

Twentieth-Century
Literary Criticism

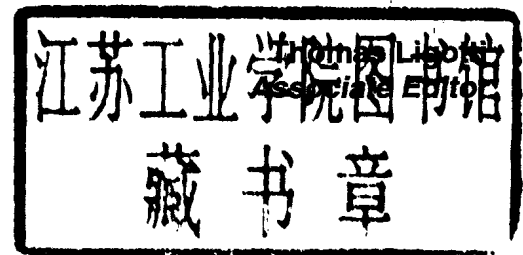
TCLC

85

Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

**Criticism of the
Works of Novelists, Poets, Playwrights,
Short Story Writers, and Other Creative Writers
Who Lived between 1900 and 1960,
from the First Published Critical
Appraisals to Current Evaluations**

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Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

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Preface

Since its inception more than fifteen years ago, *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism* has been purchased and used by nearly 10,000 school, public, and college or university libraries. *TCLC* has covered more than 500 authors, representing 58 nationalities, and over 25,000 titles. No other reference source has surveyed the critical response to twentieth-century authors and literature as thoroughly as *TCLC*. In the words of one reviewer, "there is nothing comparable available." *TCLC* "is a gold mine of information—dates, pseudonyms, biographical information, and criticism from books and periodicals—which many libraries would have difficulty assembling on their own."

Scope of the Series

TCLC is designed to serve as an introduction to authors who died between 1900 and 1960 and to the most significant interpretations of these author's works. The great poets, novelists, short story writers, playwrights, and philosophers of this period are frequently studied in high school and college literature courses. In organizing and reprinting the vast amount of critical material written on these authors, *TCLC* helps students develop valuable insight into literary history, promotes a better understanding of the texts, and sparks ideas for papers and assignments. Each entry in *TCLC* presents a comprehensive survey of an author's career or an individual work of literature and provides the user with a multiplicity of interpretations and assessments. Such variety allows students to pursue their own interests; furthermore, it fosters an awareness that literature is dynamic and responsive to many different opinions.

Every fourth volume of *TCLC* is devoted to literary topics. These topic entries widen the focus of the series from individual authors to such broader subjects as literary movements, prominent themes in twentieth-century literature, literary reaction to political and historical events, significant eras in literary history, prominent literary anniversaries, and the literatures of cultures that are often overlooked by English-speaking readers.

TCLC is designed as a companion series to Gale's *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, which reprints commentary on authors now living or who have died since 1960. Because of the different periods under consideration, there is no duplication of material between *CLC* and *TCLC*. For additional information about *CLC* and Gale's other criticism titles, users should consult the Guide to Gale Literary Criticism Series preceding the title page in this volume.

Coverage

Each volume of *TCLC* is carefully compiled to present:

- criticism of authors, or literary topics, representing a variety of genres and nationalities
- both major and lesser-known writers and literary works of the period
- 6-12 authors or 3-6 topics per volume
- individual entries that survey critical response to each author's work or each topic in literary history, including early criticism to reflect initial reactions; later criticism to represent any rise or decline in reputation; and current retrospective analyses.

Organization of This Book

An author entry consists of the following elements: author heading, biographical and critical introduction, list of principal works, reprints of criticism (each preceded by an annotation and a bibliographic citation), and a bibliography of further reading.

- The **Author Heading** consists of the name under which the author most commonly wrote, followed by birth and death dates. If an author wrote consistently under a pseudonym, the pseudonym will be listed in the author heading and the real name given in parentheses on the first line of the biographical and critical introduction. Also located at

the beginning of the introduction to the author entry are any name variations under which an author wrote, including transliterated forms for authors whose languages use nonroman alphabets.

- The **Biographical and Critical Introduction** outlines the author's life and career, as well as the critical issues surrounding his or her work. References to past volumes of *TCLC* are provided at the beginning of the introduction. Additional sources of information in other biographical and critical reference series published by Gale, including *Short Story Criticism*, *Children's Literature Review*, *Contemporary Authors*, *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, and *Something about the Author*, are listed in a box at the end of the entry.
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- The **List of Principal Works** is chronological by date of first book publication and identifies the genre of each work. In the case of foreign authors with both foreign-language publications and English translations, the title and date of the first English-language edition are given in brackets. Unless otherwise indicated, dramas are dated by first performance, not first publication.
- Critical essays are prefaced by **Annotations** providing the reader with information about both the critic and the criticism that follows. Included are the critic's reputation, individual approach to literary criticism, and particular expertise in an author's works. Also noted are the relative importance of a work of criticism, the scope of the essay, and the growth of critical controversy or changes in critical trends regarding an author. In some cases, these annotations cross-reference essays by critics who discuss each other's commentary.
- A complete **Bibliographic Citation** designed to facilitate location of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism.
- Criticism is arranged chronologically in each author entry to provide a perspective on changes in critical evaluation over the years. All titles of works by the author featured in the entry are printed in boldface type to enable the user to easily locate discussion of particular works. Also for purposes of easier identification, the critic's name and the publication date of the essay are given at the beginning of each piece of criticism. Unsigned criticism is preceded by the title of the journal in which it appeared. Some of the essays in *TCLC* also contain translated material. Unless otherwise noted, translations in brackets are by the editors; translations in parentheses or continuous with the text are by the critic. Publication information (such as footnotes or page and line references to specific editions of works) have been deleted at the editor's discretion to provide smoother reading of the text.
- An annotated list of **Further Reading** appearing at the end of each author entry suggests secondary sources on the author. In some cases it includes essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights.

