

Angharad Puw Davies
Swansea University

Mererid Puw Davies
University College London

The Silk Gown and the Scar:

An Introduction to the Life and Works of Elena Puw Morgan (1900-73)¹

Introduction

Elena Puw Morgan was a distinguished Welsh-language literary author, primarily of the inter-war period.² For a comparatively short time in the 1930s and early 1940s, she wrote prolifically in a number of forms, from children's stories to hard-hitting historical novels for adults. Morgan's audacious focus on the complex, fraught lives of women and girls in poverty, and her compassionate evocations of traditionally taboo issues which affected them, is remarkable even by today's standards. At the time her novels were published, they were nothing less than ground-breaking.

Morgan's achievements included winning a number of highly prestigious National Eisteddfod awards for literature, foremost among them the Literary Medal in 1938. Her last two novels, *Y Wisg Sidan* [*The Silk Gown*] (1939) and *Y Graith* [*The Scar*] (1943), in which her literary voice was gaining real maturity, are classics of modern Welsh literature.³ Indeed, critic Llion Wigley has recently noted 'fe ellir dadlau [...] mai [...] *Y Graith* [...] yw nofel seicolegol Gymraeg fwyaf grymus a chymhleth y cyfnod' ['it can be argued [...] that] [...] *Y Graith* is the period's most powerful and complex psychological novel'.⁴ Alongside her contemporary critical success, Morgan's popular appeal was strong. Her three novels for adults went into several editions, most recently in 2018, when the earliest of them, *Nansi Lovell: Hunangofiant Hen Sipsi* [*Nansi Lovell: Memoirs of an Old Gipsy*] (1933) appeared in the series Clasuron/Classics of Gwasg Honno/Honno Press. The novels were also adapted for radio in the 1970s and 1980s, and for television at the turn of the twentieth century.

Yet after the early 1940s, Morgan wrote very little. Partly as a result, her *oeuvre* is not widely known today, and scholarship has yet to explore her work in detail. With this context in mind, this article, to its authors' knowledge the first of its kind in English, presents Morgan and her work to a new readership. On one hand, it introduces Morgan's life and major works in the context of her times. It

¹ Large parts of this article are translated from, or based on, Angharad Puw Davies and Mererid Puw Davies, 'Rhagair' ['Foreword'] in Elena Puw Morgan, *Nansi Lovell: Hunangofiant Hen Sipsi* [*Nansi Lovell: Memoirs of an Old Gipsy*] (Dinas Powys: Honno, 2018), pp. 9-25. The authors, Morgan's granddaughters, thank Gwasg Honno/Honno Press for kind permission to reuse this material, translated by Mererid Puw Davies, including quotations, which unless otherwise indicated are originally in Welsh. Copies of this new edition of *Nansi Lovell* are available from www.honno.co.uk and all good bookshops.

² Morgan's first novel for adults, *Nansi Lovell: Hunangofiant Hen Sipsi* (Aberystwyth: Gwasg Aberystwyth, 1933) was first published under the name Elena Puw-Davies. This hyphenation is unique, for the author was otherwise always known as Elena Puw Davies, or, after marriage, Elena Puw Morgan. This article uses the latter name, since it was thus that she was best known.

³ Elena Puw Morgan, *Y Wisg Sidan* (Denbigh: Clwb Llyfrau Cymreig, 1939); *Y Graith* (Aberystwyth: Clwb Llyfrau Cymreig, 1943). According to a later edition of *Y Graith* (Llandysul: Gomer, 1999), it first appeared in 1942, but that note does not map with information in the first edition itself.

⁴ Llion Wigley, *Yr Anymwybod Cymreig: Freud, Dirfodaeth a'r Seice Cenedlaethol* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2019), p. 53.

considers, too, reasons for the untimely end of her literary production. On the other hand, this essay offers a further critical analysis of Morgan's limited posterity. Thus, it lays a foundation for future readings. At the same time, this study casts light on wider issues of canon formation, particularly in relation to gender; responses to Modernity in mid-century Welsh literature; and the need for a plural, inclusive understanding of the era's Modernisms.

Morgan's Biography

Morgan was born in Corwen, Merionethshire (now Denbighshire), in 1900.⁵ She was raised in Islwyn, the manse of Bethesda Congregationalist Chapel where her father was minister. Morgan spent her married life in Anedd Wen, Corwen and later, as a widow and invalid, she lived with her daughter and family in Shrewsbury. At that time too, when her health permitted, Morgan spent time at Victoria House, Llanfair Caereinion in Montgomeryshire (present-day Powys), the former home of her late husband's brother and sister, where she maintained for a time their family business, a traditional tailor's and outfitter's. In 1973, Morgan's friend, the well-known author Dyddgu Owen (1906-1992), wrote of her later years and illness in a perceptive and affectionate memorial essay:

[p]an glywais ei bod yn yr ysbyty yng Ngobowen doedd o'n syndod yn y byd gennyf fod y cleifion yno yn edmygu ei ffordd ddewr o frwydro yn erbyn ei hafiechyd, ac, [sic] yn rhyfeddu at ei chymeriad ac at ei hwyl heintus a oedd yn ddigon i godi calon pawb o'i chwmpas.

[When I heard that she was in hospital in Gobowen, I was not in the least surprised to learn that her fellow-patients admired her brave battle against her illness and were amazed by her personality and infectiously lively attitude, which lifted the spirits of all around her.]⁶

Morgan died in Shrewsbury in 1973.

Morgan's childhood was profoundly religious, and it is difficult to overstate the impact of traditional Nonconformist, specifically Congregationalist, culture on her upbringing. Reading for pleasure was not permitted on Sundays.⁷ Morgan would later tell, too, how she was reprimanded for daring merely to look over a wall at a travelling fair which had set up in Corwen. To venture any nearer to such a worldly event would have been unthinkable for a Nonconformist minister's daughter. Nonetheless, Islwyn was a loving and cultured home, as the dedications to *Y Wisg Sidan* and *Y Graith* testify. The former is to her father, the Reverend Lewis Davies 'a roes i mi'r ysbrydiaeth i'w hysgrifennu' ['who inspired me to write it']. The latter is to her mother Kate Davies 'mewn diolchgarwch am gartref mor annhebyg i'r Llechwedd' ['in gratitude for a home so different to Y Llechwedd']. Y Llechwedd, here, is the abusive childhood home of the novel's protagonist.⁸

⁵ A reliable outline of Morgan's biography, based partly on information and records provided by Morgan's daughter and later editor, Catrin Puw Davies, alongside general discussion of her major works, is in Marian Elis, 'Elena Puw Morgan', *Taliesin* 53 (Hydref 1985), pp. 61-68; see, likewise, the more detailed study by Marian Tomos, 'Bywyd a Gwaith Elena Puw Morgan 1900-1973' ['Life and Works of Elena Puw Morgan 1900-1973'] (unpublished MA dissertation, University College of North Wales Bangor, 1980). See also R.M. Morgan, *Llenyddiaeth Gymraeg 1902-1936 [Welsh Literature 1902-1936]* ([Caernarfon]: Cyhoeddiadau Barddas, 1987), pp. 477-85. Further page references follow in the text.

