

# Research

# Matters

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Edited by

**Peter Barry & Sarah Prescott**

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## Editorial

In this issue we catch up on recent departmental events, including two conferences, held in October and November, and a recent first book from one of our colleagues. We congratulate *Dr* Jen Sattaur on her recent successful PhD viva, and send best wishes to those whose vivas are forthcoming. Our next issue will contain commentary and analysis of RAE 2008 by a range of participants from Aberystwyth and beyond.

*RM* is an on-line research bulletin produced twice each semester in the English Department at Aberystwyth University. Each issue is sent as a *pdf*-attachment to staff and research postgraduates in English and is posted on the staff pages of the departmental Intranet.

We welcome unsolicited pieces from English colleagues (staff and postgraduate) both within and outside Aberystwyth, and we also invite both internal and external contributions on specific issues from time to time. *RM* is not a restricted document, and readers are welcome to copy it to anyone whom they think might be interested. Items should be sent as e-mail attachments to both editors:

[ptb@aber.ac.uk](mailto:ptb@aber.ac.uk) & [scp@aber.ac.uk](mailto:scp@aber.ac.uk)



*All best wishes for a Happy Christmas*

**Damaris Cudworth Masham  
(1658/9-1708)  
& her philosophical context  
(3<sup>RD</sup> October 2008)**

This one-day conference which was organized by Sarah Hutton was jointly sponsored by the British Society for the History of Philosophy and Institute of Philosophy, University of London (where it was held). The conference marked the 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth and 300<sup>th</sup> of the death of Lady Damaris Masham (née Cudworth), one of the first English women to publish philosophical writings. Until

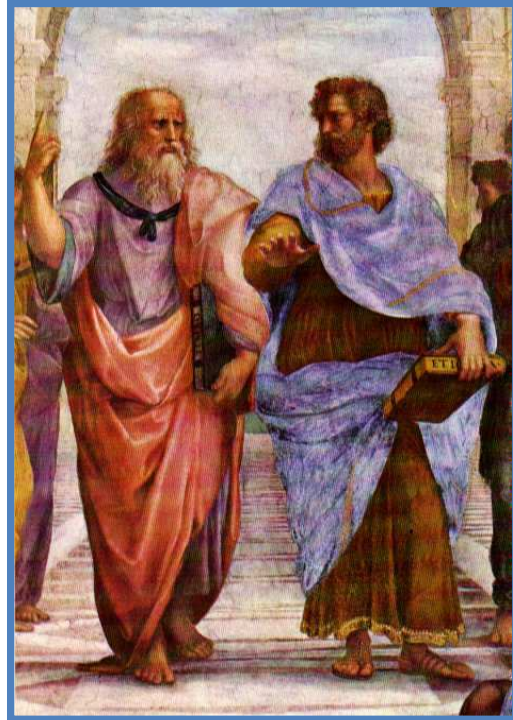


recently Lady Masham has come to notice chiefly in biographies of John Locke, of whom she was a close personal friend—probably his closest woman friend. But increasingly, she is now being recognized as a thinker and writer in her own right. The aim of the conference was to highlight some of the recent work about her.

The very fact that, as a woman, Damaris Masham was able to pursue an interest in philosophy, and to *publish* on philosophy makes her remarkable for her period. She was very much at the forefront of new ideas – two of the greatest philosophers of the age (Leibniz and Locke) had high regard for her. She was one of the first people to appreciate Locke's philosophy. She produced one of the first arguments for the education of women on ethical grounds. Interestingly, although in this respect she can be considered a feminist, she took issue with another more famous feminist of her time, Mary Astell. She also wrote poetry, including a series of pastoral love poems which she exchanged with Locke. (To have inspired Locke to write poetry was an achievement in itself –

he adopted the *nom de plume* Philander to her Philoclea). She also wrote a biography of Locke which is the source of the first printed biographies of him.

Papers at the conference dealt with her relations with Locke (Mark Goldie,



Cambridge), her educational interests (Luisa Simonutti, Milan), her correspondence with Leibniz (Justin Smith, Concordia), her Platonism (Sarah Hutton, Aberystwyth) and her critique of Malebranche (Pauline Phemister, Edinburgh). The conference closed with a roundtable discussion led by Letizia Panizza (RHUL) and Sylvana Tomaselli (Cambridge), which covered such topics as methodological issues in the study of historical women philosophers and Lady Masham's thoughts on education.

