

Jane Aaron and Sarah Prescott, eds. *Welsh Writing in English, 1536–1914: The First Four Hundred Years*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020. viii + 388. \$85.00. Review by HELEN WILCOX, BANGOR UNIVERSITY, WALES.

The Oxford Literary History of Wales, of which the book under review is the third volume, is a major scholarly enterprise, reinterpreting the literature of the bilingual Celtic land that shares the island of Great Britain with England and Scotland. The general editor, Damian Walford Davies, makes it clear from the outset that the object is not to provide a “survey” of the literary traditions of Wales, but rather to present a “conceptual engagement” with the subject (v). This approach is immediately both refreshing and promising. He also suggests that the four volumes—two on writing in Welsh, two on works written in English—will offer “an authoritative and dissenting perspective on the two literatures of Wales” (v). The “authority” that he claims here, of course, will derive from the authors themselves, who in the case of the third volume are leading critics working on early modern (Sarah Prescott) and nineteenth-century (Jane Aaron) texts in English from Wales. The element of “dissent” in their approach is firmly announced by Aaron and Prescott in the subtitle they have chosen for their volume: “The First Four Hundred Years.” This is a deliberate echo—and defiant repudiation—of a work written in 1957 by Gwyn Jones entitled *The First Forty Years: Some Notes on Anglo-Welsh Literature*, in which it was assumed that there was no inherently Welsh tradition of writing in English before Caradoc Evans’s collection of short stories, *My People*, published in 1915. Instead, Prescott and Aaron trace Welsh writing in English from almost four hundred years earlier, starting in 1536 when Henry VIII’s “Act of Union” annexed Wales to England and made English the official language of Wales. This is a daring yet logical date from which to begin their history, and their critical dissent pays off handsomely.

First, by choosing this starting-point, Aaron and Prescott not only expand the “official” canon of Welsh writing in English by including texts from four centuries before the twentieth—a massive shift of perspective—but also reconsider important matters such as why

earlier authors living in Wales would have written in English at all. This linguistic choice could have had a variety of motivations, and did not necessarily represent the colonial elitism that it has often been assumed to signify and consequently has led to its dismissal from the ranks of “Welsh” literature. As Aaron and Prescott rightly point out, many pre-twentieth-century Welsh authors were bilingual but opted to write in English because they had been educated in that language and were “not fully literate in their mother tongue” (3). Others chose English for its appropriateness to their subject-matter or intended readership, and sometimes deliberately adopted this medium to give expression to distinctive Welsh culture for a wider public. The authors of texts in English, it is argued, could be as firmly embedded in what Saunders Lewis referred to as the “organic community” of Wales (3) as those who wrote in Welsh.

What, then, constitutes a Welsh writer? A second important contribution of this book is its clear criteria on this score. Aaron and Prescott are willing to accept as Welsh, and therefore include in their discussions, any authors who meet at least two of five conditions: to have been born in Wales, to have Welsh parentage, to have lived for most of their lives in Wales, to have shown that they identified themselves as Welsh, or to have made a “significant contribution to literature on Wales and its people” (5). Readers of this history can thus be sure that these fundamental issues of both language and national identity have been taken seriously. The outcome is that the list of author biographies appended to the volume features twice as many anglophone writers from before 1915 as were identified in an equivalent exercise just fifty years ago.

A third advantage of the innovative approaches adopted by Aaron and Prescott is their application of a range of theoretical tools with which to analyse earlier Welsh writing in English. Both authors are particularly associated with feminist criticism and the recovery of female literary voices, and their volume is distinguished by the considerable attention given to Welsh women writers. Both are aware, too, of the vital importance of post-colonial theories in the study of Welsh writing, and make constructive use of these as tools in the discussion of a hybrid literature with all the political tensions inherent in a bilingual cultural landscape. The parallels between this situation

and that of many other post-colonial literatures in our contemporary world are wisely drawn. As the volume proceeds chronologically, it is also possible to plot something of the social history of a nation moving through the patterns of religious evangelization, the formation of national identity, the increasing sense of a distinctive natural and cultural landscape, the confidence of the industrial revolution, and the growing desire for independence. Aaron and Prescott handle the sweep of history with great skill while also giving detailed attention to texts and individual literary movements.