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- Each *TCLC* volume includes a cumulative **Nationality Index** which lists all authors who have appeared in *TCLC* volumes, arranged alphabetically under their respective nationalities, as well as Topics volume entries devoted to particular national literatures.
- Each new volume in Gale's Literary Criticism Series includes a cumulative **Topic Index**, which lists all literary topics treated in *NCLC*, *TCLC*, *LC 1400-1800*, and the *CLC* year-book.
- Each new volume of *TCLC*, with the exception of the Topics volumes, includes a **Title Index** listing the titles of all literary works discussed in the volume. In response to numerous suggestions from librarians, Gale has also produced a **Special Paperbound Edition** of the *TCLC* title index. This annual cumulation lists all titles discussed in the series since its inception and is issued with the first volume of *TCLC* published each year. Additional copies of the index are available on request. Librarians and patrons will welcome this separate index; it saves shelf space, is easy to use, and is recyclable upon receipt of the following year's cumulation. Titles discussed in the Topics volume entries are not included *TCLC* cumulative index.

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When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume in Gale's literary Criticism Series may use the following general forms to footnote reprinted criticism. The first example pertains to materials drawn from periodicals, the second to material reprinted from books.

¹William H. Slavick, "Going to School to DuBose Heyward," *The Harlem Renaissance Re-examined*, (AMS Press, 1987); reprinted in *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*, Vol. 59, ed. Jennifer Garipey (Detroit: Gale Research, 1995), pp. 94-105.

²George Orwell, "Reflections on Gandhi," *Partisan Review*, 6 (Winter 1949), pp. 85-92; reprinted in *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*, Vol. 59, ed. Jennifer Garipey (Detroit: Gale Research, 1995), pp. 40-3.

Suggestions Are Welcome

In response to suggestions, several features have been added to *TCLC* since the series began, including annotations to critical essays, a cumulative index to authors in all Gale literary criticism series, entries devoted to criticism on a single work by a major author, more extensive illustrations, and a title index listing all literary works discussed in the series since its inception.

Readers who wish to suggest authors or topics to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to write the editors.

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Nightingale, Florence (dark hair parted in center, braided with ribbon), photograph. Archive Photos, Inc. Reproduced by permission.

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Caradoc Evans

1878-1945

(Full name David Caradoc Evans) Welsh short story writer, novelist, and playwright

INTRODUCTION

Although he gave his first collection the apparently sentimental title *My People*, Welsh short-story writer Caradoc Evans is known for his caustic portrayals of his homeland and his neighbors. So fierce was Welsh sentiment against him that two galleries in Wales refused his portrait, and while it was on display in London, Evans's visage was slashed across the throat. In his origins at the fringes of Great Britain, his antipathy toward the land of his birth, and his inventive use of language, Evans has been compared to a more famous contemporary, James Joyce. Like Joyce, he effectively burned his bridges to his Celtic past, but won over an English audience—and ultimately a younger generation of compatriots, a group that in Evans's case included Dylan Thomas.

Biographical Information

Evans's background is closely tied to the tradition of Welsh Nonconformism, the Protestant movement which rebelled against the Church of England as the Anglican Church had rebelled against Rome. In Wales, adherence to the Church of England was seen as adherence to England. Hence the terms "Tory" and "Anglican" went together, as did "Liberal" and "Nonconformist," and the union of Evans's Anglican father with his Liberal mother constituted a mixed marriage. When Williams Evans, a farmer, became involved with the sale of land that had belonged to a Nonconformist tenant evicted for disobeying his Anglican landlord, his wife's family disowned her. Evans was four years old when his father died, leaving the boy's mother with limited means for raising Evans and his four siblings. She ultimately became a tenant farmer herself, and Evan's childhood was one of extreme poverty—a factor which influenced the bitterness of his later writing. The Welsh village, as Evans would later portray it in *My People* and other works, was a rigid society controlled by the minister, who inhabited the chapel or "capel," and the schoolmaster or "schoolin." In Evans's view, it was a world rife with hypocrisy, an opinion shaped in part by the high esteem with which the community viewed his pusillanimous uncle Joshua Powell. The latter's refusal to fund Evans's secondary schooling, a small gesture for Powell which would have immeasurably helped the young boy, served to engender in Evans an abiding bitterness reflected in his later portrayals of hypocritical figures such as Sadrach in *Capel Sion*. At age fourteen,

