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REVIEWS

Daniel G. Williams, *Wales Unchained: Literature, Politics and Identity in the American Century* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2015). Pp. 272. £24.99.

Daniel Williams's latest book *Wales Unchained: Literature, Politics and Identity in the American Century* consolidates and revisits his scholarship over the last ten years. It presents a fascinating array of material that together interrogates Welsh nationhood across the contested territories between essentialist ideals and modern pluralisms. The book poses an important question: how can one preserve a Welsh culture, language and tradition alongside a cosmopolitan and multicultural Wales without doing damage to either? The choice is not, Williams tells us, an either/or proposition. Rather, his chapters examine a diverse array of texts that place Wales within an international field where difference and plurality cannot be extricated from even the most insular national imaginaries. This is an important contribution for considering the many ways (national, racial, economic, sexual, gendered) in which Wales must understand its internal ambivalences, external influences and cultural inheritances.

Throughout the book, one is confronted with reductive racial and linguistic notions of Wales, and Williams begins with a consideration of Rhys Davies's racialist and primitivist approach to the history and culture of Wales. Davies's essentialism is traced through D. H. Lawrence and Matthew Arnold, the latter an important touchstone for the rest of the book. The Celt offers an alternative to modern industrial capitalist society; however, while Arnold calls for a modern civilisation that reconciles differences into the sameness of modern anglophone culture, Davies and Lawrence's essentialism is based on irreconcilable difference: anything other than a pure racial authenticity is an artificial imposition that threatens individuality.

The rest of the book revises and challenges such racial nationalisms, as in the fascinating discussion of boxing in Welsh literature and culture. Boxing, as Williams points out, is a sport informed by racialised conflicts and American myths and which came to prominence in modern industrialised Wales. The oppositional space of the ring, however, is revealed as a site of instability and cross-racial ambiguity. Williams presents a vibrant array of figures culminating in Jack Jones's Chicago-born, Welsh-speaking African American Rhondda boxer at the end of one phase of modern industrial life. Similar work is done with the comparison of Dylan Thomas and jazz musician Charlie Parker in terms of an American, post-war romantic primitivism. Both are associated with racial authenticities – Celtic or black folk primitivisms – that offer an antidote to the degradation of the modern world. As with boxing, however, Thomas's and Parker's unsettling racial, national and artistic positions, individually and in relation to each other, broke boundaries and forged new idioms. Williams's treatments of Aneurin Bevan and Paul Robeson introduce economic factors into national and racial identity. These two figures reveal tensions in Welsh intellectual and political history, and Williams examines the extent to which considerations of economic class may be understood within an identitarian politics. For Bevan, the impoverished conditions of Wales were not to be respected but eliminated and this should not be obscured by traditional nationalisms rooted in conservative ideas of national purity that implicitly idealise class divisions. Robeson, on the other hand, could only conceive of his class position in racial terms, recognising the inevitable implication of economic conditions in racial prejudice and subjugation. The approaches suggest that battles for national rights and economic justice are equally important and that they must be fought separately with an informed eye to their interrelations and contradictions. Across all of these discussions, Williams consistently refuses an easy resolution of the racial, national, economic and linguistic conflicts and influences that he presents. The endings of the chapters often (and appropriately) step back from definitive conclusions that resolve the dilemmas of Wales in the 'American century' in favour of highlighting the questions and challenges raised.

If there is a source of discomfort in Williams's study, it might be in the implications of the racial comparison between Wales and African American history. To what extent can the particular experiences be

meaningfully aligned without doing injustice to either? Fortunately, Williams is consistently sensitive to the dangers and limits of such comparisons in the texts considered. He acknowledges, for example, the problematic association of Dylan Thomas's Welshness with blackness. He notes that Dylan Thomas is also part of a dominant European literary tradition, which makes the uses to which he was put by black American writers all the more compelling. The analysis of Jon Dressel also exposes some of the dangers of taking cross-cultural comparisons too far. Specifically, Dressel's association of Welsh colonial subjugation with the American South after the American Civil War requires an artful elision of the historical realities of black slavery and a reduction of Wales to an anti-modern, prelapsarian racial and cultural purity. Further, while Mohammed Ali may serve as an allegory for Welsh anti-colonial resistance, the boxing ring is a space of modernity, confrontation, transformation and renewal. In the ring time, place and nation face off, as it were, and the racial and gendered underpinnings of language and nation are forced into unsettling confrontations that undo easy oppositional positions. Inversely, through an appreciation of his Welsh postcoloniality, the discussion of Raymond Williams refutes his dismissal by such critics as Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Paul Gilroy as an essentialist English critic. When properly viewed in his Welsh context as a border figure, Williams's fiction and criticism challenge the reductive colonialist gaze and reveal Wales as a place of variety and plurality. Critics who refuse to recognise the historical and cultural realities of Williams's Welsh background implicitly rehearse an English cultural dominance that his social existence belies. In such examples, Williams addresses a wide range of reductive formulations in order to usefully unsettle ideas of Welshness.

