

SCINTILLA

The Journal of the Vaughan Association

26

For a quarter century, *Scintilla* has carried forward the journal's commitment to Welsh literary culture, metaphysical poetry and the seventeenth century poets, Henry and Thomas Vaughan. As the publication looks to its next 25 years, it will continue to provide a space for creative responses and research through the intersection of new poetry and literary criticism.

"*Scintilla* does an admirable job. It holds to the transformative vision of its tutelary spirit, Henry Vaughan, by publishing not only new poetry but prose that encompasses both the scholarly and the spiritual."

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"I have found its informative literary essays ... of great importance for my own work and interests."
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"... a wide range of essays ... There is a lot here that is creatively provocative ... Some of the poems seem to me primary."

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"This remarkable journal contains scholarly and Meditative articles alongside new poems (long and short) and works of visual art, all splendidly produced and a joy to read or contemplate ... *Scintilla* honours an ancient tradition ... but is equally in tune with some of the most fundamental concerns of our own time."

Helen Wilcox (Bangor University)

"Few literary magazines can match its seriousness and its high editorial values."

Stephen Stuart-Smith (Enitharmon Press)

SCINTILLA 26

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A journal of literary criticism, prose and new poetry
in the metaphysical tradition

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PREFACE

Scintilla 26 arrives at an important point in the history of the journal. It signals the transition to what we hope is the next quarter-century (or longer!) of the Vaughan Association's commitment to celebrate the work of the Vaughan twins, Henry and Thomas. In this 26th edition of the journal, we include 5 significant essays that contribute to our ongoing exploration of metaphysical poetry, 17th-century thought, as well as the lives of the Vaughans, and those in their orbit—as well as the consideration of their influence on the poetry of today. Henry and Thomas lived in a difficult time, a time of bewildering political and military loss because of the Civil War; the closing of their parish at Llansantffraed, where Thomas served as priest; the banning of the Book of Common Prayer; and the complete reinvention of once familiar political and theological institutions. These difficulties forced both men to reconstruct their lives and identities, Henry, as 'Silurist', and Thomas, as '*Eugenius Philaethes*'. Their poetry and prose demonstrate their thoughtful responses to these challenges as they faced questions of identity and purpose; as they probed the relationship between the past and the present; as they explored the relationships between their existential questioning of inner life and the outer world, especially the beautiful Usk Valley where the Vaughan brothers grew up and called home.

This issue begins with an essay by Clay Greene, who investigates Thomas Vaughan's interest in the preexistence of the soul. This fixation grounds the *telos* of Vaughan's alchemical project and explains the central concern of his philosophy, the acquisition of practical knowledge through experimentation as a means of imitating and praising the First Person of the Trinity. From Greene's perspective, Thomas' view of the preexistence of the soul also animates his desire to explore new frontiers, as well.

We then turn to an essay by Holly Nelson, who considers the means by which British writers in the post-Civil War period conceived of the "chronotrope" as a form of navigating space and time that encourages the processing of personal and national trauma. Nelson asserts that while Margaret Cavendish and Henry Vaughan

may have engaged in forms of escapism or reimagining their relationship to nature as responses to the traumas of the period, they were coping with the life circumstances that confronted them, modifying their perceptions of reality in order to improve their emotional response to those challenges.

Jean Ward scrutinizes the relationship between Elizabeth Jennings and Henry Vaughan. From Ward's perspective, Vaughan plays a foundational role in Jennings' study of mystical poetry in the Western tradition. For Jennings, Vaughan is a poet who occupies a supernaturalised world and possesses an innocence that reflects a sense of maturity and an enduring ability to face the most terrible things in this world. Jennings also notes Vaughan's reliance on light imagery and references to childhood—both as starting points by which he dazzles the reader with technical skill and vivid imagery. Ward also reminds us that both Jennings and Vaughan possess a lyricism that encourages the reader to experience forms of love and exaltation in the divine.

Jeremy Hooker introduces us to modern images of alchemy in the works of Lindsay Clark and David Gascoyne. Hooker compares and contrasts the conception and utility of alchemical imagery in the creative works of both writers. Clarke relies on the imagery of fire, as well as images of reconciliation of opposites. Gascoyne understands alchemy as a form of magic that reconciles opposites. Hooker sees both writers as engaged in the task of demonstrating the transformative joining together of opposites in the human being as a means of overcoming universal destruction and pursuing spiritual healing.

Continuing our interest in the biographical context of the Vaughans, Donald Dickson illuminates the parish register of St. Peter and St. Paul in Coleshill and examines what it reveals about the Wise family, the family into which Henry Vaughan married. Dickson's research suggests that Henry Vaughan married into an English family that has risen to a significant social and economic status. The parish records that Dickson explores demonstrate that Vaughan's marriage connected him to a family of privilege and prominence in 17th century England.

Our final essay, by Joseph Sterrett examines the parallels between the language of poetry and the language of science in the work of Henry Vaughan. Sterrett makes the case that poetry and scientific inquiry are inextricably linked, each attempting to put a finger on the imponderable and only able to do so through metaphor, analogy, through poetic technique. Poetry is the language of wonder, and the sciences create the scaffolding to conceive of and pursue that which

is wondrous. In Vaughan's work, we discover a language that invites more than religious contemplation, it opens the reader to accept the overwhelming reality that he or she is a creature occupying a small piece of what he or she comes to recognize as a limitless universe.

The poetry chosen for volume 26 once again pitches itself within, alongside, and in creative ways 'after' the metaphysical tradition of the Vaughan brothers and their contemporaries. Rosie Jackson's poem 'John Donne Dreams his Still-Born Son Lives' might valuably be seen to rehearse, in a meta perspective, those conceptual and chronological entailments that necessarily prompt inflections and departures: 'It's strange how things are handed down, / like seeing yourself poured out again in a pitcher / of next year's water'.

The pitcher of poetry this volume offers both contains and overflows: Rizwan Akhtar's 'Winter's Specks' is a fluid examination of seasonal change, its syntax slipping over lines. This leaves us 'now reading our histories randomly' from a position of epistemological uncertainty that is reflected in several poems in this issue. Take David Lloyd's re-casting of the medieval Welsh prose cycle, the *Mabinogi*, in which Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor tell 'frothy stories that might / or might not, or must or must not, / be true'. But in that uncertainty is much exuberance – a welcome quality in a time of continuing military conflict and obscene violence, as we see in Julian Stannard's pair of 'bomb' poems: 'Schopenhauer said life was a tin of prunes / which was irritatingly difficult to prize open. / Sheet-washing day is a crackerjack day – a carnival.'

In both its poetry and prose, *Scintilla* 26, like its preceding volumes, asks readers to hold two competing truths in their minds simultaneously: First, the broad Welsh artistic tradition is important, and, second, artists have engaged that tradition in a variety of unique and significant ways. Throughout its history, this journal has assessed responses to both of those truths and continually added new contributions to those it had made before. In its future, *Scintilla* will continue to find new ways to explore how 17th-century thought, metaphysical poetry, and the contributions of complex figures, such as the Vaughan brothers and those in their orbit, work independently and in concert, to teach their audiences to read the world anew.