

Welsh Writing, Political Action and Incarceration

Branwen's Starling

Diarmait Mac Giolla Chríost

Palgrave Studies in Minority Languages and Communities
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Series Editor: Gabrielle Hogan-Brun, University of Bristol, UK

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Welsh Writing, Political Action and Incarceration

Branwen's Starling

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School of Welsh, Cardiff University, UK

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For Siobhán

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Glossary of Terms

Adfer Welsh language activist group initially founded in 1970 as a specific interest group within Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg (below) by Emyr Llywelyn, amongst others. Llywelyn was previously a member of Mudiad Amddiffyn Cymru (below). It eventually emerged as an independent splinter group in 1974.

Cyfamodwyr [Cymdeithas Cyfamod y Cymry Rhydd] Nationalist Welsh language activist group founded in 1987 by Owain Williams, amongst others. Williams was previously a member of Mudiad Amddiffyn Cymru (below).

Cyfeillion yr Iaith Welsh language activist group founded in 1971 as a moderate alternative to Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg (below).

Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg Welsh language activist group founded in 1962 by John Davies and Tedi Millward, amongst others.

Cymuned Welsh language activist group founded in 2001 by Simon Brooks, amongst others.

Dyfodol [Dyfodol i'r Iaith] Welsh language lobby group founded by Richard Wyn Jones and Simon Brooks, amongst others. Brooks was previously a founder member of Cymuned (above).

Free Wales Army Welsh nationalist paramilitary organisation founded in 1963 by Julian Cayo-Evans, amongst others.

Meibion Glyndŵr Welsh nationalist organisation associated with a series of arson attacks on second and holiday homes between 1979 and mid 1990s. There has been some speculation that the organisation is in actual fact a front for MI5.

Mudiad Amddiffyn Cymru Welsh nationalist paramilitary organisation associated with a series of bombing incidents between 1963 and 1969. Founder members include Emyr Llywelyn and Owain Williams, amongst others.

Plaid Cymru [Plaid Genedlaethol Cymru] Welsh nationalist political party found in 1925 by H. R. Jones, Saunders Lewis and Lewis Valentine, amongst others.

Tafod y Ddraig [Y Tafod] House magazine of Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg (above) founded in 1963 by Owain Owain.

Abbreviations for Literary Texts

BG	Buchedd Garmon
BK	The Brothers Karamazov
CDG	Cyn Daw'r Gaeaf
CF	Cymru Fydd
DP	Dail Pren
PB	Plasau'r Brenin
THA	Tro'r Haul Arno
YOH	Yma o Hyd

1

Introduction

No, no, no, no! Come, let's away to prison; We two alone will sing like birds i' the cage (King Lear. Act V. Scene III. 8–9).

Protest is centrally about moral voice (Jasper, 1997: 379).

Branwen's Starling

Incarceration is designed to reduce the prisoner to silence (Babington, 1968). Some (e.g. Glynn, 1921; Rives, 1922) may assume that this is a recent insight – ‘At the first drum-roll, the prisoners must rise and dress in silence’ – according to Foucault (1977), Faucher's (1838) rules governing the behaviour of those incarcerated in ‘the House of young prisoners in Paris’ represent a wholly modern form of imprisonment, a feature of which is the disciplinary function of silence. However, those believers are sorely mistaken as the Welsh of the Early Historical Period were quite familiar with the disciplinary capacity of prison. Branwen, the eponymous heroine of the Second Branch of the Mabinogi, Branwen ferch Lŷr (Branwen, Daughter of Lŷr), was imprisoned by the Irish for several years in order that she might not be able to communicate their cruel treatment of her to her powerful family in Wales (Davies, S., 2007). While she was eventually rescued, the tale does not end happily for Branwen. Her tragic end, along with the almost total devastation of both Ireland and Wales and the near extinction of the Irish and the Welsh peoples as a result of her death-pocked wedding to Matholwch, king of Ireland, caused Lady Charlotte Guest (1838–45 and 1877) to place Branwen centre-stage in her nineteenth century translation of this ancient Welsh language text. Guest invented the title by which the

tale is now familiarly known – Branwen ferch Lŷr (Davies, S., 2006: 239). Prior to Guest's intervention the tale was identified through another of its characters, Bendigeidfran fab Lŷr, or Brân, who is introduced in the incipit of the text (e.g. Davies, S., 2007: 22). This most liberal act of translation causes the casual reader to fix their gaze upon Branwen, and her fatalistic love story. The apparent centrality of Branwen was reinforced by Saunders Lewis's play 'Branwen' (1975), which Lewis himself saw as a corrective to Mac Cana's critique (1958) of the literary limitations of the Second Branch and his assertion of the significance of the Early Celtic and Irish elements in the tale (Williams, I., 2000: 767–768). It was further emphasised by the 1994 film 'Branwen', directed by Ceri Sherlock and with Gareth Miles as author of the screenplay.