Evans was forced to go to work as an apprentice draper, a position equivalent to that of a clerk in an American dry-goods store of the era. Evans remained employed thus, in Wales and later London, from 1893 to 1906, when the sale of two sketches to a newspaper convinced him that he could make a living in journalism. In 1907 he married Rose Jesse Sewell. During the next decade, he wrote for a variety of publications, including *T. P.'s Weekly* and *Ideas*. He served as editor of the latter from 1915 to 1917 and published his first two collections of stories during World War I. *My People* and *Capel Sion* brought him instant notoriety in Britain. Critics compared him to ancient Greek dramatists, Jonathan Swift, and Maksim Gorky; on the other side of the Atlantic, H. L. Mencken, who saw in Evans's Wales a mirror of the American South that he had often excoriated, echoed the praise accorded him by British critics. In Wales, Evans's unflattering portraits of his homeland brought on an anger that bordered on hatred. A group of Welsh students protested the premiere of Evans's one play, *Taffy*, but the ruckus only heightened Evans's celebrity. Evans continued to work as a journalist, becoming editor of *T. P.'s Weekly* in 1923 while he worked on his first novel, *Nothing to Pay*. He lost his job when *T. P.'s Weekly* folded in 1929, and the onset of the Depression reduced his opportunities as a journalist; meanwhile, he had met and begun an affair with an aristocratic romance novelist, Marguerite Barczinsky. Marguerite persuaded him to leave Rose, and in the early 1930s he broke completely with his past, divorcing his wife and cutting off his ties among Fleet Street journalists. Evans, who married Marguerite in 1933 and moved with her to the country, intended to become a full-time novelist, but his writing suffered, and his novels *Wasps*, *This Way to Heaven*, and *Mother's Marvel* were unremarkable compared to his earlier work. Except for a period in the late 1930s when he experienced a brief surge of creativity, most of his last twelve years were unhappy ones as Evans, regretting his haste in leaving his former life behind, resigned himself to the fact that he would thenceforth live off of Marguerite's wealth. Though his work improved during World War II, as *Pilgrims in a Foreign Land* proved, his mood did not. By the latter part of 1943 Evans became irresponsible with regard to his health, for instance spending a great deal of time in the cold and wet outdoors without a coat. He caught pneumonia, and in 1945 he was hospitalized for heart trouble. He died on 11 January 1945.

Major Works

Evans's most noted works are his first two collections, *My People* and *Capel Sion*. Formerly, rural Wales had

been known chiefly to literature through Allen Raine, who idealized it as Dylan Thomas, Richard Llewellyn, and others would do to a lesser extent in later years. Evans's fictional town of Manteg offered a portrait so fiercely sardonic that Welsh policemen harassed booksellers daring enough to offer the book for sale. Evan Rhiw in the story "Lamentations," from *My People*, is not atypical of the characters. Engaging in an incestuous relationship with his daughter Matilda, he gains absolution from the village minister, who announces that God ("The Big Man" in the Welsh argot of Evans's stories) has told him who is truly to blame: Matilda, the "adder in his house." The tales are written in a spare style, largely devoid of authorial comment or attempts to influence the readers' opinion; and Evans uses an unusual amalgam of Welsh and English—both modern English and the English of the King James Bible. The stories in *My Neighbours* offer similar characterizations, with the chief distinction being the fact that they take place in London and feature a character named Ben Lloyd, a vicious sycophant through whom Evans meant to parody David Lloyd George, Britain's Welsh-born Prime Minister. The play *Taffy* is more lighthearted, centering on the love affair between the free-spirited Marged and the reforming minister Spurgeon. However, with his first novel, *Nothing to Pay*, Evans returned to bleak themes; his presentation of the miser Amos Morgan offers little of the implied humor—as acerbic as it is—which alleviates the negativity of his first three collections. Twelve years elapsed between the publication of *Nothing to Pay* and that of *Pilgrims in a Foreign Land*, years that would see turmoil in Evans's personal life and a downward turn in his work as a writer. Whereas his earlier writing had been notable in part for its clean style and the absence of authorial intrusion, *Wasps* and the other novels he wrote after marrying Marguerite Barcinsky were characterized by a tendency toward aphorisms and toward telling rather than showing. In the stories collected in *Pilgrims* and *The Earth Gives All and Takes All*, however, Evans seemed to have found his voice again, albeit in a slightly mellowed form: there are glimmers of goodness among the characters in these later collections.

