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A “SCOTO-BRITISH-EUROPEAN” REDISCOVERED: THE LIFE AND WRITINGS OF GEORGE LAUDER

Kelsey Jackson Williams

Alasdair A. MacDonald. *George Lauder (1603-1670): Life and Writings*. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2018. Pp. 444. Hardback, £75; \$165. ISBN 9781843845065. Also available online from Canbridge Core.

It is not often that a major poet is rediscovered by modern Scottish literary scholarship. The exhaustive productions of publication societies from the Bannatyne Club to the Scottish Text Society mean that whilst critical literature may remain thin on the ground, editions of early modern Scottish texts are comparatively abundant; figures such as William Fowler, William Drummond of Hawthornden, Sir Thomas Urquhart, and Arthur Johnston had all received more or less adequate and well-known editions of their complete works by the middle of the twentieth century.¹ In more recent times, Jamie Reid Baxter’s pathbreaking work on Elizabeth Melville’s manuscript poems, and Sigrid Rieuwerts’s edition of the ballad repertoire of Anna Gordon Brown, among others, represent

¹ *The Works of William Fowler, Secretary to Queen Anne, Wife of James VI*, 3 vols, ed. Henry W. Meikle *et al.* [STS n.s. 6, 3rd ser. 7, 13] (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1914-1940); *The Poetical Works of William Drummond*, 2 vols., ed. L. E. Kastner [STS n.s. 3, 4] (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1913); *The Works of Sir Thomas Urquhart of Cromarty, Knight* [Maitland Club, vol. 30] (Edinburgh: [H. and J. Pillans] for the Maitland Club, 1834); Arthur Johnston, vols 1-2, ed. William Duguid Geddes [New Spalding Club, publications no. 9 and 13, 1892-1895], in *Musa Latina Aberdonensis*, ed. Geddes and Leask, 3 vols (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press for the New Spalding Club, 1892-1910). Of these, the latter two, while they played important roles in familiarising the scholarly world with Urquhart and Johnston respectively, are now desperately in need of re-editing. These editions in particular are highlighted as examples of poets broadly comparable to George Lauder.

important additions to the canon.² However, as the present volume proves, much awaits discovery in the archives and rare books collections of Europe.

George Lauder (1603-1670) was not completely unknown—witness T. W. Bayne’s brief account of his life and works in the original *Dictionary of National Biography*—but until Alasdair MacDonald’s *magnum opus*, his originality, ingenuity, and significance have been radically underestimated. Lauder was born in or about 1603, the son, not of the poet Marie Maitland (as repeated in both editions of the *DNB*), but of her husband Alexander Lauder’s second wife, Annabel Bellenden, herself the scion of a famously literary family. Lauder studied at the University of Edinburgh before travelling to London and Paris in the 1620s and ultimately embarking on a career as an officer in the armies which then swarmed across the war-torn continent. After brief service under the English and Danish flags, he settled into regular employment with the Dutch States, residing there and fighting on their behalf for the remainder of his life. He died in 1670 and was buried at Breda beneath a heraldic *wapenbord* which proudly commemorated his Scottish gentry ancestry, the picture of a “Scoto-British European” of his generation.³

Variations on such a career were commonplace in an era when so many Scots lived out their lives as soldiers, merchants, scholars, and priests furth of the realm. What made Lauder remarkable was his poetic output. From his youth in Edinburgh until his old age in the Low Countries, he composed a poetic corpus totalling—in this edition—153 pages of original verse, as well as translations and correspondence. As a Scot abroad, he was unusual for writing, not in the Latin *lingua franca* of his day, but in the English of the Metaphysical poets. His earliest works are conventional translations of anti-Catholic satire, but while still only nineteen he was already capable of composing the precocious *Farewell*, possibly in imitation of William Lithgow’s *Pilgrimes Farewell* of 1618 (MacDonald, 24). This was soon followed by the *Unconstant Lover*,

² *Poems of Elizabeth Melville, Lady Culross: Unpublished Work from Manuscript with “Ane godlie dreame,”* ed. Jamie Reid Baxter (Edinburgh: Solsequeum, 2010); *The Ballad Repertoire of Anna Gordon, Mrs Brown of Falkland*, ed. Sigrid Rieuwerts [Scottish Text Society, 4th ser., no. 8] (Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2011), 218-19.

