

## Impact case study (REF3b)

<b>Institution:</b> Swansea University : Prifysgol Abertawe
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 28b - Modern Languages and Linguistics (Celtic Studies)
<b>Title of case study:</b> Using creative writing to engage the public in Welsh language culture and enrich the cultural life of Wales
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b>

The Unit's creative writing has had an impact on Welsh language culture by means of:

- 1) public engagement, especially at Wales' largest cultural festival, the National Eisteddfod, including a best-selling novel which won the Daniel Owen Memorial Prize (2009), a commemorative poem which won the Chair (2010), and a historic appointment as Archdruid of Wales (2012), the first time a woman has held this prestigious position. Such engagement is described below as '*invaluable and striking*'.
- 2) supporting a number of fora which are culturally essential to cultivate a minority language such as Welsh, including diverse festival, institutional and reader groups, from the National Library to smaller learned and literary societies across Wales, as well as contributing to Welsh-medium programmes on S4C and BBC Radio Cymru.
- 3) commemorating the lives of two national heroes, the academic Hywel Teifi Edwards and the rugby international Ray Gravell. Both were well known broadcasters and admired by many across the nation who mourned their loss.

## 2. Underpinning research

In 2005, Associate Professor **Christine James** won the National Eisteddfod's prestigious Crown competition at the Eryri and District National Eisteddfod for her collection of poems, '**Llinellau Lliw**' (Coloured Lines) [R1]. The poems were inspired by some of the most famous works of art at the National Museum, Cardiff, along with works of art in other galleries and museums. All three adjudicators, who included Professor Emeritus Derec Llwyd Morgan and Dr. Jason Walford Davies, unanimously praised the series of '*polished and exciting*' poems. Each poem responds to an artistic artifact, but develops its own perspective and imaginative world. The adjudicators praised especially the poet's '*enterprising ingenuity and informed perceptiveness*'.

In 2009, having already won the Prose Medal in 2006, Associate Professor **Fflur Dafydd** won the prestigious Daniel Owen Memorial Prize at the National Eisteddfod (held that year at Merioneth and District), for her novel ***Y Llyfrgell*** (The Library) [R2]. In writing the novel, Dafydd drew upon her own experiences as a researcher at the National Library of Wales, though in terms of creative writing, research here must be understood in terms of the work involved in creating plot and character, finding the correct style and searching indeed for the correct word, as the novelist transforms an original idea into a work of art. *Y Llyfrgell* was lauded by one adjudicator of the competition, Professor Emeritus John Rowlands, as '*a highly unusual novel*', who noted that the theme of digitising national memories (archives and literatures) was most relevant today but that the novel's success was due to the author's vision being turned into such a compelling story. Describing the author as '*extremely inventive*', he compared *Y Llyfrgell* to a Greek tragedy.

The other two items by Fflur Dafydd which form part of this impact case study are the lyrical concept albums, ***Byd Bach*** [R3] (Small World, centred around places in Wales) and ***Ffydd Gobaith Cariad*** [R4] (Faith Hope Love, a partly-commemorative album, featuring well known Welsh figures as subjects). *Byd Bach* is a concept album and '*a valuable and impressive contribution to the genre*', to quote Craig Owen Jones of Bangor University. [Barn 563/4 (December/January, 2009/10), p. 77.] *Ffydd Gobaith Cariad* similarly is thematic in structure and another example of '*complex and sophisticated writing inspired by a theme*'. It includes several commemorative songs (including 'Ray o'r Mynydd', an elegy to the broadcaster and former rugby star, Ray Gravell). Literary in style, its lyrics are presented with translations into English, and vice versa in the case of the adaptation into Welsh of a poem by Owen Sheers.