In the end, Wales in the 'American century' is multicultural and diverse, and this diversity is the route through which it may preserve its distinctive language and culture. The struggle to preserve the Welsh language is naturally central to Williams's discussion and, here again, he provides no easy binary understandings of the language's relation to Welsh national identities. For Duncan Bush, he points out, the notion that the Welsh language defines the borders of an authentic and communal Welsh nation threatens an individuality that he associates with American diversity and individual freedom. Even well-intentioned defenders of the Welsh language, like Gillian Clarke in 'The Water Diviner', impose an idea of Welsh-language authenticity

that forecloses upon the possibility of multicultural dialogue. In contrast, Williams's analyses across the chapters present the Welsh language as integral to the modern movements against which it has been reductively positioned. It expresses, for instance, vital experiences of modern industrial Wales, as in Selwyn Griffith's boxing sequence *Arwyr* (Heroes). In Raymond Williams's *Border Country,* Welsh is not a barrier but a border where ambivalent identifications fail to cohere in the reductive colonial formations of Welsh and English. The final chapter most directly addresses the difficult balance of equally valuing a multicultural and a Welsh-language nation. Here, Williams considers how the preservation of one does not inevitably lead to the destruction of the other. In this, he is sensitive to the ways in which discourses of multiculturalism can be little more than master narratives of inclusivity that the dominant grant to others in a kind of liberal-inflected racism. Where the chains binding race-language-place are undone, one finds a more creative space in which the Welsh language and Welsh nationalism can encompass an increasingly plural Wales. Wales may, to quote another American, Walt Whitman, 'contain multitudes' and still be itself.

Williams is, finally, very hopeful and future-oriented. He presents pluralisms that have long informed the Welsh (and American) national imaginary and which provide useful resources for the present conditions of Welsh national identities. Looking forward, this book will also be of value to any scholarship addressing the complexities of Welsh national identity in the twenty-first century.

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Marisa R. Cull, *Shakespeare's Princes of Wales: English Identity and the Welsh Connection* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). Pp. 224. £55.00.

My earliest recollection of Wales is via the grainy black and white television images of the Prince of Wales's investiture at Caernarfon Castle beamed live into my grandmother's Southampton home on 1 July 1969. The principality does not figure in my personal history again until my arrival at Cardiff University to study for my first degree in English literature. As a monolingual Anglocentric undergraduate, my pedagogical

encounters with Shakespeare under the tutelage of such theoretically driven scholars as Terence Hawkes had – and continue to have – a profound effect on my non-academic and academic personae. Listening to Hawkes's lecture on the impact of the so-called Acts of Union on notions of 'EngLit' itself from (what I would now term) a presentist perspective was ideologically illuminating. Combined with my own distant monochromatic memory of the Prince of Wales's installation which I watched with a global audience of 500 million (according to the BBC's website, 'the largest TV audience ever for an event in Wales'), Hawkes's later published thoughts on *Cymbeline* and 'Aberdaugleddyf' (2002) – or Milford Haven as Shakespeare and his English audience call it – show how national identities are shaped by the rituals, rhetoric, performances and cultural translations of verbal and non-verbal signs. While Stephen Greenblatt's brand of new historicism takes the place of Hawkes's cultural materialism (p. 53, n. 1), the 1969 investiture frames Marisa Cull's excellent *Shakespeare's Princes of Wales: English Identity and the Welsh Connection*. Reviewing her study in the run-up to the 400-year anniversary of Shakespeare's death in 1616 shows how far critical thinking on both the cultural politics of early modern Wales and England's most canonical writer has come in the past quarter of a decade.