## **Sarah Hutton**

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**Sarah Hutton is Professor of English at Aberystwyth. Illustrations: (1) London University Senate House, venue of the conference, (2) Plato and Aristotle argue about reality (from Raphael's *The School of Athens*) - Plato points to heaven, Aristotle gestures towards the earth.**

# 'Reappraising Welsh Modernism'

**A One-Day Postgraduate Symposium in the Council Chamber, National Library of Wales, 14<sup>th</sup> November 2008**

**Organised by Alan Vaughan Jones**

This event was inspired by research undertaken, in April 2008, on the work of the Rhymney-born poet, prose writer (and former coal miner) Idris Davies. At that time, it became clear that Davies's distinctive inflections of Modernist techniques had received little critical attention, and further investigation brought with it awareness that the Welsh variant of literary Modernism had been consistently overlooked in orthodox narratives of literary history. However, it was also evident that recent years have witnessed exciting new developments. The

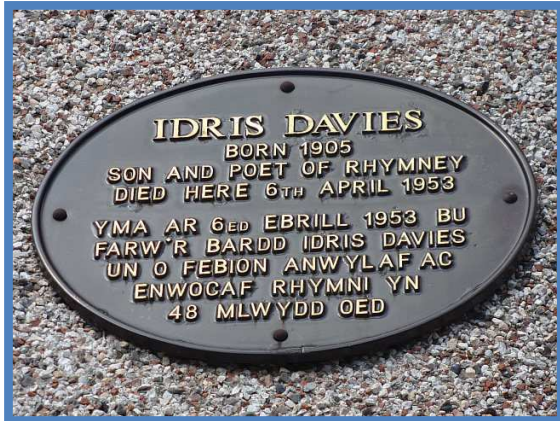


recognition that literary Modernism is a varied, culturally complex phenomenon has provided scope for examination of Welsh Modernist literature in English within a separate (if related) frame, and long-marginalised literary voices have recently acquired mainstream currency through republication. In the field of Welsh Writing in English, moreover, a reassessment is underway of Modernist aspects of canonical texts, and new theorisations of the subject have enabled encounters with Welsh Modernist writing which were once inconceivable. For all of

these reasons, an event that reappraised Welsh Modernist literature in English seemed both relevant and timely.

'Reappraising Welsh Modernism' sought to provide a forum for cutting-edge, recuperative research on the forgotten literary voices of Welsh Modernism. It also aimed to foreground and develop transferable research skills. The intention was to balance theoretical and practical approaches to Welsh Modernist literature in English, and the combination of academic papers and participatory workshops reflected this. A total of twenty-two delegates attended, and the gathering constituted a broad cross-section of Welsh HEIs. The Universities of Aberystwyth, Bangor, Cardiff and Swansea were all represented, and the mix of research backgrounds (English Literature, Creative Writing, Welsh Language and Literature, Irish Literature) made 'Reappraising Welsh Modernism' an occasion for dialogue across academic fields and disciplines. There was a healthy balance of senior academics, lecturers and research students (PhD and MA), and the presence of an individual with a general interest in the literature of Wales suggested that the symposium theme had a broad appeal.

The first speaker was **Ifor ap Dafydd (National Library of Wales)**. Ifor's presentation drew the audience's attention to resources on modern Welsh writers available at the Library, and combined factual information with a conceptual approach to literary archives and "the archive". The latter part of his talk was a critical interpretation of selected items from the Library's collections – items which were on display in the Council Chamber, the venue for the day's activities. A greater awareness was fostered of the wealth of archival resources available on our doorstep, which should open up fruitful avenues of research in due course. The talk was followed by my own



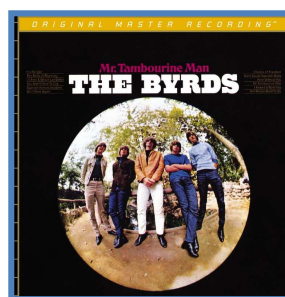
contribution to the morning programme, which sought to re-reflect the received image of Idris Davies in a tandem reading of two of his poetic sequences, *Gwalia Deserta* (1938) and ‘Gwalia My Song’ (published 1994).

The third paper lent a cosmopolitan flavour to the proceedings, and was delivered by **Laura Wainwright (Cardiff University)**. ‘Gwyn Thomas’s *Oscar* and European Expressionism’ explored the distinctive Modernist perspective of Thomas’s 1946 novella, and contended that his work is an arena where Modernism and Welsh working-class reality converge. Numerous parallels were identified between *Oscar* and European Expressionist visual art and literature, and texts discussed ranged from the stories of Kafka and the drama of Ramón del Valle-Inclán to the paintings of Max Beckmann, Otto Dix, Conrad Felixmüller and George Grosz. The paper was a fascinating demonstration of the way our reading of one type of ‘text’ can be enhanced through comparison with another, and the international dimension of Welsh Modernist literature was made manifest.