### Impact case study (REF3b)

In 2010, at the National Eisteddfod (held at Blaenau Gwent and the Heads of the Valleys), Professor **Tudur Hallam** won the prestigious Chair competition for his strict-metre poem '**Ennill Tir**' (Gaining Ground) [R5], commemorating the life and vision of Hywel Teifi Edwards, the Eisteddfod's chief historian and a much loved public scholar and broadcaster in Wales. The three adjudicators were unanimous in their decision to award the Chair to Professor Hallam and in their appraisal of the poem's outstanding literary merits. Idris Reynolds said of the *awdl* (C7): '**It's a poem that appeals to the heart, is timely and will stand the test of time**'. The chaired *awdl* is unique for its commemorative nature at the National Eisteddfod, though it is not a traditional elegy. Its originality stems from its narrative and dramatic quality, employing birds as characters, with strong reference to Dafydd ap Gwilym's work.

All items have been praised for their **originality**, drawing upon years of craftsmanship and study.

### 3. References to the research

(R1) **Christine James**, 'Llinellau lliw', *Cyfansoddiadau a Beirniadaethau: Eryri a'r Cyffiniau* (Llys yr Eisteddfod, 2005), pp. 37-45; reprinted in Christine James, *Rhwng y Llinellau* (Cyhoeddiadau Barddas, 2013).

(R2) **Fflur Dafydd**, *Y Llyfrgell* (Y Lolfa, 2009).

(R3) **Fflur Dafydd** (Composer), *Byd Bach* (Sain, 2009).

(R4) **Fflur Dafydd** (Composer), *Ffydd Gobaith Cariad*, (Sain, 2009) [with translations provided].

(R5) **Tudur Hallam**, 'Ennill Tir', *Cyfansoddiadau a Beirniadaethau: Blaenau Gwent a Blaenau'r Cymoedd* (Llys yr Eisteddfod, 2010), pp. 18-23; reprinted in Bethan Mair (ed.), *Hoff Gerddi Coffa Cymru* (Gwasg Gomer, 2013).

#### Evidence of quality:

'Llinellau lliw', *Y Llyfrgell* and 'Ennill Tir' were all awarded the Eisteddfod prizes unanimously by three adjudicators, and praised for the original nature of the creative work.

Christine James' 'Llinellau lliw' was part of the RAE return in 2008 where all output items from the UoA were assessed as being above 2\*.

In 2009 *Y Llyfrgell* also won the Max Boyce Literary Award in Welsh (with Rachel Trezise winning the award for literature in English). In 2010, Fflur Dafydd won the Best Female Artist Award in Radio Cymru's Rock and Pop Awards, and *Byd Bach* was nominated in the best album category.

<http://www.fflurdafydd.com/cymraeg/hafan.html> Copies of the albums can be provided by the University on request, or samples of tracks can be obtained at <http://www.myspace.com/fflurdafydd>

### 4. Details of the impact

#### Cultural cultivation

As Saunders Lewis once noted (*The Banned Wireless Talk*, (Caernarvon, 1931), pp. 4-5), a minority language such as Welsh must be cultivated by original artists if it is to do more than simply survive. Otherwise, '*[i]ts literature will become entirely second-hand and fifth-rate ... something worse and more tedious than the death of a language*'. In writing literary texts praised for their originality, James, Dafydd and Hallam have engaged with readers, listeners and viewers, working with several festivals, institutions, societies and groups integral to Welsh language culture.

#### Public engagement at the National Eisteddfod

In respect of the first impact noted here, the Chief Executive of the National Eisteddfod (C1) has stated that: '*the National Eisteddfod promotes the Welsh language and its culture like no other event. The main literary ceremonies are at the heart of the festival, and the office of Archdruid is essential to its success, promoting the Eisteddfod throughout the year. The support*

**Impact case study (REF3b)**

*from these three artists from Swansea University in recent years is therefore striking and invaluable to Wales' largest cultural event.'*

Only writers who have won the Crown, the Chair or the Prose Medal competitions at the National Eisteddfod can be elected as Archdruid of Wales. During the REF census period, Christine **James** had previously been part of the Gair am Gelf (A Word about Art) project in order to raise money for the 2008 National Eisteddfod at Cardiff, during which she was also resident poet in Y Lle Celf (The Arts Space). However, since her 'historical' election as Archdruid in 2012 – the first woman and the first academic to hold this position – James has engaged with the public by means of talks to various cultural groups across Wales, from Cardiff to Talsarnau, addressing both female and mixed audiences, but mostly visiting areas where Welsh is not the main communal language. She herself learnt the language and as reported by BBC Cymru/Wales her vision is to reach out to diverse communities. She was also the subject of a special edition of *Dechrau Canu, Dechrau Canmol* on S4C (28.4.13) and a special feature on BBC Radio Cymru (28.7.13).