³ MacDonald’s phrase (e.g., at MacDonald, 11) deserves wider usage as a way of capturing the multiple identities of early modern Scots.

written during his sojourn in Paris in 1624 and echoing in English the Latin sentiments of John Leech's *Anacreontica* from a few years before.⁴

The vast majority of Lauder's verse, however, reflects his life as a soldier caught up in the political and religious turmoils of the Thirty Years' War and its aftermath. Notable works of his from the 1630s include *The Scottish Souldier* (1629), *Evander* (1630), *Areteophel* (1634), and *Tweeds Teares of Joy* (1639). Lauder was by this time an accomplished poet capable of handling the sentiments of the age with skill and craftsmanship, as in this section from a reworking of Horace's *Ode* 3.30 in his elegy on Walter Scott, Earl of Buccleuch:

Let no rare artiste hand vaine wonders raise
A wandring eye to stay theron to gaize;
Sett no Numidian pompe of Paros stone,
Proud coast, and times short wonder therupon.
Nor need those live-like stones aboue you stand,
Or breathles bulkes of brasse with lampe in hand.

Lauder, *Areteophel*, ll. 135-144 (MacDonald, 255).

Both in origin and expression, such passages indicate Lauder's deep engagement with Latin and Greek literature as well as with that of his contemporaries, an aspect of his life which can also be seen in MacDonald's discussion of his extensive library (150-167).

The subsequent decades saw Lauder continue to address his poems to Dutch worthies, but also to turn his eyes towards the upheavals on his native island with topical poems such "On the most Horrid and Terrible Treason, the unparaelled Parracide, committed upon the Sacred Person, of the High and Mighty PRINCE, CHARLES" (1649) and his lengthy pastoral elegy on the death of William Drummond of Hawthornden. *Eubulus*, a lengthy poetic letter to the restored Charles II in the *specula principum* tradition is notable amongst his later works with its moderate royalist insistence upon a mixture of divine right and personal merit:

'Tis not a Crown that makes a King,
That but decores his sacred head,
A mark of Sovereignty and dread,
'Tis love that doth obedience bring;
The Scepter doth but shew his power,

⁴ For Leech's *Anacreontica* (Paris: Laquehay, 1618; London: s.n., 1620), see the digital edition, ed. Dana F. Sutton (2016), for *The Philological Museum*, University of Birmingham, at: <http://www.philological.bham.ac.uk/anacr/>.

His justice doth confirm it more,
 And keeps his Subjects in just aw;
 By which his people plainly see
 That God hath set him up, to be
 His Lievtenant, the speaking Law.

Eubulus, ll. 391-400 (MacDonald, 309).

Aside from a lone epitaph on Alexander Wedderburn, dateable to 1670, 1661 saw the last of Lauder's surviving poetic productions with his substantial *Hecatombe Christiana*, a 1000-line meditation on the life and death of Christ. The almost Miltonic power and sustained ecstasy of the *Hecatombe* make it stand out as one of his most sophisticated works, in which Lauder demonstrates a rich, metaphysical piling-up of imagery blended with the impassioned prayer of a protestant hymn:

The fertile furrows of a spacious Plain,
 In swelling surges of a Sea of Corn,
 See not so many ears her Waves adorn,
 When harvest rich rewards the Plough-man's pain;
 So many stars seed not the azure sky,
 So many flowers smile not the fields to die,
 When Spring in her fresh dressing shews most fine;
 As our most liberal and loving Lord,
 Doth mercies, blessings, favours, still afford,
 To those whose hearts to keep his Laws incline.

Hecatombe Christiana, ll. 301-310 (MacDonald, 324).

Lauder's work deserves such lengthy introduction and quotation precisely because it is so little known. Why might this be, a reader should reasonably ask? Why has it been left to Alasdair MacDonald in 2018, rather than some worthy forerunner a hundred years ago, to establish Lauder as one of the major Scottish poets of his generation?