PRINCIPAL WORKS

- My People: Stories of the Peasantry of West Wales* (short stories) 1915
Capel Sion (short stories) 1916
My Neighbours (short stories) 1919; enlarged edition published as *My Neighbors: Stories of the Welsh People*, 1920
Taffy: A Play of Welsh Village Life (drama) 1923
Nothing to Pay (novel) 1930
Pilgrims in a Foreign Land (short stories) 1942
The Earth Gives All and Takes All (short stories) 1946

CRITICISM

Edwin Pugh (essay date 1917)

SOURCE: "The Welsh Peasant," in *The Bookman*, London, Vol. LI, No. 306, March, 1917, pp. 191-2.

[In the following essay, a review of *Capel Sion*, a countryman gives cautious praise to Evans's literary ability, but questions his view of the Welsh people.]

"Art for Art's sake" was one of the war cries of the 'nineties, and curiously enough it was heard loudest and most often in literary circles. I cannot recall one painter, actor, or musician who echoed that cry. Yet we have had since all manner of revolutionary movements in painting, music, and drama, whilst our authors seem to be carrying on in very much the same way now as twenty-five years ago. It is significant, too, that of all the "Art for Art's sake" young lions of those roaring times hardly one is to be counted, with the possible exception of Mr. George Moore, among the foremost writers of to-day. The reason is, of course, that "Art for Art's sake" is a motto with as little to recommend it as "Eating for eating's sake." One might almost say, with slight reservations, that all the most notable books written in our time, from "Alice in Wonderland" to "The Heavenly Twins," were written with a purpose.

And so it is with Mr. Caradoc Evans's *Capel Sion*.

If there were no high moral purpose underlying the stark realism of this book it would lack all justification. Even its fine artistic merits would not redeem it from condemnation. As it stands, however—and I say this in all reverence—it is as moral as the Bible, whose style it adopts with consummate effect, and whose lessons it inculcates with the same impersonal force and sincerity.

Speaking as a man of Welsh blood and temperament I am bound to accept the authenticity of these studies of the Welsh peasantry, their character and habits, though I have little first hand knowledge of that particular class of Celt. But, during my sojourns in Wales, I have caught glimpses, suggestions, indications—call them what you will—of the way of life there in the more obscure and lesser known districts, sufficient in themselves to enable me to recognise that Mr. Evans is stating no more and no less than the truth in these amazing stories and sketches.

And that is the only word for them: Amazing! They are amazing as the discovery of a race of heathen people living in our very midst: a race eaten up by all manner of superstition, cruel and lustful, covetous and grasping. No stories of pioneer exploration or missionary travel have ever revealed among naked painted savages a more horrible state of things than this book reveals. It is neither better nor worse than its predecessor *My People*: it is merely a continuation of it, or rather an elaboration. It exhibits the same high qualities of sim-

plicity and strength, wrought into a style which is as distinctive as the style of Bunyan, with whom Mr. Evans in certain aspects might be compared, if it were not that he is content to let the reader draw his own moral from the narrative instead of stating it in so many words.

It would be impossible to outline any of these stories, because of the author's economy of means. Not a word or a stroke is wasted. The very backgrounds seem to evolve themselves out of the incidents; they are never described. We have no full-length portraits of any of the people, and yet we visualise them as clearly as if we beheld them in the flesh. They talk, and we hear their voices. They weep, they rave, they laugh—and again we hear them, we recognise the force and picturesqueness of their everyday speech, their common idiom, with its strange commingling of poetry, symbolism, and blasphemy. And there again is the hand of the master; for it is always the most primitive folk who in their ordinary converse one with another, are most often at once poetic, symbolic, and blasphemous.

And yet. . . . Is Mr. Evans's view of his own people a comprehensive view? I cannot believe it. I cannot but think that something of bitter passion and revolt has blurred his sight a little and limited his range of vision, blinded him almost wholly to their virtues, however few and rare. For a race cannot be utterly wicked and vicious, and endure. That way lies racial suicide, and the Welsh, even the Welsh peasantry, are very much alive.

Therefore, before parting from Mr. Evans with the utmost gratitude for the artistic delight he has given me, I would entreat him, in his next book, to try to get a little more light and shade into his pictures, to portray something, at least, of these Welsh peasants' more kindly and worthy traits: of their hospitality, for instance, which I have personally experienced. Mr. Evans has given us so much. That is why we want so much more. And that he can give us much more is as plain to see as the genius of his writing.

