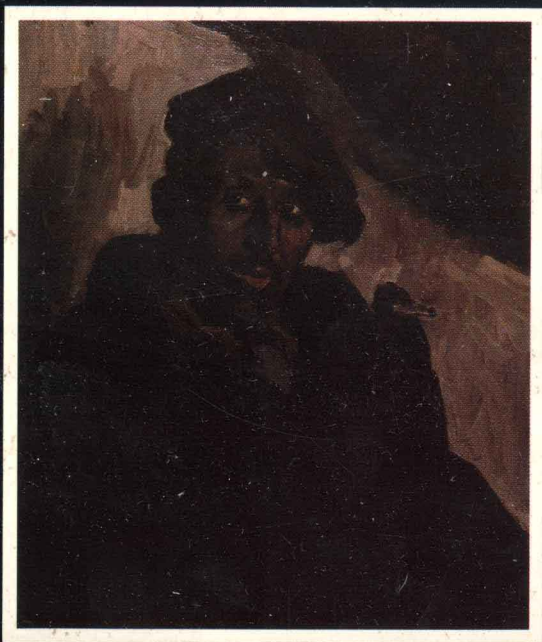


THE PENGUIN BOOK
OF



WELSH

· SHORT STORIES ·



EDITED BY ALUN RICHARDS

*The Penguin Book of
Welsh Short Stories*

EDITED BY
ALUN RICHARDS



PENGUIN BOOKS

PENGUIN BOOKS

Published by the Penguin Group
27 Wrights Lane, London W8 5TZ, England
Viking Penguin Inc., 40 West 23rd Street, New York, New York 10010, USA
Penguin Books Australia Ltd, Ringwood, Victoria, Australia
Penguin Books Canada Ltd, 2801 John Street, Markham, Ontario, Canada L3R 1B4
Penguin Books (NZ) Ltd, 182-190 Wairau Road, Auckland 10, New Zealand
Penguin Books Ltd, Registered Offices: Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England

This collection first published 1976
Reprinted 1978, 1982, 1984, 1988

This collection copyright © Penguin Books Ltd, 1976
All rights reserved

Reproduced, printed and bound in Great Britain by
Hazell Watson & Viney Limited
Member of BPCC plc
Aylesbury Bucks
Set in Linotype Georgian

Except in the United States of America,
this book is sold subject to the condition
that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise,
be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated
without the publisher's prior consent in any form of
binding or cover other than that in which it is
published and without a similar condition
including this condition being imposed
on the subsequent purchaser

PENGUIN BOOKS

THE PENGUIN BOOK OF
WELSH SHORT STORIES

Alun Richards has lived for most of his life in Wales, apart from service in the Royal Navy and a brief period as a probation officer in London. He is the author of several novels, including the much praised *Home to an Empty House*, *Ennal's Point* (Penguin) and *Barque Whisper*. *The Former Miss Merthyr Tydfil and Other Stories* (Penguin) is a selection from two volumes of short stories: *Dai Country*, which received the Welsh Arts Council literary prize for 1974, and *The Former Miss Merthyr Tydfil*.

He is the editor of *The Penguin Book of Sea Stories* (in two volumes). He has also written a number of plays for the theatre, including *The Snowdrapper*, which has been performed in the United Kingdom and abroad. His collected stage plays, *Plays for Players*, were published in 1975. He is perhaps best known for his many television plays and adaptations on the national networks, and he has also made frequent contributions to such popular series as *The Onedin Line* and *Warship*. He recently scripted the B.B.C. film, *A Touch of Glory*, which celebrated the Centenary of the Welsh Rugby Union and is the author of a companion pictorial history of the same title.

Alun Richards is married with four children and lives in Mumbles, near Swansea.

CONTENTS

Introduction	7
Acknowledgements	11
<i>Rhys Davies (1903-78)</i>	
THE FASHION PLATE	13
<i>Glyn Jones (1905-)</i>	
THE GOLDEN PONY	29
<i>Alun Lewis (1915-44)</i>	
ACTING CAPTAIN	47
<i>Geraint Goodwin (1903-41)</i>	
SATURDAY NIGHT	80
<i>Kate Roberts (1891-)</i>	
THE LOSS	
(translated by Walter Dowding)	94
<i>Gwyn Jones (1907-)</i>	
THE BRUTE CREATION	102
<i>Dylan Thomas (1914-53)</i>	
EXTRAORDINARY LITTLE COUGH	112
<i>D. J. Williams (1885-1970)</i>	
A SUCCESSFUL YEAR	
(translated by Glyn Jones)	122
<i>Gwyn Thomas (1912-81)</i>	
THE TEACHER	131
<i>E. Tegla Davies (1880-1967)</i>	
THE STRANGE APEMAN	
(translated by Wyn Griffith)	140
<i>Caradoc Evans (1878-1945)</i>	
BE THIS HER MEMORIAL	146
<i>Brenda Chamberlain (1912-71)</i>	
THE RETURN	151
<i>B. L. Coombes (1901-74)</i>	
TWENTY TONS OF COAL	165

