

JONES, DAVID JAMES ('Gwenallt'; 1899 - 1968), poet, critic and scholar

Name: David James Jones

Pseudonym: Gwenallt

Date of birth: 1899

Date of death: 1968

Spouse: Nel Owen Jones (née Edwards)

Parent: Mary Jones (née Jones)

Parent: Thomas Jones

Gender: Male

Occupation: poet, critic and scholar

Area of activity: Eisteddfod; Literature and Writing; Poetry; Scholarship and Languages

Author: Brynley Francis Roberts

Born 18 May 1899 at Pontardawe, Glamorganshire, the eldest of three children of Thomas ('Ehedydd') Jones and his wife Mary. His parents were from Carmarthenshire and his consciousness of his roots was an important element in his personality, as is seen in his essay on Rhydycymerau in the [D.J. Williams](#) presentation *Festschrift* (ed. [J. Gwyn Griffiths](#), 1965). The family moved to Allt-wen and Gwenallt was educated at local schools and Ystalyfera County School (where [Kate Roberts](#) was his teacher for a brief period). He was a pupil-teacher in 1916-17 dividing his time between Pontardawe elementary school and the 6th form in the county school. When he was conscripted to the army before taking his Higher Certificate examinations, he stood as a conscientious objector on political grounds and he spent two years from June 1917 to May 1919, in Wormwood Scrubs and Dartmoor prisons. He went to the University College of Wales Aberystwyth in 1919, at a particularly brilliant time in the social life of that institution. He met there [Idwal Jones](#) whose biography he wrote in 1958. Following his degrees in Welsh and in English he was appointed Welsh master at Barry County School and then in 1927, lecturer in Welsh at Aberystwyth. He was promoted senior lecturer and subsequently reader (the first to be appointed to this new grade in Aberystwyth). He retired in 1966. He took his M.A. in 1929 and he was awarded a D.Litt. honoris causa by the University of Wales in 1967. He married Nel Edwards in 1937 and they had one daughter. He died at Aberystwyth hospital 24 December 1968. A memorial plaque was placed on his house Rhydymôr, Ffordd Rheidol, Penparcau, Aberystwyth, in 1997.

Gwenallt's first fields of research were the lives of the saints and rhetoric in bardic schools at the end of the middle ages (see *Yr Areithiau Pros*, 1934), and though he published studies such as *Y Ficer Prichard a 'Canwyll y Cymry'* (1946), *Blodeugerdd o'r Ddeunawfed Ganrif* (1936, 1947), he is best known as a literary historian of the 19th c. In addition to numerous articles on individual poets he published *Detholiad o ryddiaith Gymraeg R.J. Derfel* (1945), *Bywyd a Gwaith Islwyn* (1948), *Y Storm: dwy gerdd gan Islwyn* (1954). Nevertheless, his greatest contribution was as a poet and writer. He was among the first members of Yr Academi Gymraeg and the first edition of its periodical *Taliesin* to 1964 (vol.9). His father had been his first teacher and he served his apprenticeship in local *eisteddfodau* and at college. His *awdl* 'Y Mynach' won

the chair at the Swansea national eisteddfod (1926) but his awdl ' Y Sant ', though adjudged the best at the Treorchy national eisteddfod (1928), was not awarded the chair. He won the chair with his awdl ' Breuddwyd y Bardd ' at the Bangor national eisteddfod (1931). The poems, sonnets and longer narrative poems in his collections of verse, *Ysgubau'r Awen* (1939), *Cnoi Cil* (1942), *Eples* (1951), *Gwreiddiau* (1959), *Y Coed* (1969) are more personal and express the poet's deeply held convictions, his attitude to life and a complex personality. Running through his work are the threads of his attachment to Wales and her culture, and his meditation on the nature of evil which threatens the civilization of which the poet and his people are part. As his writing developed and his response to materialistic, industrial society and to the crisis in Wales grew more intense, his style became ever more uncompromising and rougher. His two novels, *Plasau'r Brenin* (1934) and *Ffwrneisiau* (1982), which draw on his experiences in prison and as a lad in the Swansea valley are not as successful as his poetry.

Gwenallt was committed and serious in everything which he undertook. He was one of the early members of Plaid Cymru, he was politically minded and keenly interested in current affairs (the result of sustained thinking about his personal experience in an industrial environment) and he experienced a difficult but triumphant spiritual pilgrimage as he revealed in his essay in *Credaf* (ed. J.E. Meredith, 1943).

Author

Dr Brynley Francis Roberts

Sources

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J. E. Meredith, *Gwenallt Bardd Crefyddol, ynghyd ag ysgrif enwog Gwenallt, 'Credaf'* (Llandysul 1974)

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Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [D. Gwenallt Jones](#)

Sound and Film

Archif ITV Cymru/Wales Archive: [Gwenallt](#)

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