⁶ Dyddgu Owen, 'Roedd ei chymeriadau'n fyw' ['Her characters were alive'], *Y Cymro [The Welshman]*, 30 Awst 1973, p. 5; quoted also in Tomos, p. 4.

⁷ Tomos, p. 5.

⁸ Morgan, *Y Wisg Sidan* (Denbigh: Clwb Llyfrau Cymreig, 1939), no p.; *Y Graith* (Aberystwyth: Clwb Llyfrau Cymreig, 1943), no p.. According to a later edition of *Y Graith* (Llandysul: Gomer, 1999), the novel first appeared in 1942, but that note does not map with the information in the first edition itself.

Morgan's parents were intensely protective of her as their only surviving child, in part no doubt because their son, Dewi Iwan, born two years before his sister, had died before his first birthday. Lewis Davies was extremely well-read, including in the Greek classics, which were the source of his daughter's first name Elena, a highly unusual choice at the time. Lewis Davies was a bibliophile and, like many ministers of religion, a skilled bookbinder who made fine bindings for the works in his extensive collection. It is said that he spent his first salary on a large, handsome set of bookshelves, which were treasured in the family home for over a century afterwards. However, Lewis Davies had been brought up in abject poverty, on the smallholding of Pen Lôn Dywyll near Beulah in rural Cardiganshire. He was one of twelve children who lost both parents to tuberculosis when the eldest, a girl, was just twelve years old. She brought up her all her younger siblings on the parish, and while she was reputed to have become a formidably severe adult, she must have suffered hardships which are barely imaginable today.

Consequently, while Morgan herself never lived in the extreme poverty which is depicted in her major literary works, she was certainly aware of it in her own father's background, and that of many contemporaries. She would have seen the rural hardship of his childhood on family visits to Cardiganshire also. Owen noted in 1973 that she was fascinated by the author's ability in *Y Graith*:

i grisialu'r cyfnod garw hwnnw a oedd yn gefndir mor nodweddiadol i blentyndod fy nghenedlaeth i. [...] Mae'r awdur wedi rhwydo a chrisialu'r cyfnod yma [...] am byth. Fel yna yn union yr oedd hi ym Mhowys [...] yn f'amser i, ond mai gwraig y Mistar ac nid gwraig y Person oedd yn dod i mewn [i'r ysgol] i'n dysgu i wnio.

[to crystallise those harsh times which were the distinctive backdrop to my generation's childhoods. [...] [Morgan] has captured and crystallised that period [...] for all time. That's exactly how it was in Powys [...] in my day, except that it was the Master's wife, not the Parson's, who came in [to school] to teach us sewing].⁹

In addition, when Morgan was later asked about the sources of her literary insights into rural poverty, she would allude to her awareness of the harsh conditions which were often prevalent in the countryside outside Corwen.

By contrast, Morgan's mother Kate Davies (née Ellis), had enjoyed a different, far more comfortable upbringing on Brithdir farm, Maerdy, near Corwen. On her father's side, Kate Davies was descended from the Ellises of Llangwm. Kate Davies's mother Catherine Ellis was born into the gentry, as a Miss Pugh of Rhiw Goch, Trawsfynydd, and had eloped through the kitchen window of the family seat to marry for love, against her family's wishes.¹⁰ That event became in time a source of lively, affectionate family anecdote; yet a related awareness of past conflict and estrangement, too, may have flowed into Morgan's literary narratives of painful intergenerational crisis. Another of Morgan's great themes is that of family legacies of many kinds, including the psychological. Observation of her own parents' contrasting family stories, while very different from those in the novels, may have played a part in the development of this interest.

Morgan missed a great deal of formal schooling, reportedly due to poor health, although it is unclear today what condition or conditions may have affected her. Over-protectiveness, on her father's part in particular, may have been partly responsible for the ways in which she was sheltered. Consequently, Lewis Davies's gifted daughter never had the opportunity to attend college or access higher education, a loss which she felt keenly throughout her life. This context helps to illuminate the important connections which Morgan's novels make between womens' and girls' literacy, and their well-being and agency. And as was the norm at the time, when she did attend school, Morgan

⁹ Owen, p. 5.

¹⁰ The family name Puw was derived from this connection.

never received Welsh lessons, and later feared that her written Welsh was of poor quality. This concern seems astonishing today in light of the richness and exquisite accuracy of Morgan's writing, which proves also to be a real trove of traditional lexis, syntax and idiom.

All the same, from childhood onwards, and with her parents' full support, Morgan, to all intents and purposes an autodidact, read widely and deeply in Welsh and English.¹¹ She maintained this practice throughout her life, and so was deeply versed in all kinds of classic, modern, and Modernist, thinking and writing.¹² As an adult, Morgan was involved in important literary and social institutions, and attended evening classes run by the Workers' Education Association (WEA), which addressed challenging issues in contemporary thought and literature.¹³ Throughout her adulthood then, Morgan participated in the vivid, outward-looking intellectual life of mid-century Wales.

Morgan was married in 1931, comparatively late by the standards of the time, to John Morgan. John Morgan was a tailor, originally from Y Foel in Montgomeryshire, who had led a colourful life before settling in Corwen. He served an apprenticeship as a tailor in Manchester before moving to Glasgow. In the days of Red Clydeside, John Morgan was active in the early Labour movement and in the founding of a dockworkers' union. Indeed, he was close to being a lifelong Communist in all but name. On returning to Wales, John Morgan remained active in the Labour Party and even stood as its parliamentary candidate, although he had no prospect of election as a representative of such a new-fangled party in rural Wales. By the time of his marriage, John Morgan was co-owner, with his business partner William Davies, of Siop Treferwyn, a successful tailor's and outfitter's in Corwen, which had at one time a branch in Llangollen as well.¹⁴ John Morgan was a prominent figure in the local community: he was Secretary to Bethesda Chapel, Corwen for many years, and to the Literature Committee of the National Eisteddfod at Corwen in 1919. He served also as Chairman of the Pwyllgor Gwaith [Executive Committee], of the first-ever Urdd National Eisteddfod, or Youth Eisteddfod, which was held in Corwen Pavilion in 1929.¹⁵

John Morgan was over twenty-five years older than his wife. It was said that they had held one another in affection for many years, but that John had waited before making a proposal, in the belief that Elena should be free to marry someone of her own age. They took the train from Corwen to Llangollen to be married, telling no-one in advance but Lewis and Kate Davies, and the marriage was witnessed by two passers-by recruited from the street outside. This unorthodox wedding, as well as the couple's age gap, was no doubt quite the talking point in town, but the happiness of the Morgans' marriage and home became proverbial in Corwen. It is likely that the couple differed only on politics, for Elena Puw Morgan was an early supporter of Plaid Genedlaethol Cymru, now Plaid Cymru, founded in 1925. This interest too in the newest politics of the time reflects Morgan's engagement with current affairs and thought.