Cull extends extant published research on Tudor and Stuart archipelagic identities, for example: Lisa Hopkins, *Shakespeare on the Edge: Border-Crossing in the Tragedies and Henriad* (2005), John Kerrigan, *Archipelagic English Identities: Literature History and Politics 1603–1707* (2008), and Willy Maley and Philip Shwyzer (eds), *Shakespeare and Wales: From the Marches to the Assembly* (2010). The overarching thrust of her discussion is that '[i]t was the princedom's connection to the crisis of succession, to the problems attendant on war and conquest, to the intricacies of propagating a successful "union" that made it such an effective and malleable symbol' (pp. 152–3) from the late sixteenth to the mid-seventeenth centuries. Working out from a telling epigraph, 'It is the prince of Wales that threatens thee, / Who never promiseth but he that means to pay' (1 *Henry IV,* 5.4.41–2), Cull's tightly structured monograph – comprised of an introduction, five integrated chapters and an epilogue – charts a savvy chronological route through canonical and less familiar primary texts which both contest and intersect with contemporaneous discourses of Anglo-Welsh correspondence.

As the title of the opening chapter suggests, in 'The Princedom of Wales as Political Stage' Cull focuses on the ways in which Shakespearean dramas produced before the Interregnum function as political and cultural allegories. The author's appetite for reading against the homosocial grain is in evidence from the outset. The preliminary discussion of George Peele's *Edward I,* for instance, looks at the significance of historical queens consort alongside queens regnant and aristocratic women at large before considering the 'striking transformation that the princedom underwent during the reign of James I' (p. 50). Here, the author's scrutiny of the variable critical understandings of Henry Tudor's 'choice of the red dragon pursuivant' – an ideal demonstration of the 'complexity of the relationship between [the monarch] and his Welsh ties' (pp. 26–7) – is illustrative of a compelling critical practice which combines historical detail with a keen sense of semiotic slippage. In keeping with the first chapter's focus on the dramatisation of dynastic concerns, chapter 2 takes up the discussion via Shakespeare's first tetralogy, a series of plays 'rarely mentioned in studies that address the "British" problem' (p. 58), and shows how *Richard III*'s Margaret flags up the Welsh princedom's significance: 'Edward thy son, that now is Prince of Wales, / For Edward my son, that was Prince of Wales, / Die in his youth by like untimely violence' (*Richard III,* 1.3.196–8). In so doing, Cull examines the means by which Shakespeare's sixteenth-century history plays, from *1 Henry VI* to *Henry V,* depict 'Wales – and all the shadowed princes that play and fight along its border' as 'an expression of the growing need to make the Welsh princedom English again' (p. 13).

It is fitting that the book's central chapter examines the cultural and dramatic representations of the last indigenous Prince of Wales recognised by the English Crown, Llywelyn ap Gruffydd. Cull explains that 'the Black Prince's call for a specifically princely dynastic succession at the close of *The Reign of Edward III* anticipates the theatrical "imagined community" of princes of Wales that has inspired this study' (p. 86). This brief but effective integration of Benedict Anderson's 1983 concept of socially constructed nationhood is a further demonstration of Cull's light but nonetheless convincing analytical touch. If the first three chapters examine the ways in which early modern English drama exploits the lacuna of the empty princedom of Wales, chapter 4 looks at the impact of Henry Frederick, 'the first formally invested prince of Wales since Arthur Tudor in 1489' (p. 13), and the comparative

national identities dramatised in the Jacobean period: Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* (*c.*1610) and R.A.'s *The Valiant Welshman or the true chronicle history of the life and valiant deedes of Caradoc the Great, King of Cambria, now called Wales* (*c.*1615). Cull argues that each play has its respective 'theatrical double for the prince of Wales. In *Cymbeline,* that double is Guiderius . . . In *The Valiant Welshman,* Caradoc serves as a double for Henry Frederick' (p. 125). As with the book's earlier examination of the bifurcated criticisms of Henry Tudor's 'red dragon pursuivant', in the light of Henry Frederick's 'carefully crafted persona' (p. 125) as a martial hero 'the average playgoer in 1610 would find two very different versions' of that trait – 'depending on what side of the river the prince's story is told' (p. 145). By the time the reader reaches the fifth and final chapter, 'Anticipating the Revolution: The Princedom in Decline', it is clear that they have been steered through a highly convincing discussion of English and Welsh identity politics in a select but cogent range of Tudor and Stuart drama. In sum, *Shakespeare's Princes of Wales* is a sharp study which exhibits Cull's considerable talent for combining close textual analysis and insightful comment about past – and notably present – Anglo-Welsh relations.

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John Ormond, *John Ormond: Collected Poems* (Bridgend: Seren, 2015). Pp. 316. £14.99.