However, the Second Branch of the Mabinogi is no mere tale of romantic love confounded by petty vanity, with destructive consequences for all involved. Rather, it is a demonstration of the transformative power of communication. For example, Brân's death is brought about by the incantation of an 'obscure traditional utterance' (Koch, 2006: 236) in which he is addressed as 'Morddwyd Tyllion' (Davies, S., 2007: 32). At this point he requests that he be decapitated and that his head be carried back to Britain and buried at Gwynfryn in London. His severed head, however, remains vital, is animated by the capacity of speech and entertains the retinue of Welsh warriors accompanying it at the otherworldly feast, 'the Hospitality of the Noble Head' (Koch, 2006: 236), which punctuates their long journey home. That this tale is about the power of communication seems to be underscored by the Celtic and Classical parallels to Brân. For example, there are obvious similarities between the peculiar power of speech possessed by Brân's head and the severed head of the poet Orpheus:

The birds were his friends now, and the trees and the stones. The birds flew around him and mourned with him; the trees and stones often followed him, moved by the music of his lyre. But a savage band slew Orpheus and threw his severed head and his lyre into the River Hebrus. It is said by the poets that while they floated in midstream the lyre gave out some mournful notes and the head of Orpheus answered the notes with song. (Part III. Chpt. VI. Stanza 18)¹

Other references to the power of language can be easily read in the tale. For example, Brân is a cognate of Bran in the Irish tradition (Koch, 2006: 237), an equivalent to Bran mac Febail, Bran son of Febal. The term /febail/ is the genitive form of /febal/, (/gwefl/ in Welsh), meaning

'lip'. Brân is also cognate with Ogmios, a god of the Celts identified by the Romans as having wondrous eloquence (Benoît, 1953; Le Roux, 1960). Ogmios takes the form of a severed head on some Roman period coins. Efnisien, another of the tale's characters, has an Irish parallel in Briciu mac Carbaid, sometimes known as Nemthenga or Briciu of the Poisonous Tongue (Mac Cana, 1958 – but see Koch, 2006: 657 and Ó Cathasaigh, 1986). Also central to the tale is a Cauldron of Rebirth in which dead warriors may be brought to life, but without the power of speech. At one point in the tale Efnisien sacrifices himself in order to destroy the cauldron – the poisonous tongue destroys the speechless living-dead. Resonant as these images are of the power of language, the pivotal act of communication in this tale is when Branwen teaches a starling to talk, thereby enabling the successful delivery of her fateful prison-cell missive:

This [Branwen's captivity] continued for not less than three years. In the meantime Branwen reared a starling at the end of her kneading-trough, and taught it to speak, and told the bird what kind of man her brother was. And she brought a letter telling of her punishment and dishonour. The letter was tied to the base of the bird's wings, and it was sent to Wales, and the bird came to this island. It found Bendigeidfran in Caer Saint in Arfon, where he was at a council of his one day (Davies, S., 2007: 28).

That she chose the starling ought not to surprise us as the linguistic skills of this bird have long been well known, albeit variously looked upon as comic, unsettling or enchanting. Pliny the Elder remarked that the children of the Imperial household were amused by a starling speaking Latin and Greek (Bostock and Riley, 1855). Shakespeare's starling was a manipulative creature (Henry IV. Part I, Act I, Scene III, 219–227). In contrast, Müller and Schubert's starling was naive and romantic (Die Schöne Müllerin, 1823). For the primordial Welsh, Branwen's starling appears to be seriously political – linking politicised incarceration and disciplinary silence, with the power of language. This diminutive creature carries a text penned by the incarcerated author, the content of which has portentous consequences for all of society beyond the prison cell.