What does all this mean, then, for devotees of seventeenth-century literature? There are two chapters of special interest, both written by Sarah Prescott, who was responsible for covering the period up to 1800 in this volume. Her first chapter, “Cambro-Britons, Anglicans, and Royalists, 1536–1670,” begins by introducing writers such as Humphrey Llwyd and Lodowick Lloyd, for whom the sixteenth-century Union with England offered the chance to promote the Welsh as the true descendants of the ancient Britons and the more recent providers of the Tudor royal lineage. As Stewart Mottram has pointed out, early seventeenth-century writers such as John Davies of Hereford built on the Brutus myth and the Welsh nation’s “fabled descent from Troy” to “assert Welsh cultural independence from the English” even while remaining loyal to the crown (15). Even more important was the impact of the Protestant Reformation. Prescott makes the excellent case that Elizabeth Tudor’s imposition of the Book of Common Prayer and a vernacular Bible in Wales—leading to their official translation into Welsh in 1567 and 1588, decades before the publication of the Authorized Version in English—ironically led not to an anti-colonial rebelliousness but to a predominantly Royalist Protestant population in early seventeenth-century Wales. As Peter Roberts noted in 1998, “the church of England in Wales” may indeed have “produced the Anglo-Welsh literary tradition” (11).

This is certainly borne out by the first major writer to receive close attention in Prescott’s discussion: Henry Vaughan. Born in rural Brecknockshire in 1621, Vaughan identified himself from 1650 onwards as “the Silurist,” invoking an ancient tribe of Britons who resisted Roman dominance and whose name therefore implied both Welshness and defeated Royalism. Vaughan went on to become one of the greatest

devotional poets in the English language, and—as Wynn Thomas has argued—one who specifically identified early Christianity in Wales as a precursor of the Anglican church. Vaughan's sense of being Welsh derived from an intensely local identification with the Usk valley, and Prescott highlights the contemporary praise of Vaughan as upholding the tradition of the “Reverend Bards of old” under whose sheltering pastoral, or “hereditary shade,” the seventeenth-century poet now sits (25, quoting the anonymous poet “N.W.” writing in 1678).

By contrast, Katherine Philips has less frequently been considered in her Welsh context, perhaps because her own sense of community was not grounded in a specific Welsh setting, as in Vaughan's case, but was created by the epistolary coterie of her “Society of Friendship”—of which Vaughan and several other Welsh contemporaries, of course, were members. Though born in London, Philips moved to Wales when she was fourteen years old, married a Welshman, and wrote much of her verse while living in Welsh-speaking Cardigan. By focusing on Philips as the second key example of a seventeenth-century Welsh poet writing in English, Prescott usefully shifts the focus on Philips's work and reads it in a new light, particularly by drawing both parallels and contrasts with the work of Vaughan. Prescott further puts forward the significant forward-looking claim that Philips's “pastoral recuperation of the Welsh bardic past anticipates the Romantic recovery of Wales as a source of poetic inspiration and rural felicity in both poetry and fiction” (30).

The second chapter of this volume, “Evangelizing Wales: From Puritanism to Methodism, 1640–1800,” also contains material of interest to scholars of seventeenth-century literature. Having focused largely on Royalist writers in her first chapter, Prescott shifts her attention to the influence of Parliamentary dissenting Protestants on the development of early Welsh writing in English. The key figures here were the new “Welsh Saints,” as they were known, including Morgan Llwyd and Vavasor Powell; they and their fellow Puritans were associated with the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Wales, which was established by the Rump Parliament in 1650, just a year after the execution of Charles I. Powell was a millenarian who preached in both Welsh and English but published only in English, contributing fifteen works to the great outburst of polemical print-

ing in the mid-century. However, he is perhaps best known among literary scholars for what Prescott describes as his “well-documented literary and political spat” with Katherine Philips, an exchange of verses which is remarkable, Prescott adds, as an example “from seventeenth-century Wales of a political clash dramatized through the medium of English poetry” (40–41). Fascinatingly, in their poems we can see “some of the major religious controversies of the day” being “played out in Wales through its localized anglophone Anglican and Puritan literatures” (41).