The Nation (essay date 1918)

SOURCE: "Phases of the Short Story," in *The Nation*, New York, Vol. 107, No. 2790, December 21, 1918, p. 779.

[In the following excerpt, a review of *Capel Sion*, a critic questions the authenticity of Evans's bitter portraits.]

Not long ago a young Welshman signing himself Caradoc Evans electrified England, or at least the reviewers of England, by issuing a little "first book" called *My People*. It was a book of sketches about the peasantry of West Wales, a people who had not been used in fiction before. It possessed the prime asset, therefore, of a new local color, an atmosphere, which is a matter no longer easily to be discovered even in patchwork Britain. But it had something better than that, for purposes of electrification, namely, an absolutely God-

forsaken view of human nature and an utterly unscrupulous tongue. Here is a combination "hard to beat." Nobody but a reviewer can understand how refreshing a book like this [*Capel Sion*] may be, now and then, to professional palates which are simply tired of the usual thing. It has not only the fresh flavor (or smell) of an unexploited localism, but the ancient lure of a new window opened towards reality. We cannot know whether the smell is true, or whether the window really is a new one, or really opens on reality, but—perhaps! For the moment at least we feel ourselves shaking clear of the bogs of convention and the fogs of sentiment with which our way is compassed. Disagreeable, yes, but the real thing? Why not? Let us give it a hand, anyhow, "on the chance." Hence our chorus of British reviewers greeting the *My People* of young Mr. Caradoc Evans as a book of genius and vision and high art. Of course (they say) it is "grim," "frank," "merciless," even "ugly"; but that is because it is "stark," "powerful," "strong meat for strong men." Mr. Clement Shorter is outraged that the libraries should exclude such a book. The *Westminster Gazette* doesn't relish its matter, but finds refuge in praise of its manner: "Nothing but artistic purpose, and the rarer endowment of artistic capacity, could have carried a writer triumphantly through his welter of meanness and brutality and hypocritical depravity." In brief, he has wallowed well, but what if the welter be of his own making? What is his "triumph"—to have achieved tragic beauty, or to have fillipped our jaded senses with the uncommonly "high" flavor of an otherwise homely dish? Perhaps the answer is suggested by a noticeable tendency among the reviewers to value this "new" writer chiefly, after all, as one who has out-Hardied Hardy and taught the shade of Dostoevsky a thing or two. *Capel Sion* is of exactly the same substance and quality. We beg leave to question its sincerity as a document or as art. Its sketches of these Welsh people have a dreadful effectiveness because of their unrestrained cruelty. You can always get a literary effect, like any other object, by going straight for it without eyes or heart for anything else. No doubt there are Welsh peasants as blasphemous, as lustful, as selfish, as filthy, as utterly contemptible as the people in this book. That there are whole communities of them, in Wales or anywhere else, for whom nothing better can be said, it is impossible to believe.

The Dial (essay date 1919)

SOURCE: A review of *My People* and *Capel Sion*, in *The Dial*, Vol. LXVI, February 8, 1919, pp. 154-6.

[In the following essay, a review of *My People* and *Capel Sion*, a critic cautiously accepts Evans's negative view of humanity.]

Is this revelation or fiction? Such uniform squalor and bestiality scarcely seems consistent with truth. The author [of *My People* and *Capel Sion*] appears to have used up his literary faculties on variations of the general

themes of sexual degradation and avarice. It is not to be denied that he has made excellent literary material out of these unpleasant themes, but it is the excellence of his handling which makes it so difficult to suppress a question concerning the truth of his tales and sketches. It is not at all impossible that these peasants of West Wales may be violent distortions of our correct selves, to whom the veiling of emotion and desire has become like a sixth sense. But whether the tales and sketches are faithful transcriptions of truth or merely fiction, they possess force and vitality. If Mr. Evans has not written of the people of West Wales, then he has created a new type of peasant and, in any event, his work is literary creation which our moral prejudices or preconceptions should not permit us to neglect. He has told us of a people who live their lives on a non-moral basis and who are yet so conscious of sin and of their moral responsibility to the Big Man and the "little white Jesus" that what might easily have been indifferent non-morality becomes gross and repulsive immorality. These peasants, in spite of their anthropomorphic religiosity, seem naively unconscious that filth is dirty. Their God is a primitive patriarch, between whom and themselves there is hardly any barrier of ritual, though at the same time there is no beauty in the communion. The Big Man speaks in the vulgar language of the commonest peasant—being, one supposes, in common with all gods, a reflection of his worshipers. He doesn't hedge himself about with any symbols of divinity—though he does insist on being invisible to mortal eyes—and may be induced to wink at any subversion of the moral laws, provided that the Respected, or the minister, intercedes (for a consideration) on behalf of the sinner. "Ianto opened his Bible and read. Afterwards he removed the tobacco from his mouth and laid it on the table and he reported to God with a clean mouth."