<i>T. Hughes Jones (1895-1966)</i>	
THE SQUIRE OF HAVILAH (translated by T. Glynne Davies)	186
<i>Eigra Lewis Roberts (1939-)</i>	
AN OVERDOSE OF SUN (translated by the author)	217
<i>Moirra Dearnley (1942-)</i>	
THE HOUSE IN BUILTH CRESCENT	221
<i>Jane Edwards (1940-)</i>	
BLIND DATE (translated by D. Llwyd Morgan)	234
<i>Harri Pritchard Jones (1933-)</i>	
MORFYDD'S CELEBRATION (translated by Harri Webb)	241
<i>John Morgan (1929-)</i>	
A WRITER CAME TO OUR PLACE	248
<i>Leslie Norris (1921-)</i>	
A ROMAN SPRING	253
<i>Ron Berry (1920-)</i>	
BEFORE FOREVER AFTER	264
<i>Alun Richards (1929-)</i>	
HON. SEC. (R.F.C.)	280
<i>Islwyn Ffowc Elis (1924-)</i>	
BLACK BARREN (translated by the author)	309
<i>Emyr Humphreys (1919-)</i>	
MEL'S SECRET LOVE	318

INTRODUCTION

It was an American wit who listed one of man's greatest virtues as the art of making the long story short, but he was saying nothing about the short story which has its own necessary length, neither too long, nor too short, and is – in this editor's view – at its best when it presents a revealing insight into a person in a particular situation. What interests me most is being at the core of another life, seeing new light thrown upon it through the mind and world of the central character. It is a help if I am so involved at the outset that my attention does not wander and that my sympathies are immediately engaged, but, ultimately, I must know more at the end than I did at the beginning. Now and again, let it also be stated, I can certainly do with a smile.

These stories have been chosen to fulfil such requirements where they can be met, but they are, in addition, of a place and a time. The place is Wales and the time is this century, since the short story is a comparatively new arrival here. They reflect Wales, not always flatteringly, as it is and has been. English writers, it has been said, are often refugees from society, but almost all the stories in this book written by Welsh men and women show a concern for a particular landscape or community. It is as if Welsh writers cannot escape this involvement, and often there is also a sense of characters off stage, present but unseen at the storyteller's elbow. Perhaps the reason for this awareness of others is that so many of us have lived in such crowded places, and, while it is not always healthy, it is a part of the Welsh experience which is very different from that of our neighbours.

I have not otherwise been able to define a specific characteristic of the Welsh short story which makes it immediately identifiable, save for the nationality or place of residence of the writer, but it should be pointed out that some Welsh writers writing in English have faced particular difficulties when they have felt the need to emphasize their difference

from English counterparts. Often this need has led to exaggerations of speech, the whimsicality of which gives the lie to thought. At the back of it, one suspects the seductive pressures of those who like to see their Welshmen as clowns or 'characters', but it should also be said that many Welshmen have woven myths about themselves and their country with mischievous delight, and one doubts if they needed much encouragement. Of course this forced use of language can be detected in other literatures, some of them colonialist, and it is perhaps the inevitable consequence of the dominance of a distant metropolis. Having said that, it is only fair to note that many of the short-story writers who write in English received their first encouragement in England, and indeed some of them, like Alun Lewis, represented here by an almost unknown story of Army life, are at their best away from home. In his case, he was probably more searching as an observer with a foreign eye, and his stories dealing with English life were perhaps more acutely observed than those dealing with his native South Wales. It is an arguable point, but, as with Rhys Davies and Kate Roberts, there is an abundance of riches from which the anthologist may choose and my task has been made easier by the selections of other editors whose choices I have tried not to duplicate where possible.

I have said that these stories were chosen because they please one reader and are of a place and time, but I have also had a number of other considerations in mind and I have tried to represent all Welsh writers, including those whose work belies the concept of Wales as a homogeneous society. Thus Brenda Chamberlain finds her place here alongside the savage satire of Caradoc Evans or the sermonizing of T. Hughes Jones who, like Kate Roberts and D. J. Williams, writes exclusively in Welsh and for whom Welsh is the first language. All arguments about degrees of Welshness I find to be fruitless; for me, the story is the thing, although, on re-reading so many stories in preparing this volume, I could not help but detect the security of so many writers in the Welsh language which has freed them

from painful attempts to emphasize their nationality, a strain which affected the work of some of their counterparts writing in English for a time.

