised strict metres. He also adjudicated many times at the National Eisteddfod.

Cynan published the following volumes of poetry: *Telyn y Nos* (1921); *Y Tannau Coll*, the second best crown poem at the Ammanford national eisteddfod in 1922; *Caniadau Cynan* (1927); *Cerddi Cynan, y casgliad cyflawn* (1959), which included all the eisteddfodic poems, ballads, lyrics and translations of poems by English authors (not all of them acknowledged as such). The style is unaffected and the diction straightforward, in the manner of all the lyrical poets of the first quarter of the 20th century. Many of the poems are based on the author's reaction to World War I and his own personal experience of it. On the other hand he was greatly inspired by the peace and tranquility of the Llŷn countryside. The narrative element, in the ballads and in the long poems, is more conspicuous in his work than in that of any other Welsh poet. In 1946 he published a short prose romance, *Ffarwel Weledig*, set in Macedonia.

Drama in Wales owes a great deal to Cynan. In 1931 he won the prize offered at the National Eisteddfod for a full-length play with his *Hywel Harris. Absalom fy mab* was the outcome of a commission which he accepted to write a play for the *eisteddfod* in 1957. He translated and adapted John Masefield's *Good Friday* and Norman Nicholson's *The Old Man of the Mountain*. But his most valuable contribution to the drama movement in Wales was through his lectures to extramural classes and drama festivals, his direction of performances, in which he himself sometimes took part as an actor, and his adjudications at the national eisteddfod in both the play-writing and play-performing competitions. He was for a period a tutor in a course arranged for young actors by Cwmni Theatr Cymru. He wrote and produced large-scale pageants, such as the historical pageant in Conwy castle in 1927, and the ones in Caernarfon castle in 1929 and 1930. In 1931 he was appointed reader of Welsh plays on behalf of the Lord Chamberlain, a post which he held till the abolition of censorship in 1968.

Cynan was awarded the degree of D.Litt. honoris causa by the University of Wales in 1961, and in 1963 was elected honorary freeman of his native town of Pwllheli. He was appointed C.B.E. in 1949, and knighted in 1969. He married (1) Ellen J. Jones of Pwllheli in 1921, and there was a son and daughter of the marriage. His wife died in 1962, and in 1963 he married (2) Menna Meirion Jones of Valley, Anglesey. Cynan died 26 January 1970.

Author

Sir Thomas Parry, (1904 - 1985)

Sources

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Dafydd Owen, *Cynan* (1979)

Further Reading

Gerwyn Williams, *Cynan: Drama Bywyd Albert Evans Jones (1895-1970)* (Talybont 2020)

Wikipedia Article: [Albert Evans-Jones](#)

Additional Links

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