When Fflur Dafydd won the Daniel Owen in 2009, the highlights on the day attracted 44,000 viewers on S4C, which included an interview with Fflur Dafydd. Similarly in 2010, when Tudur Hallam won the Chair competition, the Eisteddfod's highlights of the day programme was viewed by 49,000 people. Both ceremonies were also broadcast and televised live. Interviews and reports appeared in numerous national and local papers. Hallam's *awdl* was included in the festival's *Cyfansoddiadau a Beirniadaethau*, published by the Eisteddfod. As emphasized above, these ceremonies are integral to the Eisteddfod's programme and public appeal.

**Engaging with the National Library of Wales**

In 2011, James contributed a poem on one of the treasures kept at the National Library of Wales, translated into English and published in a book, *26 Treasures: 4 National Museums, 104 Objects, 62 Words* (2012), and online at <http://www.26treasures.com/wales>. James promoted the project on *Pethe* on S4C, and in July 2013 was commissioned by the National Library of Wales to write a new poem for the Four Ancient Books of Wales Exhibition, while another of her poems, already published in *Rhwng y Llinellau*, has also been selected to feature in the exhibition. These projects consolidate the creative link between the UoA and the National Library formed by Fflur Dafydd's *Y Llyfrgell*. The novel and *Byd Bach* were the subject of a talk and song event by Dafydd at the Library (27.11.2009), and the subject also of *Y Sioe Gelf* (22.11.2009), produced by Cwmni Da for S4C and filmed at the Library. Published by Y Lolfa of Tal-y-bont, *Y Llyfrgell* quickly became a bestseller. Wales Literature Exchange selected the novel for its Bookshelf. This entailed international promotion and an author interview in *Transcript Magazine*, subsequently translated into French and German for an international audience. Literature Wales invited Dafydd to host a literary tour of the National Library (13.7.2012). Contemplating the novel's popularity, the National Library's Press Officer (C2) has stated that '*Y Llyfrgell has brought the National Library to the forefront of people's minds in a new and exciting way, and the literary tour at the Library proved a great success, allowing us to respond to the public's interest in the novel's relationship with the building. Such tours, along with exhibitions such as the Four Ancient Books and projects such as 26 Treasures, allow us to present our collections to new audiences.*'

**Working with diverse institutional and reader groups and Welsh-medium broadcasters**

*Y Llyfrgell*, produced by Y Lolfa of Tal-y-bont, became the bestselling Welsh-language book for August 2009 and September 2009 (a reprint was necessary within a month of its publication). It subsequently won the Fiction Bestseller Award at the Trade Publishing Awards 2012, having sold 3,738 copies. Sales figures, however, cannot convey how Fflur Dafydd's work bridges the gap between literature and music. (Details of media appearances and past live performances are listed on Dafydd's web-site.) According to BBC Radio Cymru's editor (C3): '*Fflur Dafydd is one of BBC Radio Cymru's most played artists. Her work is an important contribution to the musical content of the station's programmes, but the Welsh language itself is also enriched through her songs.*' In June 2012 she was invited by the world-renowned Telegraph Hay Festival to launch *Ffydd Gobaith Cariad* in a special concert there at the Sound Castle, supporting Cerys Matthews (C4).

