

Gwyn A. Williams was a passionate, original and poetic historian who journeyed from century to century. 'He wrote with consummate skill about Italian communists, French sans-culottes, London communards, American intellectuals, Spanish revolutionaries, freeborn Englishmen and radical Welshmen' (Geraint H. Jenkins). He also made his mark as the people's remembrancer, and brought the past to life on television, crossing frontiers that were often outside academia. *When Was Wales? A History of the Welsh* (1985) was only one of a number of inspiring texts that was to enthuse and challenge the future of Wales. In its closing paragraph he writes: 'One thing I am sure of. Some kind of human society, though God knows what kind, will no doubt go on occupying these two western peninsulas of Britain, but that people, who are my people and no mean people, who have for a millennium and a half lived in them as a Welsh people, are now nothing but a naked people under an acid rain.'

POEMS IN MEMORY OF

Gwyn A. Williams

(1925 – 1995)

Professor/Historian/Broadcaster/
The people's hero/Welshman/
The nation's remembrancer

*'It's very easy to love Wales, it's the
bloody Welsh who are the problem'*

GWYN A. WILLIAMS

1 *Parêd Paradwys*

*'The Welsh have danced among these giant cogwheels
before. Wales has always been now.'*

GWYN A. WILLIAMS

Mae pris ar bob paradwys.

Chwiliaist arian daear amdani
camu trwy gastell a thŷ unnos
dangos y rhwyll yn eu parwydydd,
dilyn diadell ddynol yn diasbora
wrth gludo i bedwar ban – Iwtopia.

ddyn unig, mesuraist y Missouri
yng nghefn y lleuad, eira'r gors a'r egroes,
ffroeni balm y lemwn, am einioes –
yr hirdaith am 'Beulah' ar ddisberod,
wrth it lwggu gyda'r lliaws – di-lofnod.

heno mae glosau'r hanesydd yn burddu,
eto, yn chwedlau'r barcud, a'r ysgafn ehedydd
bydd llith a ban y mythau'n aflonydd
gylchdroi, gyda'r sawl 'welodd nant drwy yr enfys
wrth herio wynebwerth yr haul, – a'i ewyllys.

Nid du y gwelodd un gwyn ei genedl.

1 *Paradise Time*

*'The Welsh have danced among these giant cogwheels
before. Wales has always been now.'*

GWYN A. WILLIAMS

Every heaven has its price.

Earth's wealth you sought for her,
trod castle and one-night shed –
look, the gaps in the lattice!
followed the flock of humanity's diaspora
humping Utopia to the four quarters.

A lonely man, you measured the Missouri –
through gossamer haulms, cotton-grass, rosehips,
to the smell of lemon balm, for a life
– O that long trek to Beulah – gone astray.
With the unsignatured multitude you starved.

Glosses of the historian lose colour tonight,
Yet in tale of red kite, in lark's lightness,
the clamour of myths will be a wheel never-still
to his memory, who saw through the rainbow
a challenge to the vaunt and claim of the sun.

The crow sees his chick white.* The good man
did not see his nation bad.

[TC]

* 'The crow sees his chick white' is a proverb implied by the last line
but not quoted. I have had to make the reference explicit.

3 Gyrru I Ben

'...rown i'n 54-blwydd oed ddoe. Mae pob dim a wnafl yn awr yn ras yn erbyn yr ymgymerwr. Alla i ddim gwastraffu rhagor o amser.'

GWYN A. WILLIAMS

Annwyl lywiedydd, troist bob siwrne'n ffawd yrru
rhwng dyfnant a dwnshwn. Pob mater yn her
a'r metel o'th amgylch yn dychlamu,

ymosod ar sbardun, cweryla â brêc, ffrithiant –
rhwng y lôn a'r llwyni. Pob creadur ar ffo
wrth dy glywed yn brasco gêrs at eu henaint,

ciliai'r lleuad i'w chwffaint wrth baderu galar,
oblegid dy herwa ar bob erw o'r ffordd
tarw dur oeddit, ar darmac ymhongar.

crynai'r sgrîn wynt wrth amrantu'r wipar
tramwyo'n ufudd ei dynged ddi-dâl,
amlach na pheidio, troi'r gwrych yn gymar:

cloisiaist ato, clawdd terfyn mor ddi-draha;
osgoi clec a chlatsh rhyw gerbydau syn
a ddoi'n anfoddog amdanat. Un ddrysfâ

rhwng blewyn gwrthdaro a gweryd. Dargyfeirio
pob llyw arall; troi'n alltud olwynion ar chwâl,
wrth sgleftrio ar iâ du dy ddrycin. Dy oleuadau'n fflachio

goleuadau coch parhaus cyn sgrialdod – troëlli –
pob noson yn gyrrfiw tân gwyllt i greaduriaid;
dy gerbyd yn rhan o rali fynyddig, danlli,

ond heno, sgrîn arall a dynnwyd, i'w galed-fyd;
yn dolciog orweddog, erys heb wefrau;
collodd Cymru un gyrrwr oriog o'i gynfyd.