The couple had one child, Catrin Puw Morgan (Catrin Puw Davies after her marriage), who was born in 1933. Catrin Puw Davies recalled a lively, intellectually active home, where local writers and poets would assemble regularly to discuss literary matters. Poets would call, too, in order to ask John Morgan to check their *cynganedd*, or strict metre verses. While he did not write poetry himself, he was a noted authority on the form's most complex rules.¹⁶ Indeed, John Morgan's granddaughter

¹¹ Cf Elis, p. 61.

¹² As Wigley's recent monograph shows, the era's rich periodical culture, familiar to Morgan, reflected intensively on cutting-edge Welsh and continental thought, for example psychoanalysis and existentialism.

¹³ Wigley, p. 55.

¹⁴ Morgan is commemorated by a plaque on the exterior of the former Siop Treferwyn, Corwen, now occupied by Caffi Treferwyn.

¹⁵ Tomos, p. 10.

¹⁶ John Morgan's brother Rob was a locally successful poet who won chairs for poetry. He too was a tailor and with his sister Catrin kept Victoria House tailor's and outfitter's in Bridge Street, Llanfair Caereinion.

was told an anecdote about a customer making his way to Siop Treferwyn one day, only to find it packed to the rafters with poets and their apprentices intensely debating some arcane point of strict metre. After a lengthy wait for attention, he asked, in satirical tones, whether he would be best advised to leave and return some other time to make his purchase. 'Ie wir, buasai hynny'n eithaf peth' ['Yes indeed, that would be a fine thing'], replied John Morgan with no trace of irony, his mind fully absorbed by poetics.¹⁷

Elena Puw Morgan was a lifelong, faithful member of Bethesda Chapel. It is likely that this background, paired with a powerful sense of service, social justice and responsibility, prompted her to become a Justice of the Peace in Corwen. Amongst other things, that role meant that her name appeared above the door of all the licensed premises in the area, often noted as a great incongruity given Morgan's deeply-felt commitment to Temperance. However, Morgan was by no means conventional in her outlook. While she was a gentle, modest and extremely shy woman, she was known for her kindness and inclusive interests and relationships. She counted among her friends and acquaintances some of the era's acclaimed intellectuals and artists, as well some of the most marginalised people in her community.

A friend and regular visitor at Morgan's home was the eccentric and controversial author John Cowper Powys (1872-1963). After years lecturing in the USA, he came with his partner Phyllis Playter to live a bohemian life near Corwen from 1935 onwards. Powys was at that time married to another woman who was still living, and described himself as an anarchist. Not all of Corwen's respectable burghers would have chosen to keep such unusual company. Powys enjoyed long literary discussions with the Morgans and learned to read Welsh in part due to their help and support. His novel *Owen Glendower* (1941), written during this period, contains numerous references to the legends of the Mabinogi. In a handwritten dedication in one of his books, given to John Morgan as a gift, Powys wrote (in English): 'To my Master Bard John Morgan, from his respectful and affectionate pupil of mabinog'. Another of the Morgans' friends was the poet John Redwood Anderson (1883-1964), who had retired to the area. Elena Puw Morgan also knew the distinguished linguist and expert in Welsh Romani philology John Sampson, who visited the area around her maternal grandmother's home near Betws Gwerful Goch in the course of his research. She accompanied him in his fieldwork and in 1931 attended his funeral, which was conducted in full accordance with Romani custom.¹⁸

At the same time, Elena Puw Morgan knew many Welsh-speaking writers and intellectuals. Amongst them was the prominent historian, poet and co-founder of St Fagan's National History Museum, Iorwerth C. Peate (1901-1982), whom she introduced in turn to Powys.¹⁹ As a teenager, Morgan corresponded with her older first cousin David Ellis of Penyfed (1893-1918), who came to tragic, posthumous fame as an emergent, bright poetic talent claimed by the Great War. Today, Ellis is commonly known in Welsh as 'y bardd a gollwyd' ['the lost poet'].²⁰ Later in life, Morgan exchanged letters with her friend, novelist Moelona (Elizabeth Mary Jones, 1877-1953). Morgan and Moelona kept one another company at the Gorsedd of the Bards, the prestigious Welsh literary and artistic order to which Morgan had been elected to the highest rank of Druid. In June 1951, in advance of a meeting of the Gorsedd, Moelona wrote to Morgan to ask, 'Wel, a ydych yn dod i Aberystwyth

¹⁷ This anecdote is disputed, in that Catrin Puw Davies averred that she had never heard it and that it was at odds with her father's well-known courtesy. A detailed variant, set in 1940 and communicated by prominent poet W.D. Williams, is recorded by Tomos, p. 9, suggesting that it had plausibility and currency in local culture.

¹⁸ Tomos, p. 12, p. 18.

¹⁹ Peate writes of this introduction by the Morgans as the start of a long friendship and correspondence, in his foreword to *John Cowper Powys: Letters, 1937-1954* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1974), ed. by Peate, p. ix; quoted in Wigley, p. 131, n. 69.

²⁰ See Alan Llwyd and Elwyn Edwards, *David Ellis: Y Bardd a Gollwyd [David Ellis: The Lost Poet]* (Felindre, Abertawe: Cyhoeddiadau Barddas, 1992), p. 109, which quotes a letter of Morgan's to her cousin, debating a poem by Cynan which had appeared in the newspaper *Y Cymro* in 1918.

ddydd Mercher? Rwy'n mawr obeithio eich bod, neu ni bydd Derwydd arall o wraig ond myfi' ['Well, are you coming to Aberystwyth on Wednesday? I very much hope so, or I'll be the only woman Druid present'.]²¹ Morgan was also a friend of the celebrated prose writer and minister of religion, E. Tegla Davies (1880-1967). Kate Roberts (1891-1985) was another high-profile literary acquaintance, who, like Owen, wrote a memorial essay on Morgan's death.²²

Frequent, but very different visitors to the kitchen at Annedd Wen were itinerants or 'tramps' as they were then known. These men would travel the area with their few possessions in search of occasional work or shelter. Morgan's door was always open to them, and she would provide them with food, clothes and conversation, listening to their tales. It was only later that Morgan's daughter Catrin discovered that this travelling community had its own secret media, patteran-like messages of sticks and stones left outside properties where its members might receive support. This welcome accorded to travellers resonates with the recollections of Morgan's family and friends of her caring nature, and connection with the socially excluded.