This takes us to the heart of the matter for it can be said that Branwen's starling has fluttered its wings throughout the course of the story of the Welsh language in the twentieth century. In this period the sense of the decline of Welsh energised the politicisation of the language, as a result of which a series of Welsh language activists were imprisoned. That

much is well known and has been the subject of substantial scholarly and more popular scrutiny (e.g., Phillips, 1998a, 1998b; Tudur, G., 1989; Williams, C. H., 1977, 1994, 1996). It is also known that several of these activists created some popular examples of prison literature – creative writings for which incarceration is a pivotal moment. However, this phenomenon is less well understood in the broader sociological and literary context. The fact that not only was the Welsh language the cause but also the mode of expression of very many of these prison voices, but that some chose to write in English or under translation, is critical to our understanding of the phenomenon. Also, while individual reviews of many of the works of these prisoners certainly exist, no attempt has been made until now to map this area of inter-connected political and literary activity as a coherent piece. This is the mission of this book, to frame a new terrain – the story of the incarcerated imagination of the radical Welsh language voice – this is Branwen’s starling.

Researching the Welsh Incarcerated Imagination

This study draws upon the academic literature from several distinctive areas of scholarly endeavour namely, prison literature (e.g., Abou-bakr, 2009; Bisbort, 2006a, 2006b, 2010; Booth-Yudelman, 1997; Bowen-Raddeker, 1997; Davies, I., 1990; Mailer, 1980; Whalen, L., 2008), the sociology of prison (e.g. Cohen and Taylor, 1972; Foucault, 1977; Sykes, 1958; Toch, 1992; Zamble and Porporino, 1988) and the sociology of protest (e.g., Guidry, Kennedy and Zald, 2000; Klimke and Scharloth, 2008; Linz and Stepan, 1996; Oliver, Cadnea-Roa and Strawn, 2003; Tilly, 1978; Walton and Seddon, 1994), as well as ethics or moral philosophy (e.g., Rawls, 1999). More specifically, the work comprises the sociological analysis of key elements in the biographies and creative writings of certain Welsh language literati whose incarcerated imaginings comprise a coherent and distinctive body of work. It is reasonable to characterise my approach as that of the case study (Mills, Durepos and Wiebe, 2010; Yin, 2009), given the use of quite varied sources and methods, coupled with a quasi biographical and historical style. Thus, my research methods include the historiographical analysis of autobiographical and biographical materials, the analysis of archival material, including private papers, held at the National Archives in Kew, the London Metropolitan Archives, the National Library of Wales (NLW), the Library of the Religious Society of Friends and West Glamorgan Archive Service, the critical literary and linguistic analysis of the works of Welsh prison writing, and interviews with some of the literati. Such

a multi-disciplinary approach allows for a set of intellectual aims to be pursued that would be otherwise difficult to accommodate in the context of a more narrowly focused *modus operandi*. These goals are:

- To identify and examine key literati and key texts in the prison literature of modern and contemporary Wales in specific relation to the Welsh language.
- To identify the principal conceptual themes in the literature and to subject these ideologies of confinement to critical analysis.
- To explain, where relevant, the function and significance of variations in literary form, style and language in this literature.
- To illuminate the motivations for prison writing and to distinguish the effects of the texts on the author's readership – their community outside prison, and upon society more widely.
- To draw general theoretical insights from the academic literature on the sociology of prison and the sociology of protest with particular reference to the prevailing scholarly view of prison writing as the 'production of text within the experience of prison and violent closure' (Davies, I., 1990: x). The aim of this is to apply the notion of the textuality of violence and of symbolic violence to this particular Welsh milieu.
- To consider the extent to which, and how, the incarcerated imagination of the radical literatus has become a part of Welsh thought.

Broadly speaking, the book is subject to a chronological ordering relating to the publication of the key works but not to the period of arrest or trial or imprisonment of the writer. For some of the personalities the work prefaces such a period; in some cases it is more or less contemporaneous, and in other cases again the work is of a much later date than the events of arrest, trial and imprisonment. This chronological ordering coincides with a gendering of the material to hand, thus Part I of the text comprises a set of male authors while Part II, pertaining to a wholly different and distinctive historical period, is made up exclusively of female creative writers. Together, these cover the broad sweep of the development of a form of protest incorporating incarceration and creative writing that is distinctively Welsh and has, as a defining characteristic, a certain engagement with the Welsh language. One of the points made in this book is that this distinctive form of protest has encountered a significant hiatus, and may well have run its course. Thus, the final chapter of the book, Conclusions, includes, among other things, a critical study of 'The Arrest' by Emyr Humphreys (2003) and

DW2416 by Dewi Prysor as texts of retrospection that stand apart from the other two sets of prison writing.