## Impact case study (REF3b)

James' numerous talks, since her appointment as Archdruid were mentioned above. Both Dafydd and Hallam too, following their Eisteddfod success, visited diverse groups to discuss their work, with audience numbers varying from 10 to 90, including Welsh-medium schools, literary groups and dinner or cultural societies, from Bangor University to Clwb Cinio Glannau'r Llŵchwr (Loughor Dinner Club). Both have also appeared on television and radio programmes (e.g. *Heno*, *Pethe*, *Dei Tomos*), including Dafydd's *3 Lle*, produced by Apollo for S4C (21.3.2010). Since winning the Chair, Hallam as Prifardd (Master Poet) has also adjudicated for a number of local literary festivals and schools (the Chaired Eisteddfod of Hendy, Bancffosfelen, Tumble, Llandyfaelog, Ysgol Gyfun Gŵyr), helping organisers 'to attract competitors from afar' as stated by the Secretary of the Tumble Chaired Eisteddfod (C5).

### Commemoration

One of the largest audiences was at Cymdeithas y Llan a'r Bryn (20.10.2010), the literary society established by Hywel Teifi Edwards in Llangennech, the subject of 'Ennill Tir' [R5]. The poem commemorates a much loved national figure and prominent campaigner for the Welsh language – a theme also present in Fflur Dafydd's *Ffydd Gobaith Cariad*, including the tribute song to Ray Gravell performed at a special tribute and sell-out concert, 'Cofio Grav', at the Lyric Theatre, Carmarthen (2.3.2008) (C6). The song was subsequently translated and performed in English on BBC Radio Wales (2.6.2012). Both men were truly Welsh greats and subjects of public commemoration in the media and in their communities.

Idris Reynolds (C7) noted that "*Ennill Tir* is a beautiful tribute to a giant of a man who gave so much to the Eisteddfod and to the nation', and reference to the commemorative value of the *awdl* was made by Hywel Francis, MP, in a parliamentary Early Day Motion (8.9.2010) (C8). Work on an anthology of commemorative verse, *Hoff Gerddi Coffa Cymru*, commenced in 2012, published by Gwasg Gomer (2013), and as stated by the editor, the *awdl* was the 'stimulus' for that book (C9).

### In conclusion

Collectively the three artists here have engaged with a variety of fora in Wales, enriching the lives of readers, listeners and viewers of Welsh texts, programmes and events, as evidenced by qualitative quotations and quantitative figures above. This engagement is truly diverse, ranging from national festivals and televised interviews attracting large audiences, to supporting the smallest cultural groups, who are nevertheless important to their community's Welsh language culture. In the REF census period, all three authors have developed their role as academics whose creative writing impacts on the all important task of cultivating the cultural life of Welsh.

## 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

(C1) Chief-Executive of the National Eisteddfod, in relation to engagement at the festival

(C2) National Library of Wales Press Officer, in relation to events at the National Library

(C3) Editor of Radio Cymru, in relation to the albums on air

(C4) The Telegraph Hay Festival, (event no. 345): <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/hay-festival/9217118/Hay-Festival-2012-Music-is-king-of-the-castle.html>

(C5) Secretary of Tumble Chaired Eisteddfod, in relation to adjudicating at the Eisteddfod

(C6) 'Cofio Grav': [http://news.bbc.co.uk/welsh/hi/newsid\\_7270000/newsid\\_7272800/7272878.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/welsh/hi/newsid_7270000/newsid_7272800/7272878.stm)

(C7) 'Beirniadaeth Idris Reynolds', *Cyfansoddiadau a Beirniadaethau: Eisteddfod Genedlaethol Cymru Blaenau Gwent a Blaenau'r Cymoedd 2010* (Llys yr Eisteddfod, 2010), pp. 12-17.

(C8) The Early Day Motion: <http://www.parliament.uk/edm/2010-12/701>

(C9) Editor of *Hoff Gerddi Coffa Cymru*, in relation to the anthology's inspiration for the book

(C10) S4C's viewing figures: [http://www.s4c.co.uk/abouts4c/viewing/c\\_archive.shtml](http://www.s4c.co.uk/abouts4c/viewing/c_archive.shtml)