Morgan's first novel for adults, *Nansi Lovell: Hunangofiant Hen Sipsi*, shows that she was particularly interested in Romani, or Kale, history and culture. The most prominent Roma group in North Wales in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was known as Teulu Abram Wood ['the Abram Wood family'] or 'yr Hen Deulu' ['the Old Family'], and had strong historical links to the former counties of Merionethshire, Denbighshire and Montgomeryshire. The group traditionally travelled in the Corwen area and local people knew them and their stories well.²³ In Sampson's company, Morgan knew and visited 'yr Hen Deulu', and learned about their culture and way of life, an extremely unusual acquaintanceship for a middle-class, chapel lady from Corwen.²⁴

Nansi Lovell therefore has roots in the presence of the Roma in the Corwen area, and Morgan's familiarity with them. Many descriptions of Roma life in *Nansi Lovell* dovetail with historical records of the time.²⁵ For example, the eponymous protagonist notes her family's use of tents made from blankets rather than caravans, and the custom of overwintering in barns or cottages, with the owners' permission. She describes too the musical talents of 'yr Hen Deulu', the influential figure of the *phuri dai*, or 'old lady', matriarchal aspects in the family structure, and complex traditions and rituals relating to cleanliness, death and mourning. The novel is shot through with Romani vocabulary, and includes a short glossary for readers. Morgan was inspired also by the era's scholarly, cultural and popular interest in Romani history, culture and language.²⁶ From the nineteenth century on, this field had come to readers' attention through the work of linguists like Sampson, as well as such popular writers as George Borrow whose works were likely known to

²¹ Personal correspondence, family collection.

²² Owen, p. 5; Kate Roberts, 'Marw Nofelydd' ['Death of a Novelist'], *Y Faner* [*The Banner*] 31 August 1973, p. 1. This tribute to Morgan following her death headed the front page of national paper *Y Faner*, as did the announcement the previous week of Morgan's passing, under the same headline, *Y Faner* 24 August 1973, p. 1.

²³ See Eldra Jarman and A.O.H. Jarman, *Y Sipsiwn Cymreig* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1979), trans. and expanded by the authors as *The Welsh Gypsies: Children of Abram Wood* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1991).

²⁴ Tomos, p. 12.

²⁵ Cf Jarman and Jarman.

²⁶ Cf H. Francis Jones and the bibliographies in Jarman and Jarman. Typical contemporary examples of this artistic interest are e.g. the image 'Y Sipsi' ['The Gypsy'] by Llew. E. Morgan, in a volume to which Morgan herself contributed, *Y Llinyn Arian: I Gyfarch Urdd Gobaith Cymru* [*The Silver Thread: In Honour of Urdd Gobaith Cymru*], ed. by Evan D. Jones, R.L. Gapper, Thomas Jones, D. Myrddin Lloyd and William Williams (Aberystwyth: Urdd Gobaith Cymru, 1947), p. 52; and the 1949 woodcut by John Petts reproduced on the cover of the 2018 Clasuron Honno edition of *Nansi Lovell*.

Morgan.²⁷ Thus, if her upbringing and socialisation were in some senses restricted, her horizons and social circles as an adult were anything but parochial.

A '[lasting] place in our literature': Morgan's Literary Career

Morgan began her literary career by writing for children. According to scholar Marian Elis, she published sixteen short stories for children in periodicals like *Cymru'r Plant* [*Children's Wales*, a long-running magazine for children founded in 1892], national newspapers *Y Cymro* [*The Welshman*] and *Y Faner* [*The Banner*], the local, Bala-based newspaper, *Y Seren* [*The Star*] and the Congregationalist paper *Y Tyst* [*The Witness*].²⁸ Morgan also contributed the story 'Anrheg Neifion' ['Neptune's Gift'] to the literary anthology *Y Llinyn Arian* [*The Silver Thread*] (1947) which marked the twenty-fifth year of the influential organisation Urdd Gobaith Cymru [Welsh League of Youth].²⁹

Morgan's first book, which she published as Elena Puw Davies, was a novel for children, published by the London Missionary Society. It was titled *Angel y Llongau Hedd* [*The Angel of the Peace Ships*] (1931), about nineteenth-century Congregationalist missionary John Williams.³⁰ Her second book for children, *Tan y Castell: Stori o Ddyddiau Brwydrau Siarl a Cromwell yn Sir Benfro* [*Below the Castle: A Story from the Days of the Battles of Charles I and Cromwell in Pembrokeshire*] was awarded the prize for a children's novel at the National Eisteddfod in Llanelli in 1930. It was published in 1936.³¹ Another children's book, *Bwthyn Bach Llwyd y Wig* [*The Little Grey Woodland Cottage*], about a little girl's relationship with the natural world, won the same competition at the National Eisteddfod in Fishguard in 1936.³² A publication was to follow, but it was ultimately prevented by the advent of the Second World War, and an ensuing scarcity of resources for producing illustrated books like the one planned.³³ Indeed, the fact that the proposed book was to be illustrated: illustrations would have been a costly addition to its production costs, so this plan underlines the publisher's anticipation of the book's value and popularity.

Morgan's first novel for adults, the short *Nansi Lovell*, won a prize at the National Eisteddfod in Holyhead in 1927, and was published in 1933. The success of this work is evidenced by the fact that it went into new editions, in 1934, 1938 and 2018. In *Nansi Lovell*, the eponymous protagonist in old age writes her life story for her granddaughter, the young lady Nansi Wyn, to read one day. Nansi Lovell is the powerful and wealthy head of her family, and lives according to the old Romani ways. By contrast, Nansi Wyn lives in a mansion, and knows nothing at all of her antecedents. The novel gradually discloses how this extraordinary state of affairs came about.