Ironically this freedom seems to be in danger of ending and, judging by some of the stories made available in translation, appears to have been replaced by the aim of political conversion, to the detriment, in my view, of the storyteller's art. However, the representation of writers in the Welsh language and here translated is varied enough to warrant a further anthology comprised entirely of stories translated from the original. Nevertheless it is my hope that the Wales of the past and the present is well represented in this volume, together with the world of work and workmen in some of our more ravaged terrains, an aspect which has tended to be neglected in the past.

Finally I should like to express my gratitude to the Welsh Arts Council for their generosity in making funds available for translations, to numerous Welshmen for their suggestions, and also to Dr F. G. Cowley of the University College library at Swansea for his help in unearthing so many stories, long forgotten and out of print.

ALUN RICHARDS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For permission to reprint the stories specified we are indebted to:

Curtis Brown Ltd and William Heinemann Ltd for Rhys Davies's 'The Fashion Plate' from *The Collected Stories*;

Glyn Jones for his own story 'The Golden Pony' originally published in *Chance*;

Mrs Gwenno Lewis and George Allen & Unwin for Alun Lewis's 'Acting Captain' from *The Last Inspection*;

David Higham Associates Ltd and Jonathan Cape Ltd for Geraint Goodwin's 'Saturday Night' from *The White Farm*;

Kate Roberts for her own story 'The Loss';

Gwyn Jones and the Oxford University Press for his own story 'The Brute Creation' from *Shepherd's Hey*;

J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd, the Trustees for the Copyrights of the late Dylan Thomas and New Directions Publishing Corporation for Thomas's 'Extraordinary Little Cough' from *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog*;

J. D. Lewis & Sons Ltd, Gomer Press, for D. J. Williams's 'A Successful Year', Eigr Lewis Roberts's 'An Overdose of Sun' and Islwyn Ffowc Elis's 'Black Barren';

Victor Gollancz Ltd for Gwyn Thomas's 'The Teacher' from *Gazooka*;

Hughes & Son and Christopher Davies Ltd for E. Tegla Davies's 'The Strange Apeman' and for T. Hughes Jones's 'The Squire of Havilah';

Dennis Dobson for Caradoc Evans's 'Be This Her Memorial' from *My People*;

Neville Chamberlain for the late Brenda Chamberlain's 'The Return' from *Life and Letters Today*, vol. 54;

V. Davies for B. L. Coombes's 'Twenty Tons of Coal' originally published in *Penguin New Writing*;

Moira Dearnley for her own story 'The House in BUILT Crescent';

Jane Edwards for her own story 'Blind Date';

Harri Pritchard Jones for his own story 'Morfydd's Celebration';

Atlantic Monthly for Leslie Norris's 'A Roman Spring';

The New Statesman for John Morgan's 'A Writer Came to Our Place'.

Ron Berry for his own story 'Before Forever After' originally published in *Planet*;

Michael Joseph Ltd and Alun Richards for his own story 'Hon. Sec. (R.F.C.)' from *The Former Miss Merthyr Tydfil*;

Secker & Warburg Ltd and Emyr Humphreys for his own story 'Mel's Secret Love' from *Natives*.

Acknowledgement and thanks are also due to those who provided new translations for this volume and to the Welsh Arts Council which generously paid their fees.

The Fashion Plate

RHYS DAVIES

I

THE Fashion Plate's coming -' Quickly the news would pass down the main road. Curtains twitched in front parlour windows, potted shrubs were moved or watered; some colliers' wives, hard-worked and canvas-aproned, came boldly to the doorsteps to stare. In the dingy little shops, wedged here and there among the swart dwellings, customers craned together for the treat. Cleopatra setting out in the golden barge to meet Antony did not create more interest. There was no one else in the valley like her. Her hats! The fancy, high-heeled shoes, the brilliantly elegant dresses in summer, the tweeds and the swirl of furs for the bitter days of that mountainous district! The different handbags, gay and sumptuous, the lacy gloves, the parasols and tasselled umbrellas! And how she knew how to wear these things! Graceful as a swan, clean as a flower, she dazzled the eye.

But, though a pleasure to see, she was also incongruous, there in that grim industrial retreat pushed up among the mountains, with the pits hurling out their clouds of grit, and clanking coal wagons crossing the main road twice, and the miners coming off the shift black and primitive-looking. The women drew in their breaths as she passed. She looked as if she had never done a stroke of work in her life. Strange murmurs could be heard; she almost created a sense of fear, this vision of delicate indolence, wealth, and taste assembled with exquisite tact in one person. How could she do it? Their eyes admired but their comments did not.

Yet the work-driven women of this place, that had known long strikes, bitter poverty, and a terrible pit disaster, could

not entirely malign Mrs Mitchell. Something made them pause. Perhaps it was the absolute serenity of those twice-weekly afternoon walks that nothing except torrential rain or snow-bound roads could prevent. Or perhaps they saw a vicarious triumph of themselves, a dream become courageously real.