According to received wisdom, John Ormond was not a prolific poet. As his daughter Rian Evans pointed out at the Cardiff launch of this edition of his *Collected Poems,* much has been made of Vernon Watkins's famous advice to a young Ormond not to write any more poetry until the age of forty. In fact, the poet attested to this himself. He spoke on many occasions of the pressures of his career as a journalist and, later, as head of the BBC Wales Film Unit, on what he called his 'work' as a poet, in moods that ranged from cheerful resignation to melancholic regret. There was even perhaps a tinge of resentment in his admission that 'if I'd spent even a tenth of the time and imaginative effort in trying to write a poem as I put into making a film – directing it, writing it, arranging it, supervising the cutting to a twenty-fifth second of it – then I'd probably have more poems' (quoted in Richard

Poole, 'Conversations with John Ormond', *The New Welsh Review,* 2/1 (1989), 42). Indeed, besides a handful of shared works and the late *Selected Poems* (1987), he published only two original volumes in his lifetime and even these, *Requiem and Celebration* (1969) and *Definition of a Waterfall* (1973), contain significant overlaps. Yet this weighty new collection, published by Seren, edited and annotated by Rian Evans, and with an introduction by Patrick McGuinness, totally belies any sense of creative paucity. Almost everything is collected here, from the early Dylanesque work of his student days to a poem completed a mere month before his death, and including, for the first time, an illuminating selection of 'Saturday Poems' that he wrote for the *News Chronicle* in the 1950s – a decade in which he was previously assumed to be virtually silent. This book fully disproves the idea that Ormond was an artist of limited output and attests only to the richness and diversity of the work of this significant Welsh artist.

Ormond was, of course, an artist in more than one medium and possessed a distinctly cross-cultural, intertextual vision. The *News Chronicle* poems are a key example of this and in fact prove themselves to be pivotal in his development. These were verses written as captions to images by photojournalist greats, including Bill Brandt and Henri Cartier-Bresson, and they evidence Ormond's chameleon-like ability to think across formal boundaries, to adapt himself to a vast range of artistic forms and intellectual discourses in his work. One of his major preoccupations was the profound interconnectedness of human culture and very often his poems take their cue from the work of other writers, visual artists, composers, even geologists and sailors. These poems revel in intertextuality and cross-cultural correspondence. A key example of this is 'Landscape in Dyfed', a poem written for the neo-Romantic landscape painter Graham Sutherland. This is its first stanza:

> Because the sea grasped cleanly here, and there
> Coaxed too unsurely until clenched strata
> Resisted, an indecision of lanes resolves
> This land into gestures of beckoning
> Towards what is here and beyond, and both at hand. (p. 222)

Here Ormond constructs a linguistic homology for Sutherland's characteristically elaborate visual patterns. The stanza consists of a single,

complexly interlocking sentence that draws on the lexicon of geology, and its consonantal emphases insist on a phonetic dissonance that seems to mimic the harsh visual geometries of rock formations: 'Coaxed too unsurely until clenched strata / Resisted'. Many of Ormond's poems perform such acts of intertextuality in a mode comparable to his great documentaries on Welsh poets and artists. In doing so they celebrate the value and recompense that art offers in a commodified, unstable, secular world.

In this sense Ormond was a classic humanist and Patrick McGuinness's introduction is deftly perceptive on this score. It engages in sensitive close readings that make a valuable and long-needed new contribution to the critical literature on Ormond's poetry, while at same time very ably situating the work socially and intellectually. McGuinness charts Ormond's ascent out of the 'ambient Dylanism' (p. 15) of the 1940s into his more economical – though no less finely crafted – writing of the 1960s onwards. He attends to Ormond's vision of poetry as a material, social act; a form that deserves its place not only in slim volumes held on a few shelves in the corners of bookstores but alive in the culture, here and now, informing our perception and our conception of the wider social world. This sense of poetry's place in society connects in significant ways with Ormond's egalitarianism but also with his lack of patience for the intellectual rigidities of politics – particularly those of a national inflection. For Ormond, art is bigger than all that and was therefore afforded a far higher priority in his thinking. Ormond's readable poems speak of this themselves, of course, but McGuinness's introduction, along with the comprehensive annotations that bookend the collection – written by Rian Evans with the intriguing insight only a family member can offer – illuminates the poems splendidly.

The plaque that hangs on the front of Ormond's house on Conway Road in Cardiff states simply 'John Ormond Poet 1923–1990'. This indispensable book is a reminder of the peculiar modesty of that epitaph. The sum total of Ormond's output on paper and on film was a vital contribution to post-war Welsh culture and this long-awaited book fully confirms this. It will no doubt become a cornerstone in our understanding of his considerable body of work and of the Wales in which he lived.

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