Nansi Lovell contains in nascent form the themes and preoccupations of Morgan's two slightly later, and much darker novels, on which her reputation principally rests today. At the National Eisteddfod at Fishguard (1936), *Y Wisg Sidan* was awarded the prestigious prize for best novel, and it was

²⁷ Beyond Sampson's, it cannot be confirmed which of these works Morgan knew, since the libraries of Islwyn and Annedd Wen are now dispersed. However, Borrow's works, for example, are fully in keeping with her interests and those of her family. Morgan may also have known M. Eileen Lyster, *The Gypsy Life of Betsy Wood* (London and Toronto: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1926), a biography in novelistic style of a historical North Welsh Romani woman. Well-known in its day, the book alludes to Corwen and shares themes with both *Nansi Lovell* and the work of Jarman and Jarman.

²⁸ Elis, p. 63; cf R.M. Jones, p. 478.

²⁹ Elena Puw Morgan, 'Anrheg Neifion', in Jones, Gapper, Jones, Lloyd and Williams, pp. 37-42.

³⁰ Elena Puw Davies, *Angel y Llongau Hedd* (London: Cymdeithas Genhadol Llundain, 1931).

³¹ Elena Puw Davies, *Tan y Castell: Stori o Ddyddiau Brwydrau Siarl a Cromwell yn Sir Benfro* (Aberystwyth: Gwasg Aberystwyth, 1937). Elis, p. 63.

³² R.M. Jones, p. 478.

³³ Cf Elis, p. 63.

published in 1939. Here, some time in the second half of the nineteenth century, the orphaned protagonist Mali Meredur grows up in extreme poverty and emotional destitution with her abusive, controlling older brother. At the start of the narrative, she is in her teens, and has never known care, friendship or education. It is hinted, too, that Mali has what we would recognise today as learning difficulties or disabilities. The only thing in her life which gives her joy is the fine silk gown of the title, the sole legacy of her late mother, who had it as a hand-me-down from a mistress when she was in domestic service long before. Mali's attachment to and fascination with the gown have shocking consequences, which the novel tracks through to her old age.

Morgan's last novel, *Y Graith*, received the era's highest accolade for contemporary narrative fiction, the Prose Medal at the National Eisteddfod in Cardiff in 1938. This was only the second time that medal had been awarded, and at the time, it was awarded only triennially, for the best prose work of the three years in question. Morgan was to remain the only woman laureate until the award of the medal to Rhiannon Davies Jones (1921-2014) in 1960. The judge was the distinguished writer and autobiographer D.J. Williams, who wrote in his adjudication:

Dyma nofel y cefais hyfrydwch gwirioneddol wrth ei darllen o'r dechrau i'r diwedd. Yma ceir meistr y gelfyddyd yn trin ei ddefnyddiau yn hamddenol ac i bwrpas. [...] Fe'i hysgrifennwyd mewn arddull wych, ac y mae'n gyfoethog mewn geiriau a themau gwerin y talai wneuthur geirfa fechan ohonynt. [...] yr wyf o'r farn fod y gwaith hwn yn gyfraniad pwysig i fyd y nofel yng Nghymru, ac y bydd iddo le arhosol yn ein llenyddiaeth.

[This is a novel which afforded me true delight from beginning to end. Here, a master of his art is working with his materials with composure and purpose. [...] [The novel] is written in an excellent style, and it is rich in vocabulary and rural terminology which would form a rewarding little glossary. [...] I am of the view that this work is an important contribution to the world of the Welsh novel and that its place in our literature will be a lasting one.]³⁴

Despite the war, *Y Graith* was published in 1943.

Y Graith, like its predecessors, is a historical novel which follows the life of a young girl, Dori Llwyd. Here, the historical span is slightly more specific than in *Y Wisg Sidan*, beginning in the later nineteenth century and ending in the present day, that is, the 1930s. Like Mali, Dori grows up in great economic hardship. However, that material struggle pales in significance alongside the physical and emotional abuse she suffers at the hands of her mother. While Dori leads a very different life from Mali's, she too is haunted in adulthood by her childhood experience, as the novel's title suggests. The novel is interested also in the dizzying pace of social modernisation and change in the period in question, and its complex consequences for Dori and her family.

Morgan continued to publish short pieces sporadically into the late 1950s, and wrote an obituary for Powys as late as 1963.³⁵ However, her main creative period fell in the years 1931-43. These were key years in her personal life, too, for she married in 1931, and her daughter was born in 1933. These circumstances no doubt fuelled Morgan's interest in writing for children, especially girls. Her prolific work in those twelve years is remarkable, especially given the demands, and the happiness, of life with a young family, and so demonstrates her determined and exceptional commitment to writing. It is therefore all the more striking that Morgan produced no major works after *Y Graith* in 1943.

³⁴ D.J. Williams, 'Nofel, heb fod dros 50,000 o eiriau – yn darlunio'r cyfnewidiadau diweddar ym mywyd Cymru. [...] Beirniadaeth Mr. D.J. Williams' ['A novel, not exceeding 50,000 words in length – depicting the recent changes in Welsh life. [...] Mr D.J. Williams's adjudication', *Eisteddfod Genedlaethol Caerdydd 1938: Barddoniaeth a Beirniadaethau [Cardiff National Eisteddfod 1938: Poems and Adjudications]*, ed. by W.J. Gruffudd and G.J. Williams (no pl.: Cyngor yr Eisteddfod Genedlaethol, 1938), pp. 130-4, p. 134.

³⁵ Tomos, p. 75.

Owen recalled, on reading Morgan's novels,

gobeithio fod gennym ferch o nofelydd fyddai'n [d]atblygu'n George Eliot neu'n Charlotte Bronte [sic] [...] gan mai cynnyrch Eisteddfod oedd y nofelau, teg oedd casglu mai bwrw prentisiaeth oedd eu hawdur. [...] pe buasai wedi dal ati byddai gennym heddiw nofelydd o fri.

[hoping that we had in her a woman novelist who would become a George Eliot or Charlotte Bronte [sic] [...] since the novels were products of Eisteddfod competition, it is fair to assume that here, the author was serving her apprenticeship. [...] Whatever the reason [for the end of Morgan's writing career], it is our loss. [...] had she continued [to write], we would have in her a novelist of the greatest stature.]³⁶

In Elis's words, '[y]n Elena Puw Morgan gwelodd Cymru egin nofelwraig fawr a fyddai wedi tyfu'n ddylanwad aruthrol ar lenyddiaeth ein gwlad pe bai wedi datblygu i'w lawn dwf (t. 66)' ['in Elena Puw Morgan, Wales saw the green shots of a great novelist who would have been a tremendous influence on our literature, had she attained her full development.'] (p. 66). Elis writes too, '[b]u'r golled i lenyddiaeth Gymraeg yn enfawr.' ['the loss to Welsh literature is tremendous.'] (p. 61) And novelist Sioned Lleinau Jones noted in 1995 of the premature conclusion to Morgan's work, '[d]iau i'r golled o'r herwydd fod yn un fawr' ['there is no doubt that this was a great loss'].³⁷