The tales and sketches have at least the sound of truth. And perhaps it is only our desire to have people live cleanly that makes it so very easy for us to believe that the peasants of these books are nothing more than creatures of the author's imagination.

The English Review (essay date 1923)

SOURCE: "The Little Spoon," and "Taffy," in *The English Review*, Vol. 36, April, 1923, pp. 344-50.

[In the following essay, a review of *Taffy*, a critic lauds Evans's play as a refreshing change from most current offerings for the stage.]

Mr. Caradoc Evans bounded into fame shortly before the war as the discoverer of a new literary method. Once more the Bible was the source, but he had another, Wales, and the idiom of Wales transcribed into English, which he used as a searchlight upon the insular idiosyncrasies of his people. Wales was virgin soil for literature and Mr. Evans was fiercely regional. He sovietised (before Lenin) the King's English. The stories he wrote

(published mostly in this REVIEW struck a new theme and a new note. Their quality, of daring and incisive re-creation, staggered. They were at once tragic and comic. He was of course pilloried, denounced by his "Fathers," and damned, but he held his course, and in time the stories appeared in book form, when literary London recognised an "original" and a new force. Then came the war and the transvaluation of values that have succeeded war, in which all that went before was forgotten, barred and banned to make room for the new values which were to give us a new world and what not, where indeed we stand to-day still re-valuing, still seeking the de-morphinisation of art and society. Into this knock-about flux Mr. Evans tipped out a play, *Taffy*, thanks to the largeness of Mr. Dennis Bradley, who not only produced the piece, but really presented it to the edification of a representative art-caring audience.

After the trash which has graced the boards since the Armistice, *Taffy* naturally puzzled. To begin with, Mr. Evans refuses compromise. Though no one can call him a highbrow, whatever the tag may mean, he is a high-kicker with a message. He wallows in that long-lost article—sincerity, out-Heroding any revivalist, withering all politicians, scorning the conventionalities of the box-office theatre, too proud to pander to the commonness, rottenness, vulgarity, and clap-trap of the machine-made play that has reduced our stage to the lowest in Europe; and such a man starts with a heavy handicap, for the London Theatre is a purely commercial business, and the man who thinks otherwise is not a "patriot." This was made evident during the production. A Welsh chorus punctuated his sallies with antiphonal chants, culminating in a rally for "Lloyd George," which, however, fell flat, as the audience was a cultured one, far from the madding crowd of the hustings. In short, *Taffy* hit, hurt, and heartened.

It was a stimulating afternoon. The parochial quarrelling about zinc or tiles for the chapel, who is to pay for it, who not to profiteer out of it, how to do in this "big head" or that preacher, and all that kind of thing reminiscent of the terrific rows, intrigues, enthusiasms, and squabbles that used to go on years ago over the building of Cathedrals—such was the theme, infinitely minute and localised, represented by three "big heads," a pair of rival preachers, a sweet Welsh maid and her farmer father, ending in a little love episode which took the boy preacher from the Church and led the venerable preacher, "tearful Ben"—a great scream of a type—to take unto himself his fifth wife. Not much movement, perhaps. No slop, no brandy-balls for the pit, no bawd or catch or penny-whistle tintinnabulation for the ladies—just hard, inexorable, caustic life as it is, or as the author sees it.

To our jaded theatre-mind, steeped in the artificialities of the commercial play, which bears no relation to psychology at all, the thing seemed preposterously over-emphasised, over-laden, over-keyed. Many could not stand this showing-up of a village mentality; all shook their heads at the notion of trying so brilliant a spate of

satire, wit, fun, and human analysis upon the people. No doubt Mr. Evans is a phenomenon. He has the single-track mind. He cannot portray his people with charm, as Sir J. M. Barrie portrays the Scot, and he lacks the poetry of Synge, who Biblified his people. He stands between Bernard Shaw and Synge. His weakness is partly technical, partly the weakness of his race—he himself is a preacher. *Taffy* is a sermon in sermons. A little bit too homilectic for the Theatre, which demands light and shade and that indefinable something which leaves some things to the imagination.

Refusing hypocrisy himself, he seems to have forgotten that hypocrisy is the world's social weapon, and so in uncloaking his characters he deprives them, protests, too much. They are too revealed, too undifferentiated, too bare. Not as real men, perhaps, but as theatre men certainly, the result being a sameness of character and procedure which detracts from the illusion so essential to the footlights. His village is one of Iagos all the way; call it realism. Yet it hummed, held, and was a joyous performance. There were great scenes, one superb moment handled by Miss Evans with mastery, a delicate love-passage, and innumerable unexpected scintillations of bathos, drama, and antithesis. Mr. Evans reached heights and plumbed depths. He has written himself into his work, which has the great merit of vitality. We saw live men. We heard live words. We left more alive than when we entered the theatre.