The Keynote Address was delivered by **Professor Patrick McGuinness (St Anne’s College, University of Oxford)**, editor of the republished poetry and prose of Lynette Roberts and a leading authority on this long-neglected ‘Latino-Welsh

modernist’.<sup>1</sup> Beginning with a survey of contemporary attempts to define her work, his thought-provoking talk attempted to locate her writing in relation to mainstream literary Modernism, and outlined the principle characteristics of her poetry and prose. The address encouraged the audience to reconsider orthodox narratives of the development of Modernism, and lively debate followed in the question and answer session.

Issues and ideas raised in the papers were developed and put into practice in the afternoon workshops. The first used poems by H.D. (Hilda Doolittle) and the Welsh artist and writer Brenda Chamberlain to explore the interrelated themes of ‘Gender, War [and the Legacies of?] Modernism’,



and delegates’ encounters with the texts were facilitated by **Dr Damian Walford Davies (Aberystwyth)**. The writers’ respective

ideological positions, their responses to history, and their positioning in relation to 1920s literary Modernism were discussed in detail, and the exercise of comparing and contrasting two female responses to war provided a useful corrective to enduring stereotypes of war writing as a male genre.

The second workshop shifted the emphasis from poetry to prose, and focused on Dylan Thomas’s short story ‘The Dress’ (1936). It was led jointly by myself and **Laura Wainwright**, and produced a group reading of the text based on the conceptual categories of Surrealism and Symbolism, the ‘Uncanny’ and the unconscious, the

<sup>1</sup> Nigel Wheale, ‘Lynette Roberts: Legend and Form in the 1940s’, *Critical Quarterly*, 36.2 (Summer 1994), 4-19 (p. 5).

latent and manifest, gender, and war. Parallels between Thomas's text and a 1936 painting by Salvador Dalí were also explored, and the exercise provided opportunities for delegates to engage with the interface between literature and the visual in a practical way.

'Reappraising Welsh Modernism' was a great success: feedback received on the day and subsequently suggested that delegates found it very enjoyable, and there was unanimous agreement that a similar event should be held in the future. The papers were well received, and the workshops were singled out by some for particular praise. The symposium's principle achievement was to bring Welsh Modernist writers and writing to the attention of students and academics outside this developing field, and it was especially pleasing that individuals unfamiliar with Welsh Modernism or Modernism as a genre had found the event 'very accessible' or 'very enlightening and educational'. Important, cross-disciplinary conversations were initiated, and it is to be hoped that they will continue.

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### **Alan Vaughan Jones**

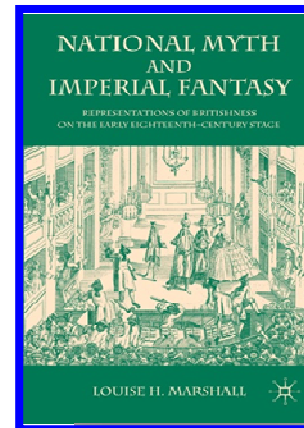
**Alan Vaughan Jones is a PhD student at Aberystwyth, working on Alun Lewis and Idris Davies**

**Illustrations: (1) The National Library of Wales, (2) Plaque to Idris Davies in Victoria Road, Rhymney (3) Cover of The Byrds debut album *Mr Tambourine Man* of 1965, containing a version of 'The Bells of Rhymney' by Idris Davies which became a 'Flower Power' anthem.**

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## **Recent Book from the English Department**



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**Louise Marshall's first book, *National Myth and Imperial Fantasy*, was published in November by Palgrave Macmillan (240pp, £45). Louise writes:**

Although eighteenth-century drama is often dismissed as stylistically homogenous, aesthetically uninteresting, and even politically complacent, *National Myth and Imperial Fantasy* reveals the intriguing and intricate nature of the period's history plays.

As a body of texts, these plays disclose the conflicts and concerns of contemporary political and private lives, creating, for modern readers, a picture of the period's instabilities. Through their often messy dramatisations of the complexities of patriotic rhetoric and national identification, they reflect a world of contrasts, where the shrinking globe gives rise to increasing commercial and imperial possibilities, and where fantasies and mythologies of Britishness vie to construct a cohesive image of the nation as a dominant colonial power.

Examining representations of the nation's imagined patriotic predecessors and historical enemies, both foreign and domestic, *National Myth and Imperial Fantasy* offers one of the first close readings of a series of lesser known yet historically vital dramas.