The obvious, though not sufficient, answer would be serendipity or juxtaposition: MacDonald spent much of his career in Holland, as professor at Groningen, and proximity encouraged curiosity and facilitated research. In his introduction to the present volume, however, MacDonald offers a sustained, and less personal, answer to the question of Lauder's long neglect and belated rediscovery. Seventeenth-century Scottish poetry has traditionally been seen as the poor cousin of the Makaris, neither sufficiently Scottish nor sufficiently English to garner the attention of nationally-obsessed literary traditions, while Lauder's life abroad and his decision to write in English rather than Scots or Latin makes him even more likely to be marginalised by "a narrow and

isolationist view of national culture” (MacDonald, 11). MacDonald pushes back against this, convincingly insisting that Scots writing in English deserve equal attention as their Scotophone counterparts and that “authors who are innovative in drawing inspiration from new foreign models deserve better than to be dismissed as derivative” (10).

Such statements echo more broadly through Scottish literary studies and make this edition and study of Lauder potentially wider in its relevance. If we accept—as we should—MacDonald’s revaluing of Lauder by these standards, we are forced to reevaluate many other neglected figures, perhaps most notably William Drummond of Hawthornden, whose poetry has suffered from unjustified neglect ever since his 1913 editor L. E. Kastner identified Drummond’s many debts to continental literature and summarily categorised him as “a poet of the school of imitation” who “cannot pretend to the highest rank.”⁵ In an era of scholarship which is finally beginning to break free both from a Romantic cult of originality and a Kurt-Wittigian determination to find the “true” Scottish tradition in literature, writers such as Lauder and Drummond may finally receive a more unbiased and thoughtful consideration by critics. If they do, it will in no small part be due to the pioneering efforts of scholars such as Alasdair MacDonald.

As befits a first modern edition, this is a substantial volume. The monograph-length opening section is a 168-page introduction to Lauder’s life and works which also treats *inter alia* his contexts and reception. This is followed by the poetic corpus itself which includes not only poems by Lauder, but poems *to* Lauder, and correspondence, as well as extensive commentary.⁶ MacDonald is alert to his role as Lauder’s first editor and includes a lengthy bibliography establishing Lauder’s *oeuvre* (175-184), which almost all survives only in print sources, save for one surviving manuscript witness, NLS MS 1806 (the Newhailes MS). In his “Treatment of Texts” (185-189), MacDonald states that he has retained the capitalisation and italicisation of the source-texts, and that, while

⁵ Kastner, as in n. 1 above, I: xliii-xliv.

⁶ The only known Lauder work *not* included in this edition, as MacDonald specifies, is a prose work, his 92-page English translation of Marie du Moulin’s *Les dernières heures de monsieur Rivet* (Breda, 1651), published as *The last houers, of the right reverend Father in God Andrew Rivet, ... Translated by G.L.* (Hagh [The Hague]: Samuel Broun, English Bookseller, 1652), ESTC R218023; also available through JISC/Historical Texts (R1554A, Wing 2nd ed.).

punctuation is editorial, he has been “minimally interventionist” (186). This is further clarified through an admirably detailed discussion of his editorial practice in treating apostrophes, abbreviations, combinations, etc., leaving the reader in no doubt as to the editorial practices that have been adopted (186-189). As to substantive variants or choice of text, Lauder’s work does not present any significant challenges as few if any variants are known and surviving witnesses seem to be largely reliable. Locating material within the text is made straightforward through a quadripartite index of first lines, manuscripts, places, and names.

The long-term value of a volume such as this can only be determined by its impact; if George Lauder begins to appear on reading lists, in anthologies, and in other scholars’ footnotes over the coming decades, it will have succeeded. It should be of interest to scholars and students both of Scottish literature and of seventeenth-century history. As an edition, a critical biography, and an intervention in Scottish literature, however, this is an exceptional piece of work and one for which MacDonald is to be warmly commended.

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