What is to be done with *Taffy*? Will it die because it is so alive? Presumably. Any bidders? I wonder. Anyhow, *Taffy* was a little event, an Ark in theatre-land. It has reinstated Mr. Caradoc Evans, thus promoting the slow process of de-morphinisation. Those who saw it will not forget Ben and his sermons, or the Elders, or the wench who drew the young preacher back to the land, or the pithy, racy, quaint dialogue, or the hen, in place of a close-up. Theatrical managers may cry cock-a-doodle-doo to it, but Mr. Evans may yet, with management and manipulation, be able to say "hey cockalorum" to the great public, when *Chu-Chin-Chow* and Co. have gone to the land of their Fathers.

Glyn Jones (essay date 1968)

SOURCE: "Three Prose Writers: Caradoc Evans, 1878-1945," in *The Dragon Has Two Tongues: Essays on Anglo-Welsh Writers and Writing*, J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1968, pp. 64-80.

[In the following excerpt, Jones offers his personal reminiscences of Evans.]

I first met Caradoc Evans in the company of Dylan Thomas in, I think, 1934. It seems to me strange now that I should at that time have sought him out, because, at fifty-six, he had been, for many years, a hated and notorious figure in Wales, the author of such works of calculated provocation as *My People*, *Capel Sion*, *My*

Neighbours, *Nothing to Pay*, *Wasps* and *Taffy*. (I wonder if Caradoc's early books would have aroused such fury and attracted so much publicity if they had been given titles less jeering and inflammatory, say *Tales of Bygone Wales*, or *Remembering Aberteifi*.) He was regarded in Wales as the enemy of everything people of my upbringing and generation had been taught to revere, a blasphemer and mocker, a derider of our religion, one who by the distortions of his paraphrasings and his wilful mistranslations had made our language and ourselves appear ridiculous and contemptible in the eyes of the world outside Wales. But he was also one of the very few Welshmen at that time who had made a name for himself by writing in English, and in spite of everything commonly urged against them I read his strange stories almost always with curiosity and respect, often with considerable admiration.

In reply to my letter asking for permission to visit him, I received from Caradoc a cordial invitation to tea, written in a minute and rather spiky script in the central two or three square inches of a large sheet of writing-paper which had a list of Caradoc's books printed down the side. He was living then in a pleasant house called Queen's Square House, near the centre of Aberystwyth, in Cardiganshire, with his second wife Oliver Sandys (Countess Barcynska) and her son Nicholas.

I do not know enough about the nobility of Poland to judge whether Mrs Evans's title was genuine, or *soi-disant* on the part of her first husband. Did the Poles have counts, and were some of them Jewish? Certainly Mrs Evans was a fine and generous Englishwoman whom I always liked and admired very much, warm-hearted, merciful, tireless in her concern for the young, for outcasts and misfits, and bountiful towards her friends and dependants. Also she was an industrious and highly successful writer, the author, one of her publishers claims, of more than seventy best-selling novels. Caradoc's nickname for her was the sentimentalist.

On the day of our visit Dylan and I were shown into a spacious drawing-room furnished with splendid antiques of varying periods and styles, the sort of place that, although roomy, seems overcrowded with too many exotic ornaments and large vases of fancy grass, and Buddhas, and icons with scarlet lamps burning under them, and too many damask curtains. Caradoc was sitting in the middle of this profusion, in the process of being interviewed by a local newspaper man. Mrs Evans was also present, looking like an ex-actress, or what I thought an ex-actress would look like; that is, her face was very much made up, she wore unusual and highly coloured clothing and a good deal of conspicuous jewellery, including shoulder-length ear droppers. Her welcome to us, two complete strangers, was extremely cordial. I thought by the loudness and brusqueness of Caradoc's Cardiganshire English, and the violent pipe-brandishing, that he was quarrelling with his interviewer. I feel sure now that the truculence and the wrangling and the pontificating upon the absurdities of our