3 Driver

'I was 54 yesterday. Everything I now do is a race against the undertaker. I can't waste any more time.'

GWYN A. WILLIAMS

Dear driver, you made every journey a joy ride
between deep stream and canyon. Everything a challenge
and the metal jumping round you...

assault on accelerator, squabble with brakes, friction
between lane and bushes. Every creature in flight
hearing you paddle gears to old age.

Moon retired to her convent, to her rosaries of grief
because you were highwayman every acre of the way,
a steel bull on the dogmas of tarmac.

Windscreen quaked, wiper blinked like an eyelid
to and fro, obedient to its thankless destiny –
more often than not, you made the hedge partner

closed with it – how humble the boundary dyke –
to avoid clash and crack of the stunned cars
that were, unwillingly, coming round you. A hair's breadth,

a labyrinth, between collision and earth. You diverted
every other helm; wheels scattered to exile,
slid on the black ice of your storm. Your lights flashed –

red ones always – delinquent, skidding, spinning –
your car, like a curfew of fireworks for creatures,
every night took part in a mountain rally.

But there's another screen shut fast tonight;
prostrate and battered, nothing thrills through him;
Wales has one less rash driver through the ages.

Ac aethost ar y siwrne ola deg –
trwy Borth y Dychymyg yn ddistaw ddi-reg,
fesul pwyth ar y briffordd mewn cerbyd mor ddi-staen
sidanion amdanant. Gyrru sad gyda graen;

Un limosín diogel –
heb groesi llinell na thorri cornel.

And you've gone on that last fine journey
through the Imagination's Portal, uncursingly quiet,
on the main road, stitch by stitch, in a spotless carriage,
silks all round you! A curtained limousine

driven so discreetly, so with the grain – safely –
never crossing white lines, or cutting a corner.

[TC]

5 *Blwyddyn Y Pla'*

Gwyn A. Williams – Refferendwm 1979

Fflachiodd goleuadau'r ddawns i nodi ei therfyn
collodd y rhythmau eu byddardod ifanc
rhoddwyd y bai, nid ar ein traed ond ar ein Tir.

'Ai llwch yn y gwynt ydym,' llefaist
'Ai deunydd crai hanesion eraill,'
Ai llwyth sy'n cycyllu mewn coedwig
Wrth weld adain hollt, gan filwg ambwl?

Ynteu, ai cenedl yn noethlymuna oedd hi
yn fflagu ar eurwallt y mynydd-dir,
glaw asid yn tasgu ar ei chroen llogswyllt;
atblygon y rhewynt yn rhincian gwynnau
wrth droi nwydau'n las mynawyd y bugail.

Do, holaist dy hun yn ddidrugaredd
ai deddf disgyrchiant a ddrylliwyd,
swmbwl yn y cnawd ger godre'r graig,
ai llygod bach oeddem a'r gath hunanfodlon
yn gwatwar ein gwingo dan losgwrn a phalf?

Cenedl cnu un ddafad farw oedd ar ein dwylo,
yn ddameg basgedig –
ac yn ystod hyn oll
roedd pyncio cras
nico tyn dy nicotin
yn canu brud, dy bryder
yn tynnu sêl o'th seler
gwaed ei grawnwin yn gochddu.

Oeddodd y ddawns wedyn –
– di-fwsg arianbib yn y llaid,

cerddodd yn waglaw i'r anialwch –
troi ymysg Mandans cefn gwlad –

lladinwr unig yn y glaw.

5 *The Year of the Plague*

Gwyn A. Williams – Refferendwm 1979

Lights of the dance flashed to mark closing time,
rhythms abandoned the young to their deafness,
transgression not at our feet was laid, but on our land.

Are we dust in the wind, you wailed?
are we raw material of other folk's histories?
are we a tribe blindfold in a wood?
are our wings chopped by a blunt billhook?

Was the whole nation, then, stark naked
flaring on the moss of the mountain land,
our wild burnt skin splashed by acid rain,
reflexes of the icy wind our sinews creaking,
our passions frozen blue as cranesbill?

Yes, you mercilessly asked yourself,
is the law of gravity shattered –
at the rock's foot a thorn in the flesh?
were we little mice, that a self-satisfied cat
mocked writhing beneath tail and paw?

We'd a dead sheep's fleece of a nation on our hands
as a fatted parable...
and all the time you were talking
the dry singing
of the mean finch nicotine
prophesied, as your anxiety
drew the seal from your cellar,
the blood of its grape red, black.

The dance was delayed then? –
a musicless silver flute in the mire,

he walked into the wilderness,
among Mandans at the back of beyond he walked,
a lonely Latin in the rain.

[TC]