Prescott makes a strong case for Morgan Llwyd as the greatest writer among the “Welsh saints” and particularly emphasises his special position as one who wrote verse in both Welsh and English. As John Kerrigan has noted, Morgan’s written English “was richly idiomatic enough to absorb the influence of Welsh without sounding like Fluelen” (43). Notably, the poems can move between English and Welsh within the space of a stanza, and Morgan’s English contemporary and fellow-dissenter, Richard Baxter, described him as “the deepest truest Welshman” (43). Prescott’s extended discussion of Morgan’s hitherto critically neglected poetry is one of the most important achievements of the early modern section of this book.

In a history of this kind, there are bound to be omissions necessitated by lack of space or the choice of narrative focus. It is striking that George Herbert receives only the briefest of passing mentions when, as a writer born in Wales of Welsh parentage, he could have qualified for consideration under Aaron and Prescott’s own criteria for a Welsh writer. At the very least, more could have been made of his unusual choice of the specific title “The British Church”—rather than the “English”—for his poem on the Anglican church which was later echoed by Vaughan. The poet Rowland Watkyns, author of *Flamma Sine Fumo* (1662), might also have merited a little more attention; and it is strange that the Welsh Royalist prophet, Arise Evans, appears in the chapter on nonconformity rather than Royalism. But these are minor shortcomings in a study that is undoubtedly a major contribution to our understanding of seventeenth-century literature in English. Prescott has opened up new vistas on what we might have thought was a familiar literary landscape, and in particular has brought the strands of Welsh and English writing from Wales into close and

fruitful dialogue with one another. How fascinating it is that a 1631 poem by David Lloyd, the dean of St Asaph cathedral in North Wales, entitled “The Legend of Captain Jones,” seems to have been, as Andrew Hadfield suggests, “a pastiche or parody of a Welsh poem” written by Siôn Tudor, a Welsh bard living in the diocese (19). As Prescott writes in connection with her analysis linking the English poetry of Vaughan and Philips written in Wales, “an awareness of the Welsh dimensions” of their work “does not downgrade the tensions at play but opens up the complexity of cultural exchanges that go beyond one-way cultural colonization” (22–23). This comment may be applied to the volume as a whole, in its sensitivity and alertness to the issues involved—and, above all, its constructive and imaginative reconfiguring of the place of writing in English in the literary history of Wales.

Martin Dzelzainis and Edward Holberton, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Andrew Marvell*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019. xxii + 822 pp. \$150.00. Review by BRENDAN PRAWDZIK, PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY.

The Oxford Handbook of Andrew Marvell, edited by Martin Dzelzainis and Edward Holberton, must be read with two hands. With 844 pages consisting of forty-three chapters from forty of among the most influential writers on Marvell, the volume does what Oxford handbooks do: like a preternatural Cromwell, ascend above emergent scholarship of a growing field and thunder down rousing force. Yet rather than “ruin the great work of Time,” the *Handbook* honors an epoch of transformative scholarship that recovered the historical Marvell and the troubled world around him.

The *Handbook* is last of a succession of publications that rewrote the field of Marvell studies, groundwork that continues to nourish the emergent generation. These include *The Prose Works of Andrew Marvell* (Yale, 2003), edited by Dzelzainis and Annabel Patterson, which enabled scholarly treatment of the prose. *An Andrew Marvell Chronology* (Palgrave, 2005), compiled by Nicholas von Maltzahn, detailed Marvell’s life, writings, and reception by drawing upon a trove of new documentary evidence. In 2006, Nigel Smith published