The main phase of Morgan's writing career ended more or less before her fortieth birthday for two key reasons. The first of these was domestic responsibility, despite the fact that John Morgan was actively supportive of his wife's literary enterprise.³⁸ Morgan cared for her parents, who lived at Annedd Wen in old age, her uncle, her aunt and then her husband John, who lived with poor health until the age of ninety. Morgan also cared for Tomi (Thomas), the former farmhand at her aunt's and uncle's property at Brithdir, who came to join the family as an elderly man. Brithdir was the childhood home of Morgan's mother Kate Davies and her sister Margaret Roberts (née Ellis).³⁹ Margaret Roberts lived at Brithdir with her husband Seth Roberts, and when she passed away as a widow in the mid-1940s, Tomi, as a bachelor, according to the rural custom, went to live with the remaining family at Annedd Wen. Morgan's dedication to each of these members of her household was unflinching. Soon after John Morgan's death, she herself was badly afflicted by a rheumatic condition. This illness was the cause of Morgan's long periods of hospitalisation at Gobowen as described by Owen, and she was severely unwell for many years, until her death in 1973.

The second reason Morgan withdrew from writing had to do with her own retiring character and diffidence with regard to her own capabilities. Her awareness that she had never received much formal education, let alone had the opportunity to complete it, played a significant part too. As Elis notes, Morgan usually wrote and published in response to invitations and commissions from editors and publishers, or Eisteddfod competitions, in which normally unpublished work is judged anonymously.⁴⁰ Such contexts provided vital encouragement and structure for a temperamentally hesitant, unconfident writer. By contrast, a less positive reception on the part of others in the Welsh literary establishment had a profound effect on Morgan. Some influential figures were critical of her work in public, lamenting what they saw as its regrettable popularity. That is to say, it was felt that

³⁶ Owen, 'Roedd ei Chymeriadau'r Fyw', p. 5.

³⁷ Sioned Lleinau Jones, 'Rhagymadrodd' ['Foreword'], in Elena Puw Morgan, *Y Wisg Sidan* (Llandysul: Gomer, 1995), pp. v-x, p. x.

³⁸ Cf Tomos, p. 11.

³⁹ Morgan's second novel for children, *Tan y Castell*, is dedicated to 'S.R. and M.J.R.', that is, Seth and Margaret Roberts, no p.. The name Brithdir is echoed in the *nom de plume* 'Y Tir Brith' under which she entered *Y Graith* in the Eisteddfod in 1938.

⁴⁰ Elis, p. 63.

Morgan's writing was not highbrow enough to merit acceptance in the era's highest culture. To Morgan, such remarks were deeply hurtful. Despite the warm praise her work garnered in Eisteddfod competitions and a large, enthusiastic contemporary readership, especially perhaps amongst women, she lost faith in her ability, and ceased to write.

Morgan's Reception

Morgan's work has an important place in modern Welsh letters. In the words of leading scholar R.M. Jones, referring to her best-known woman contemporary as a comparison, she 'yw cymhars fwyaf dawnus Kate Roberts nid yn unig wrth hawlio lle i'r ferch yn ein rhyddiaith storïol yn y cyfnod hwn, eithr yn bwysicach wrth ddod â benyweidd-dra i ledu amrediad chwaeth a gwelediad ein llenyddiaeth.' ['is Kate Roberts's most talented peer, not only in asserting the place of women writers in the narrative prose of the time, but more importantly in pushing the boundaries of its taste and vision to include the feminine.'] (p. 482). And Roberts herself noted, on Morgan's death, that '[y]n natblygiad y nofel Gymraeg bydd yn rhaid cyfrif ei nofelau hi yn rhan bwysig ohono.' ['her novels must be counted as an important part of the development of the Welsh novel'].⁴¹

This appreciation has been reflected in the interest of readers, listeners and viewers in Morgan's work over many decades. Following a period of comparatively little attention, *Y Wisg Sidan* appeared in a new edition for lending libraries in 1969 and there were radio broadcasts of Morgan's writing in the 1970s and 1980s. In the the 1990s and at the turn of the century, both *Y Wisg Sidan* and *Y Graith* were adapted for the Welsh-language television channel S4C. These well-received series were accompanied by attractive new editions of the novels by Gwasg Gomer, their covers featuring stills from the series.⁴² *Nansi Lovell's* fourth edition of 2018, and media coverage around it, testify to its lasting appeal.

Nonetheless, as R.M. Jones writes, '[ni] chafodd [Elena Puw Morgan] ei haeddiant gan y beirniaid' ['Elena Puw Morgan [...] has not been given her due by literary critics.']⁴³ Only very little detailed attention is paid to her work in literary studies, primarily from the 1990s onwards. The more extensive contributions by Jones and Elis, dating from the 1980s, and Wigley's innovative, psychoanalytically-oriented reading of 2019, remain exceptions.⁴⁴ Most commonly, if Morgan is mentioned in literary history at all, it is extremely briefly as part of wider surveys. This limited reception reflects above all some conventions of scholarship in its more traditional forms. For

⁴¹ Roberts, 'Marw Nofelydd', p. 1.

⁴² See n. 3, n. 37. Both novels were edited by Catrin Puw Davies.

⁴³ R.M. Jones, p. 477.

⁴⁴ Further publications are Delyth A. George, 'Llais Benywaidd y Nofel Gymraeg Gyfoes' ['The Feminine Voice in the Contemporary Welsh Novel', *Llên Cymru* 16 (1990-91), pp. 363-82 and 'The Strains of Transition: Contemporary Welsh-Language Novelists', in *Our Sisters' Land: The Changing Identities of Women in Wales*, ed. by Jane Aaron, Teresa Rees, Sandra Betts and Moira Vincentelli (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1994), pp. 199-213, p. 200; Katie Gramich, *Twentieth-Century Women's Writing in Wales: Land, Gender, Belonging* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007), pp. 55-105; Mair Rees, *Y Faneg Goch a'r Lawes Wen: Y Corff Benywaidd a'i Symbolaeth Mewn Ffuglen Gymraeg gan Fenywod* [*The Red Glove and the White Sleeve: The Female Body and its Symbolism in Writing by Women in Welsh*] (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2014), p. 31, p. 52; John Rowlands, 'The Novel', in *A Guide to Welsh Literature c1900-1996*, ed. by Dafydd Johnston (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1998), pp. 159-203, pp. 170-71; *An Encyclopaedia of British Women's Writing 1900-1950*, ed. by Faye Hammill, Ashlie Sponenberg and Esme Miskimmin (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 274; 'Elena Puw Morgan', in *Cydymaith i Lenyddiaeth Cymru* [*Companion to the Literature of Wales*], ed. by Meic Stephens (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1997), p. 511; 'Elena Puw Morgan', in *The Oxford Companion to the Literature of Wales*, ed. by Meic Stephens (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 405.

instance, in the past writing by women has been commonly marginalised. In a related way, less prestige is accorded to short, or apparently ephemeral forms and contexts frequently favoured by women writers, like Morgan's short stories which appeared in periodicals earlier in her career. Likewise, women's writing has been disregarded too when, like much of Morgan's *oeuvre*, it is for children or women, or can be perceived as such. In a related way, high criticism can overlook works which, like Morgan's, with its library editions, media adaptations and broadcasts, are genuinely popular; that is to say, favoured by readers, including many women, who could be perceived as less educated and discriminating in their intellect and sensibilities.

