

Stewart James Mottram and Sarah Prescott, eds. *Writing Wales, from the Renaissance to Romanticism*.

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Challenging traditional boundaries of period and discipline, this collection sets out, in the words of the editors, to “explore the continuities and discontinuities in Wales’s written representation across three centuries of English, Anglo-Welsh, and Welsh-language literature.” The period under scrutiny saw extraordinary shifts in how Wales was imagined both by its inhabitants and by outsiders. One indicator of these changes is a shift in national nomenclature. In the sixteenth century, most people on either side of the Wye would have understood the term *Britons* to refer primarily if not exclusively to the people of Wales, descendants of the inhabitants of ancient Britain. By the late eighteenth century, the term was understood to refer equally to all subjects of the unified British state — Welsh, English, and Scots alike. Whether the political and cultural upheavals reflected in this shift involved a gain or a loss for the people of Wales is a question that can still raise passionate disagreement. One contributor to this collection quotes the grim observation of Dafydd Glyn Jones: “Dros bont Brytaniaeth, y cerddodd y Cymry i garchar tywyll Prydeindod” (“Over the bridge of Britonism, the Welsh walked into the dark gaol of Britishness”). Yet, taken as a whole, *Writing Wales* tells a more complex story of individuals and communities negotiating complex, multivalent identities on the borders of Welshness, Englishness, and Britishness.

The essays in part 1 focus on the writing of Wales under Elizabeth and James. Grace Jones examines how Welsh historical traditions were at once co-opted and defended by sixteenth-century scholars such as Humphrey Llwyd and David Powel; Jones finds an “anti-colonial” current running through the works of these writers, despite their professions of loyalty to the Tudor state. Liz Oakley-Brown explores Thomas Churchyard’s fascinating chorography *The Worthines of Wales*, arguing suggestively that the Shropshire-born Churchyard identifies with Wales less as a homeland than as a metaphorical equivalent of his own economically and socially insecure condition. Alex May similarly finds grounds for English identification with Wales and its historic defenders in Peele’s play *Edward I*: London audiences may have seen in the play’s Prince Llewellyn not an inveterate enemy of England but an attractive exponent of Robin Hood-style localism. Marisa Cull explores the fascination of early modern playwrights with the role of Prince of Wales, a fascination that becomes the more intriguing when we are reminded that the title lay in abeyance between 1502 and 1610. In the final chapter in this section, Stewart Mottram invites us to revisit William Browne’s *Britannia’s Pastorals*, a poem he finds to be both more interested in Wales and more interesting on the subject of British union than has been recognized.

Part 2 draws the reader on from the Civil War era to the close of the eighteenth century. M. Wynn Thomas considers how old Welsh myths and symbols informed the writings of the Puritan Morgan Llwyd, a key figure in the subsequent imagining

of Wales as a “Nonconformist Nation.” In a wide-ranging survey, Sarah Prescott explores how poets from Katherine Philips and Henry Vaughan in the mid-seventeenth century to John Dyer and Hester Lynch Piozzi in the eighteenth reevaluated Wales as a subject worthy of poetry. Bethan Jenkins offers an illuminating discussion of how medieval poetic forms and vocabulary were adapted for the praise of the new British state in eighteenth-century Welsh-language poetry. Mary Chadwick uses the riddles, letters, and other ephemera preserved in the archive of the Griffiths of Denbighshire to probe the nuanced, even paradoxical sense of identity experienced by an apparently “anglicised” gentry family. In the concluding essay, Jane Aaron explores a little-known selection of late eighteenth-century Gothic novels set in Wales, demonstrating how the genre provided a means of exploring themes of self-estrangement and loss of identity that weighed heavily on Welsh cultural consciousness.

Writing Wales could be mistaken for a book of two halves, with the first part focusing chiefly on Renaissance English writing about Wales, while the second concentrates on Welsh writing (in both Welsh and English) across the long eighteenth century. Yet part of the successful work of the collection is to make us wary of just such clear-cut ethnic distinctions. What nationality can we safely assign to a Thomas Churchyard, a Katherine Philips, or a Henry Vaughan? As the essays in *Writing Wales* go far to demonstrate, the troubled boundary between England and Wales runs through many of the most memorable voices of the early modern era.

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