The reader ought to note also that the choice of authors is based upon their creative work being a contemplation upon incarceration, whether somewhat convoluted and perhaps indirect, or brutally direct, but no less interesting and revealing for that. Hence, references to some Welsh creative writers and prisoners in the cause of the language, such as D. J. Williams – author of *Hen Dŷ Ffarm* (1953) and *Yn Chwech ar Hugain Oed* (1959) – whose work tells us nothing of incarceration, appear as glosses to the main chapters whose focal points are directed towards others. Equally, forms of writing other than creative, such as straightforward polemical treatises (Ffransis, 1974) or collections of prison letters (e.g. Williams, Rh., 1981), are treated in the same way. The nature of the prison texts varies; it includes single poems, complete collections of poetry, novels, a fictional diary, a drama and short stories. Intellectual, biographical and other connections are made between the authors and their works.

The chapters of this book deal with the following authors and works respectively: D. Gwenallt Jones *Plasau'r Brenin* (1934) and *Dartmoor* (1941); Saunders Lewis *Buchedd Garmon* (1937); T. E. Nicholas *Llygad y Drws* (1940), *Canu'r Carchar* (1942) and *Prison Sonnets* (1948); Waldo Williams *Dail Pren* (1956); Meg Elis *I'r Gad* (1975), *Carchar* (1978) and *Cyn Daw'r Gaeaf* (1985); Menna Elfyn *Tro'r Haul Arno* (1982) and *Cell Angel* (1996); and, Angharad Tomos *Yma o Hyd* (1985). These chapters are not intended to be contemplated in isolation. Instead, they can only be properly understood in relation to each other; the chapters are interconnected. Certain analytical and narrative threads run through the work as a whole – the nature and extent of intellectual connections between the authors; the authors' conceptions of the broader intellectual and historical literary context in which they are writing and acting; and, how the authors use literary work to make sense of incarceration, and what their works, drawn from this special context, may be able to tell us about the condition of Wales and the Welsh language. Also, in setting the authors and their works in context, other writers and works are drawn into the discussion, including, for example, Ned Thomas, author of *The Welsh Extremist* (1971) and Ffred Ffransis, who penned the piece *Daw Dydd* in 1974, which was subsequently translated into Irish by Liam Mac Cóil as *Tiocfaidh Lá* (1977). These works are not prison literature *per se* but, as works of literary criticism, political polemic and of literary fiction in response to the incarceration of others, they inform our reading of radical Welsh prison literature.

'Branwen's Starling' is a story of the power of communication from within the prison cell. It is also about the dramaturgy of incarceration. This book invites us to take a broader, fuller view of prison literature. If, for example, Ioan Davies is largely correct in his assertion that 'prison writing is centrally about violence' (1990:16) and is also an 'attempt to overcome violence' (1990: 18) then how does this pertain to the radical non-violence that, at least partly, characterised Welsh protest against the British State during the twentieth century? Another perspective on this might be to ask what the voices of the Welsh incarcerated imagination have to say about politically motivated violence? Might they help us to understand how and why radical political activism in Wales took the path it did? Moreover, what message is being carried by Branwen's starling today? Does that message help us to understand whether all the obvious and most difficult language battles have been fought and won, as suggested by several authoritative commentators (Phillips, 1998a, 1998b; Williams, C. H., 2000)? Or, should Welsh activists be mindful of the carceral qualities of the State in Wales, of the disciplinary silence of a hegemonic political consensus on the language issue? Yet again, perhaps the most challenging and most divisive battle of all is beginning to take shape – that of the struggle of a threatened Welsh language with an emergent Welsh State.

I

Gwryw – masculinities

The first part of this book comprises the study of the prison writings of four Welsh language authors: D. Gwenallt Jones (Gwenallt), Saunders Lewis, T. E. Nicholas and Waldo Williams (Waldo). That the first half of this study comprises a set of four male prison writers ought not to be a surprise, after all these authors are very much a product of the Wales of the time. The period we have in mind is the first half of the twentieth century. This is an era which begins with the outbreak of World War I (1914–1918) and closes as another global conflict with far-reaching consequences, the Cold War, which developed in the late 1940s and early 1950s. During this period public life in all its forms in Wales, including both politics and serious literature, which are the two issues at the heart of this work, was dominated by men. Moreover, as products of their time, the authors and their intellectual and political ideas are very much informed by the norms, values and dissensions that define this era. However, these literati do not pertain to a single, coherent set of ideas, or a single social or political movement. Rather, they occupy diverse and often contradictory positions and in this sense it is most certainly possible to read of a wide range of notions in their works, and, at the same time, to read various contrasting ideas into their work, even more so as time passes and society changes around their writings.