In context, it is noticeable that Morgan's greatest literary successes were associated with Eisteddfod culture. Traditionally, entries to Eisteddfod literature competitions are submitted anonymously under a *nom de plume*, and the winner's identity revealed only once the winner is determined. This context served Morgan well, for it allowed her to put her work forward for a prestigious award without drawing attention to herself. It may have worked in her favour too, in the sense that her entries' anonymity meant that they were not identifiable as the work of a woman writer. In the adjudication quoted above, D.J. Williams alludes to the winning author, whose identity he did not know at the time of writing, as 'he' and interestingly, uses the imagery of an explicitly masculine mastery. Williams is making use of the generic masculine which could refer to a man or woman writer, rather than stating that he believes this author to be a man. Nonetheless, it is striking that the lexis of literary achievement here is masculine ('master'), and certainly the anonymity of the competition made it more difficult to pigeonhole the works considered within it in gendered and hence limiting ways, either by judges or later readerships.

At first sight, Morgan's writing seems not to meet expectations of valuable high culture due to its subject matter. The stuff of her novels for adults is the life of poor girls and women in rural Wales, as well as the societies in which they lived. The focus is on their personal lives and relationships, topics which until more recent decades have often not been considered worthy of serious treatment in criticism. Moreover, *Y Wisg Sidan* and *Y Graith* name and discuss from a feminine perspective issues which seldom featured in the discourse of contemporary polite society. *Y Wisg Sidan* uncompromisingly indicts the sexual and emotional abuse of a vulnerable child by a rich, powerful man whose secrets everyone keeps. *Y Graith* is astonishing for its portrayal of a violently abusive wife and mother, which explodes powerful stereotypes of femininity.

Further unorthodox topics treated from a feminine perspective in the novels include domestic violence and abuse of many kinds, marriage breakdown, adultery, sexuality, pregnancy, childbirth, breastfeeding, unmarried motherhood, infant mortality, ageing, illness, disability and the vulnerable female body. Morgan writes too about the sometimes extreme, exploitative and frightening demands of caring, and the horrific challenges of motherhood in poverty. As a result, she offers plausible portraits of the ambivalence of maternity under harsh societal conditions which do not map well with highbrow literary tradition. These novels' critical discussion of such disturbing topics, and their rejection of conventional narratives about women's lives, are remarkable and may well have contributed to the illegibility of Morgan's writing to literary criticism for so long. Today, however, intellectual outlooks have changed. Due in particular to the far-reaching innovations of a more inclusive, feminist literary theory, more recent criticism is open to Morgan's work.⁴⁵

As historical fiction, Morgan's work could be mis-characterised as formulaic, genre writing. This perception was noted critically by Owen in 1973, even as she highlighted its limitations. If *Y Wisg Sidan* and *Y Graith* were period novels, she reflected, nonetheless '[s]wydd nofelydd yw pwyso a mesur y natur ddynol ac mae'r modd y gwneir hyn yn newid o genhedlaeth i genhedlaeth – ni fuasai Elena Puw Morgan byth bythoedd wedi dal ati i sgrifennu yn ôl y rysait a oedd mor boblogaidd ar y pryd' ['the business of a novelist is to evaluate human nature and the ways in which this is done

⁴⁵ See n. 44.

changes from generation to generation – Elena Puw Morgan would never have continued to write according to the conventions which were then so popular.’]⁴⁶ It is the case that in some ways Morgan’s writing, notably the early *Nansi Lovell*, shares features with forms of popular fiction like the melodrama or popular romance, for example the themes of family secrets and hidden relationships. As such, a novel like *Nansi Lovell* might be considered by traditional critics as being beneath their notice, especially since it shares the era’s fashionable interest in Romani culture. On the face of it, it is a family saga, an adventure, a love story and a mystery. As such, and as the adult début of a woman writer in her mid-twenties, it could be easily suspected of romantic cliché rather than explored on its own merits as a formative work for its author which handles its themes and generic conventions in subtle, original and even subversive ways.

As R.M. Jones points out, *Nansi Lovell* confidently inverts the convention of the family romance in which the plot’s *dénouement* hinges on a long-buried family secret. Here, the secret of Nansi Wyn’s descent is unveiled to the reader at the very outset, so that narrative focus shifts elsewhere. These foci include the wealth of period detail, including about the North Wales Roma. Unexpectedly, the novel becomes a critical meditation on, rather than affirmation of, love and marriage. It challenges the notion that a love story should close on marriage, and that a romantic match with a rich man is all a young woman needs for fulfilment. Here, marriage does not stand for closure in either structural or emotional senses. It features not at the end of the story but mid-way through, and so marks the beginning of new plot strands, dilemmas and pain for the bride. As she later reflects, she learns ‘yng nghwrs y blynyddoedd fod hyd yn oed i gariad ei raddau a’i ansawdd’ (t. 98) [‘over the course of the years that even love can vary in its degree and quality’]. That is, love is not an absolute value. On one hand, it is not the cure-all of romantic fiction. But on the other, it is not merely an illusion. Rather, it is more changeable, flickering and ambiguous. Thus, there is real psychological depth to the ways in which the novel examines the quantity and quality of love and this theme is the real heart of the novel. And as Morgan’s creative vision matured, from *Nansi Lovell* to *Y Graith*, the more conventional aspects of her plotting, such as reliance on coincidence and family secrets, increasingly fade away. So, as Owen observed in 1973, while Morgan responded in her writing to contemporary trends, she also went beyond them.