National Eisteddfod were no more than an act. He knew well from his own considerable experience of journalism that his outrageous remarks and behaviour were good copy and good publicity for himself. Soon after our arrival the reporter departed and Caradoc's manner changed immediately, and he turned upon us the full blaze of his blarneying charm. His courtesy, simplicity and gentle manners have been remarked upon by many who knew him. He was not by any means a good-looking man. He had a large, ill-shaped nose and a too-long upper lip, and his face was at once very bony and flabby, with thin hanging skin. His lower lip pouted, and the hood-like lids, which he often slid forward and held down over his eyes, were of reptilian thinness. Mrs Evans talks in one of her books about his 'shaggy goat's hair', and that is a perfect description of the coarse, wiry, dirty-grey covering rising thick and upright on top of his head. In conversation he was a great encourager, a concentrated and smiling listener, an enthusiastic nodder and agree-er. And of course to a young and inexperienced writer like myself—I cannot speak for Dylan—much of his fascination was his familiarity with the literary life of the capital,¹ his references to people like Norman Douglas, Mary Webb and Arthur Machen, whom he had known in Fleet Street. I recall little of our conversation apart from the goodwill of it. A few months later, early in 1935, having seen a story of mine in print, he wrote to tell me how much he had enjoyed it. After that I was prepared to listen very sympathetically to whatever was said in defence or praise of Caradoc and his work.

Caradoc's life began in 1878 at Pantycroy, a farm in Carmarthenshire, but his boyhood was spent in Rhydllewis in the next county, on a small farm called Lanlas-uchaf, to which the family had moved. The people of Cardiganshire, the Cardis, have in Wales a name for thrift, even meanness and parsimony, similar to the reputation of the Scots in England, and many stories are told, often by Cardis themselves, about what Caradoc calls their 'close-handedness'. Several tales are based on the allegation that the London water supply—pioneered incidentally by a Welshman, Sir Hugh Myddelton—is often unlawfully diverted by some of the numerous Cardigan dairymen of the capital into the metropolitan milk; and it is alleged that the wreath which appears annually on the Myddelton statue has been subscribed for by these same grateful tradesmen. One story says that the charge against a passer of dud cheques in Carmarthenshire stated that he had obtained credit by false pretences; when he crossed the county boundary and faced a similar accusation in Cardiganshire, the charge had to be reduced to *attempting* to obtain credit by false pretences. Many of Caradoc's short stories concern a peasant greed for money and possessions, but humour of this sort enters hardly at all into his treatment of this obsessive theme.

Caradoc's memories of his schooldays, his friends tell us, were painful, and embittered for many years by a deep sense of failure. But towards the end of his life he could depict his time in Rhydllewis elementary school like this.

'One of my schoolins² used to stand sadly in front of me, cut a bit of spanish, pop it into his mouth, scratch his back head,³ and say: "There will be whiskers on eggs before the twelve times in your head." He was short and slim and had whiskers all over his face and in his nostrils and ears, and he produced a child a year without outside help.

'Another was a whipper-snapper who claimed to be able to count with his eyes shut and sing louder than any other man in the district. He said if there was a twp⁴ more twp than me he would rather be Son Prodigal.

'Though I never brought home a certificate merit or moved higher than the second from the bottom of my class and the porridge in the bottomer's head was not done, I knew one thing: schoolins got their jobs because they were religious Independents and the Independents were stronger than the Methodists.'⁵

In spite of the teachers' alleged low opinion of him, Caradoc was invited to remain at school when his leaving time arrived, as a 'monitor' or apprentice school-teacher. Instead, like many youths of his time and situation, he left home to serve in a shop, in his case the Market Hall in Carmarthen town, a drapery store belonging to an uncle. He was fourteen at the time. Later, doing the same sort of job, he moved to Cardiff, and then at twenty-two he left Wales for London.⁶ The management of the Holborn drapers where, after a period in Kentish Town, he found work, handed him a four-page brochure of the house rules governing shop assistants in their employment who 'lived in'. Caradoc's comment on this production was that he found Moses's ten commandments hard enough to keep, and Wallis's two hundred had him 'whacked'. 'Whacked' meant eventually sacked. At the end of two years he got a more congenial job in the drapery department of Whiteley's 'the universal provider', at thirty-five pounds a year all found, 'living in' with about five hundred other men in a sort of civilian barracks. By this time Caradoc was beginning to feel a desperate need for privacy to read and write. While at Whiteley's he read Jerome K. Jerome and such books as Forster's *Life of Dickens* and Besant's *All Sorts and Conditions of Men*, but a cubicle shared with two or three other shop assistants made serious study impossible, and he determined to find a room for himself and live out. He got a job in an Oxford Street store and rented a room in Marylebone, in a street in which Trollope had once lived. He saved up ten pounds, applied for a job on a periodical called *Chat*, at three guineas a week, and got it, solely, he thought himself, because he turned up in his shop assistant's frock-coat and pin-striped trousers for the interview. Unfortunately *Chat*'s proprietor was an eccentric who used to burn the linoleum to keep the office warm, and before long his paper folded. But Caradoc was now a journalist, at twenty-six he had finished with his hated shop-keeping for good, and he became in turn a sub-editor on the *Daily Mirror*, an assistant to Sir John Hammerton in his work on the Harmsworth Encyclopaedia, editorial