It could be argued quite reasonably that some thread pertaining to Thomistic, or theistic, existentialism runs through the work of Gwenallt, Lewis, Nicholas and Waldo. At the very least, we can be entirely confident that the Christian faith was adhered to by them all, albeit in very different ways, and that this has a profound impact on their political beliefs and on their prison writing. Indeed, if protest is about moral voice, as some contend (Jasper, 1997), then the sense of morality that is articulated by these four as political activists adds to this view on protest.

That is still the case even when apparent contradictions may be perceived between their adherence to such a Christian moral voice on the one hand and the atheistic, historical materialism characteristic of the deeply held Marxist convictions of one or two of the authors. Nicholas, in particular, is guilty of such broad-minded, not to say logically incompatible, accommodation. Gwenallt shifts quite dramatically between the two, abandoning the Marxism of his youth for a fundamentalist Christian nationalism. Interestingly, the two authors in whose work notions of theistic existentialism are most obvious, Lewis and Waldo, both turned from the Protestant Non-conformist denominations that dominated Welsh religious life, and much beyond that, at that time. Instead, they allied themselves to institutions or communities of faith that were wholly marginalised in the Welsh context. Lewis became a Roman Catholic, while Williams embraced Quakerism. Clearly, the task of discovering that moral voice was not simply a matter of enunciating basic Christian tenets in relation to the political challenges faced by Wales, as they saw it, at the time of their writing.

Unambiguous differences between the four authors may be discerned in their attitudes to war. Even then certain important qualifications have to be made in order to take account of certain subtle, yet significant concerns. Gwenallt was a conscientious objector during World War I but he was not a pacifist, whereas Waldo was a pacifist in the most absolute meaning of the word. Lewis, in complete contrast, served during the World War I as an officer in the British Army and remained loyal to the notion of military service as an honourable occupation for the rest of his life. He was not afraid of making that known, even though it could have been easily anticipated that this would have been an unpopular belief to express and given also that there was, in reality, very little to be gained at the time from making that view known. Nicholas spent long and hard years campaigning as a pacifist but during World War II (1939–1945) he found himself in a position where he was a supporter, if not a whole-hearted advocate, of a war that he hoped would thoroughly eradicate fascism and Nazism. Their different positions on the use of armed force to realise political goals are not only important in understanding the authors and their prison writings but also inform the political activism of the radical generation that followed them.

The dominant political ideologies of the period impacted upon the four authors in contrasting ways. The political landscape of the 1920s and 1930s was dominated by the politics of the left and of the right. Each of these had their adherents among our authors, while all were Welsh nationalists of sorts. On the right, Lewis was clearly attracted to

Italian fascism but not to the Nazism of Germany. Gwenallt started out as a Marxist but became the leading poet of a Welsh form of Christian nationalism that was wholly conservative and reactionary in its values. Nicholas remained a communist until his death. At no point could he see any fault in communist or socialist regimes, even as the atrocities of Stalin, for example, were denounced by Khrushchev. Waldo was, from an early age, always socialist but, typically, vaguely so. In this matter also, the convictions of these authors complicate the manner in which the generation that are the subject of Part II of this book engage with politics.

Finally, it is worth reminding that, during this period, being sentenced to prison entailed not inconsiderable social stigma. However, it is important not to overstate the case. It ought also to be borne in mind that thousands of members of certain social movements of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century were subjected to periods of imprisonment but ultimately saw their causes legitimised – whether conscientious objectors, suffragettes or trade union activists. For example, in the period from 1903, and the creation of the Women's Social and Political Union, up until the Representation of the People Act of 1918, many hundreds of suffragettes in the United Kingdom suffered imprisonment and force-feeding while in prison in order to bring attention to their cause. Similarly, late nineteenth century legalisation, notably the 1871 Trade Union Act that legalised trade unions, along with creation of the Independent Labour Party in 1893, served to legitimise previous trade union activism that had resulted in the imprisonment and deportation to prison colonies of many hundreds of individuals. Thus by the early twentieth century, in the United Kingdom politicised incarceration had been firmly established as one of the tools in the repertoire of contention (following Tilly, 1993, 2006, for example) available to social movements. In this sense, prison for the political activist was not such a stigma. In addition, while the prison writing of our authors was also a distinctive feature of this repertoire of contention, the manner in which they each came to realise this varies. More to the point, understanding that Gwenallt came to this post hoc, or that Lewis and Waldo were fully aware of the possibilities throughout, or that Nicholas was something of an opportunist, is a crucial insight with implications for their prison texts and how they might be read by others.