There remained the mystery of how she could afford all those fine clothes. For Mrs Mitchell was only the wife of the man in charge of the slaughterhouse. She was not the pit manager's wife (indeed, Mrs Edwards dressed in totally different style, her never-varied hat shaped like an Eskimo's hut). Mr Mitchell's moderate salary was known, and in such a place no one could possess private means without its being exact knowledge. Moreover, he was no match to his wife. A rough-and-ready sort of man, glum and never mixing much in the life of the place, though down in the slaughterhouse, which served all the butchers' shops for miles, he was respected as a responsible chap whose words and deeds were to be trusted. Of words he had not many.

The women wished they could curl their tongues round something scandalous. Why was Mrs Mitchell always having her photograph taken by Mr Burgess in his studio down an obscure yard where he worked entirely alone? But nobody felt that suspicion of Mr Burgess, a family man and chapel deacon with a stark, knobby face above a high stiff collar, sat comfortably in the mind. The bit of talk about the two had started because one afternoon a mother calling at the studio to fix an appointment for her daughter's wedding party found Mrs Mitchell reclining on a sofa under a bust of Napoleon. She was hatless and, in a clinging dress ('tight on her as a snake skin') and her hands holding a bunch of artificial flowers, she looked like a woman undergoing the agonies of some awful confession. Mr Burgess certainly had his head under the black drapery of his camera, so everything pointed to yet another photograph being taken. But to have one taken *lying down*! In the valley, in those days, to have a photo taken was a rare event attended by tremendous

fuss. Accompanied by advising friends or relations, one stood up to the ordeal as it going before the Ultimate Judge, and one always came out on the card as if turned to stone or a pillar of salt.

The whispering began. Yet still everyone felt that the whispering was unfair to Mr Burgess. For thirty years he had photographed wedding parties, oratorio choirs, and silver-cup football teams in his studio, and nothing had ever been said against his conduct.

Mrs Mitchell, coming out of her bow-windowed little house as out of a palace, took her walk as if never a breath of scandal ever polluted her pearl ear-rings. Was she aware of the general criticism? If so, did she know that within the criticism was homage? – the homage that in bygone times would begin a dynasty of tribal queens? Was she aware of the fear, too, the puritanic dread that such lavishness and extravagance could not be obtained but at some dire cost greater even than money?

II

This afternoon her excursion was no different from the hundreds of others. It was a fine autumn day. The tawny mountains glistened like the skins of lions. She wore a new fur, rich with the bluish-black tint of grapes, and flung with just the right expensive carelessness across her well-held shoulders: it would cause additional comment. With her apparently unaware look of repose she passed serenely down the long, drab main road.

Down at the bottom of the valley the larger shops, offices, a music hall, and a railway station (together with Mr Burgess's studio) clustered into the semblance of a town. She always walked as far as the railway station, situated down a hunchback turning, and, after appearing to be intent on its architecture for a moment, wheeled round, and with a mysterious smile began the homeward journey. Often she made small domestic purchases – her clothes she obtained from the

city twenty miles away – and as the ironmonger's wife once remarked: 'Only a rolling-pin she wanted, but one would think she was buying a grand piano.'

Today, outside the railway station, she happened to see her young friend Nicholas and, bending down to his ear, in her low, sweet voice breathed his name. He was twelve, wore a school satchel strapped to his back, and he was absent-mindedly paused before a poster depicting Windsor Castle. He gave a violent start and dropped a purple-whorled glass marble which rolled across the pavement, sped down the gutter, and slid into a drain. 'It's gone!' he cried in poignant astonishment. 'I won it dinner-time!'

'And all my fault.' Her bosom was perfumed with an evasive fragrance like closed flowers. 'Never mind, I have some marbles. Will you come and get them this evening? You've been neglecting us lately, Nicholas.' She was neither arch nor patronizing; he might have been a successful forty.

'I'll have to do my homework first,' he said with equal formality.

'Well, come in and do it with us. You shall have your own little table, and I'll be quiet as a mouse.'

They lived in the same street and, though no particular friendship existed between the two households, he had been on visiting terms with the Mitchells, who were childless, for a couple of years. The change from his own noisily warring brothers-and-sisters home to the Mitchells', where he was sole little king, nourished him. To his visits his mother took a wavering attitude of doubt, half criticism, and compassion; before becoming decisive she was waiting for something concrete to happen in that house.

That evening Mrs Mitchell had six coloured glass marbles ready for him on a small table on which, neatly set out, were also a crystal ink-well, a ruler, blotter, and pencils and – yes! a bottle of lemonade with a tumbler. Very impressed by the bottle, which gave him a glimpse of easy luxury in a world hard with the snatchings and blows of his brothers and sisters, he made little fuss of the glitteringly washed marbles, which he guessed she had bought in Watkins's shop after