Re-evaluating Morgan’s Modernity: A Conclusion

Morgan’s historical novels are not set in specifically identifiable locations. Nonetheless, they are markedly regional and rural in their settings and inflections. As Roberts wrote in 1973: ‘[y]r oedd ei mynegiant yn wahanol iawn i fynegiant storïau heddiw. Cymraeg gwlad Edeyrnion oedd ei Chymraeg, a hwnnw’n Gymraeg â blas y tir arno. Y cymeriadau hefyd yn gymeriadau ac aroglau’r pridd arnynt.’ [‘her expression was very different from that of today’s stories. Her Welsh was that of rural Edeirnion, and it had the taste of that terrain. The characters, too, were characters so redolent of the land.’]⁴⁷ Or, according to R.M. Jones, ‘Elena Puw Morgan yn anad neb a ddarluniodd mewn nofelau ac ar ei lawnaf y bywyd Cymraeg gwledig.’ [‘Elena Puw Morgan, more than any other writer, depicted rural Welsh life in novels, and that at its very fullest.’] (p. 485) Put another way, Morgan seems at first sight to represent a completely different world from some of her literary contemporaries. The lives described by Morgan, and her approach to them, are profoundly different from those of the more sophisticated, urban inhabitants of South Wales for instance, as seen for example in the work of Kate Bosse-Griffiths (1910-1998) or, at times, Saunders Lewis (1893-1985), as in the case of his then-scandalous novel *Monica* (1930).

⁴⁶ Owen, ‘Marw Nofelydd’, p. 1..

⁴⁷ Roberts. Edeirnion is the historic district around Corwen.

R.M. Jones suggests therefore of Morgan: '[o] ran dull a thestun, i'r cyfnod cyn 1936 y perthyn yr awdures hon yn sicr felly' ['in terms of style and theme, this author therefore certainly belongs to the period before 1936'] (p. 478). He writes too that in her focus on regional and historical themes, 'hiraethu y mae hi am y bywyd gwledig a ddiflannodd, a'i Chymraeg hi'n costrelu'r hen briod-ddulliau a fu' ['[she] is nostalgic for the lost rural life of the past, and her language preserves the idioms of another time'] (p. 478). On R.M. Jones's reading, therefore, Morgan's novels appear not to form part of the era's Modernism due to their topics and settings; certainly this apparent discontinuity with their times has also contributed to their omission from the critical canon.

Yet a contemporary reading can re-evaluate Morgan's presentation of history, and reject any argument that it is nostalgic in character. All three of her novels for adults are set in the past, and describe it in extensive, realist detail. However, they expose its inequities in extremely critical terms, for at the centre of these works is the abuse of power by both men and women, especially as it affects the most disenfranchised in society. There is neither judgement on nor sentimentalisation of those figures. Instead, the novels offer a sensitive, compassionate gaze. They locate the root of their characters' predicaments not in their own failings or sinfulness, as earlier writers might have done, but in part at least in the expectations, structures and institutions of society, which is often revealed as cruel, corrupt or hypocritical. There is analysis, too, of the ways in which hardship and societal injustices can make individuals, in turn, hard and unjust. In this respect, these novels are political, albeit in a deep rather than manifest sense.

Moreover, these works, for all their rich detail about earlier ways of life, offer distinctively modern ways of looking at the world, for example in their examination of women's lives. There is a stark, if implicit critique here of expectations on women to conform, to submit and to suffer their lot. Equally implicitly, the novels stress the importance of women's independence. All three contain an older, unconventional, shrewd and single female character (not always the protagonist) who lives autonomously. The emotional and material well-being of these wise women is greater than that of other female characters, including those who are living in (apparently) good marriages. In *Nansi Lovell*, for instance, the protagonist abandons a respectable marriage and motherhood when she discovers how oppressive they are, almost forty years before Betty Friedan's classic on that theme, *The Feminine Mystique* (1963). Consequently, these independent women are able to offer solidarity and support to younger, more vulnerable women; or, in a related way in the case of Nansi Lovell, to send an empowering message to her granddaughter Nansi Wyn. In short, there is correlation in these works between a woman's material and financial independence and her well-being; and her ability to support other women in turn. Thus, the novels draw connections, again in modern ways, between the emotional, psychological, the societal and the economic.

Each of the independent women in Morgan's novels has learned to read and write and so to read the world literally as well as figuratively. The importance of literacy for the women about whom this author writes is basic, and essential. Nansi Lovell is well-educated, a sublimely confident writer who sets down the matrilinear story of five generations of her family for Nansi Wyn, in order to convey to her a real sense of her place in the world. By contrast, Mali in *Y Wisg Sidan* never learns her letters, and never gains real agency. Dori in *Y Graith* is a talented pupil and her successes at elementary level in a tiny, rural school make her the child she is. When she is deprived of education, the impact is equal in magnitude to the physical assaults she endures. Thus, for Morgan, the ability to read and write is formative for the autonomy and personality of women and girls, and gives them a chance of holding their own in a world where the odds may otherwise be against them. Striking too is the insistent connection they make between women's literacy, material independence, agency and well-being, even if this means a life outside of respectability, marriage, motherhood, or traditionally acceptable feminine behaviour.

Another noticeable, profoundly contemporary aspect of Morgan's writing is her exploration of psychology, as noted by Wigley. For example, the novels show the ways in which what would today be termed childhood trauma can mark a person for life, and be transmitted across generations. The comparatively limited attention paid to religion in the three novels is equally striking.⁴⁸ Given the historical centrality of chapel culture to the societies Morgan describes, her novels' lack of interest in that theme indicates an unexpected view of the past. Another theme of Morgan's which seems proleptic is that of the environment. *Y Graith* in particular concentrates on the rapid onset of social modernisation in a formerly traditional community, and the rural landscape is radically altered in a few short years around the 1930s. Ecology is central also to the unpublished children's book *Bwthyn Bach Llwyd y Wig*.

All three of Morgan's novels for adults focus on generational shifts and social change in nuanced ways. At times in *Y Wisg Sidan* and *Y Graith*, the passing of time and historical progress offer amelioration, even if it primarily benefits younger characters while the novels' principal protagonists, and others who are vulnerable, are left behind. Dori, in *Y Graith*, experiences complex, ambivalent feelings about the losses involved in this process, for all the conveniences it brings to her life and the opportunities it offers to some of her children. Morgan highlights therefore the ambiguities of modernity, and the complex relationships of past and present at many levels. There is a case here then for understanding Morgan's writing not as a relic of a bygone age, but rather, as a regional, rural, Modernism which responds to contemporary thought and records its present in a highly sensitive way. In turn, the notion of Modernism itself in Welsh literature appears in a more differentiated, plural light. This prospect is just one among many which Morgan's neglected *oeuvre* holds out for future research.

⁴⁸ R.M. Jones, p. 478; Elis, p. 65; Sioned Lleinau Jones, p. vi.