2

D. Gwenallt Jones

Plasau'r Brenin (1934) and
'Dartmoor' (1941)

Nid oedd yr un darlun ar y muriau. Cerdyn rheolau'r carchar yn unig a hongiai ar un ohonynt. Darllenodd Myrddin Tomos y rheolau drwyddynt yn fanwl, ac o ddiffyg llenyddiaeth amgenach i'w darllen, darllenodd hwynt lawer gwaith ar ôl hynny, hyd oni wyddai hwy ar gof. Dyma'r rheolau: 1. Rhaid i garcharorion gadw distawrwydd [...].

[Translation] There wasn't a single picture on the walls. Only a card with the prison rules hung on one of them. Myrddin Tomos read through the rules in detail, and because of the lack of alternative reading material, he read them many times after that, until he knew them off by heart. Here are the rules: 1. The prisoners must maintain silence [...] (*Plasau'r Brenin*, p.50).

Introduction

Plasau'r Brenin (PB) is the first work of prison literature that is specifically Welsh. According to the scholarly literature, its author, David James Jones, often simply known by his bardic *nom de plume* 'Gwenallt' (Stephens, 1986), spent the greater part of two years of his life in English prisons at HMP Wormwood Scrubs and Dartmoor between May 1917 and May 1919 (Lewis, 1969: 54; Morgan, D., 1972: 9; Owen-Rees, 1978: 52; Roberts, 2009; Thomas, G., 1984: 39) as an uncompromising 'absolutist' (Williams, 1996: 74) conscientious objector, pacifist (Evans, 1991; James, 2006; McGuinness, 2005; Owen, 1992) and member of the No-Conscription Fellowship (Rae, 1970). Subsequent to his release from prison he developed a writing and academic career as one of the greatest of Welsh-language poets (Jones, R. M., 1975; Allchin,

Morgan and Thomas, 2000; James, 2001; Meredith, 1974; Roberts, K., 1978; Rowlands, D., 1982), but it was not until 1934 that he wrote anything at all about this period of incarceration namely his quasi-autobiographical novel, *Plasau'r Brenin* [The King's Mansions] (1934a). This work of prose was followed in 1941 by the poem 'Dartmoor', a reflection upon his time in prison there (James, 2001: xxiv and 514–515; Rhys, 1997: 158). This very substantial delay may well mean that what the novel and the poem lack in immediacy is compensated for by retrospective understanding and creative maturity – Gwenallt was, after all, barely eighteen years old when he was imprisoned. Yet, the novel, in particular, divides literary opinion in Wales. Some appear to completely ignore the work (Jones, R. M., 1987), or are rather disappointed in its qualities as a novel (e.g., Brewer, 1964; Lewis, 1969; Morgan, T. J., 1934; Rowlands, J., 1992b). Others consider it to be a work of substance (Williams, 1996: 69) while placing it in the genre of war novels pertaining to World War I, alongside, for example, Robert Graves' 'Goodbye to All That' (1929) (Morgan, D., 1972: 10). Thomas locates Gwenallt's novel in the context of a literary narrative on Welsh language protest in which it is a 'striking, if schematic, piece of work' (Thomas, N., 1991: 53). This slight criticism appears to have stung the sensitivities of other literati. An unidentified contributor to Stephens (1986: 299–300) claims that 'there are powerful assertions in Gwenallt's work' and that these 'are not schematic assertions but spring from his own experience and they are expressed in images which arise from a landscape and tradition with which he was entirely familiar'. The Welsh language version of this literary encyclopaedia (Stephens, 1993) appears, if anything, to be a degree more personal in its defence of Gwenallt; 'Nid haeriadau ffuantaŷ yw'r rhain [These are not insincere, or false, assertions]'. Gwenallt's poem 'Dartmoor' (first published in the journal 'Heddiw' in 1941) is also considered to be an example of war poetry, as is demonstrated by its inclusion in Curtis's anthology of twentieth century Welsh war literature (2007). Yet, it appears to me to be most obvious that *Plasau'r Brenin* and 'Dartmoor' are, first and foremost, works of prison literature and that they merit to be examined as such.

'Cofiaf un noson mewn carchar ...': Re-constructing Gwenallt's sentence

At one time, as Williams points out (1996: 71), it was simply understood that Gwenallt had been incarcerated as a conscientious objector in HMP Wormwood Scrubs and Dartmoor for two years between May 1917