

Association for Welsh Writing in English Annual Conference 2007

'Life Writing in Wales'

The focus of the 2007 annual conference of the Association for Welsh Writing in English to be held at Gregynog Hall in Powys on the weekend of March 30 – April 1 will be Life Writing in Wales. In 2006 the prestigious Wales Book of the Year prizes in both the English-language and Welsh-language categories went to works of life writing: Robert Minhinnick's autobiographical essays *To Babel and Back* and Rhys Evans's biography of Gwynfor Evans, *Gwynfor: Rhag Pob Brad*. But this is not a new phenomenon: both biography and autobiography have had a long and stubborn hold on the Welsh imagination, perhaps beginning with the influence of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* and *Grace Abounding*, which spoke powerfully to the Welsh Dissenting conscience and gave rise to a number of 'spiritual autobiographies'. In the nineteenth-century the *Cofiant/Memoir* chronicling the life, works and influence of a range of charismatic Welsh preachers became the genre *par excellence* for the expression of Welsh religious passion and commitment. In the twentieth century, the subject of autobiography shifted from the preacher to the worker; texts such as Bert Coombes' *These Poor Hands*, an amalgam of autobiography, social history and fiction, came to be regarded, above all other forms, as the authentic expression of the Welsh industrial experience. Other life writers leant more towards the poetic, the humorous or the fantastical, like Dylan Thomas's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog* or Dannie Abse's *Ash on a Young Man's Sleeve*. Meanwhile, poetry itself began to 'bear witness' to a life or to give expression to personal memories representative of a whole community; works such as Glyn Jones's 'Merthyr' or David Jones's *In Parenthesis* speak of such experiences, while Vernon Watkins's 'The Collier' and R. S. Thomas's 'Welsh Testament' are dramatized expressions of another's or an imagined life. Welsh women's lives have also been, more recently, eloquently represented in life writing, such as Brenda Chamberlain's *Tide-Race*, Kate Roberts's *Y Lôn Wen* (The White Lane), Margiad Evans's *Autobiography*, Gillian Clarke's 'Cofiant' and Charlotte Williams's *Sugar and Slate*. This conference will be an opportunity to explore this diverse tradition of life writing from Wales and, at the same time, to investigate and theorize the appeal of these most unstable of genres, blurring as they often do the boundaries between fact and fiction, between myth and reality.

CALL FOR PAPERS

Papers are invited on any aspect of autobiography/biography/autobiographical fiction by writers from Wales. The organizer will consider both short papers (c. 20 minutes) or longer ones (c. 45 minutes); in both cases, a brief abstract should be submitted for consideration by the deadline of December 1st, 2006.

Organizer:

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