

Alasdair A. MacDonald. *George Lauder (1603-1670): Life and Writings*. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2018.

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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 Aside from Jamie Reid Baxter's pathbreaking 2010 edition of Elizabeth Melville's poetry, most of which had until then remained in manuscript, there are few recent examples of the rediscovery and consequent re-editing of a major early modern Scottish poet's work.²

This volume, however, is one of those examples. 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 conjectured lesbian 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. He 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 a long-standing relationship 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 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

¹ *The Works of William Fowler, Secretary to Queen Anne, Wife of James VI*, 3 vols., ed. Henry W. Meikle (Edinburgh, 1914-1940); *The Poetical Works of William Drummond*, 2 vols., ed. L. E. Kastner (Edinburgh and London, 1913); *The Works of Sir Thomas Urquhart of Cromart, Knight* (Edinburgh, 1834); *Musa Latina Aberdonensis*, 3 vols., ed. William Duguid Geddes (Aberdeen, 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.

² *Poems of Elizabeth Melville, Lady Culross: Unpublished Work from Manuscript with 'Ane godlie dreame'*, ed. Jamie Reid Baxter (Edinburgh, 2010).

³ The phrase is MacDonald's, e.g., at 11, but deserves rather wider usage as a way of capturing the multiple identities of early modern Scots.

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 (24). This was soon followed by the *Unconstant Lover*, 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 from the 1630s include *The Scottish Souldier* (1629), *Evander* (1630), *Aretophel* (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.⁵

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 unparalleled Parricide, 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,
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.⁶

⁴ For Leech's *Anacreontica* see the digital edition by Dana F. Sutton at <http://www.philological.bham.ac.uk/anacr/>.

⁵ George Lauder, *Aretophel*, ll. 135-144 (p. 255 of this edition).

⁶ George Lauder, *Eubulus*, ll. 391-400 (p. 309 of this edition).

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.⁷

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? MacDonald offers a sustained answer in the introduction to the present volume. 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" (11). MacDonald pushes back against this, convincingly insisting that Scots writing in English deserve equal attention as their Scotophone counterparts and that "[a]uthors 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 much 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".⁸ In an era of scholarship which is finally beginning to break free both from a Romantic cult of originality and a Wittigian determination to find the "true" Scottish tradition in literature, writers such as Lauder and Drummond may finally receive a more

⁷ George Lauder, *Hecatombe Christiana*, ll. 301-310 (p. 324 of this edition).

⁸ Drummond, *Poetical Works*, i. xliii-xliv.

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. Its first section is a 168-page monographic 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.⁹ MacDonald is alert to his role as first editor and includes a lengthy bibliography establishing Lauder's *oeuvre* (175-184), all print sources save for NLS MS 1806 (the Newhailes MS) which is the only surviving manuscript witness. In his "Treatment of Texts" (185-189), MacDonald states that capitalisation and italicisation have been retained, while punctuation is editorial but "minimally interventionist" (186). This is additionally clarified through an admirably detailed discussion of editorial practice surrounding apostrophes, abbreviations, combinations, etc., leaving the reader in no doubt as to the editorial practices in use (186-189). The texts themselves do 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 and in footnotes over the coming decades, it will have succeeded. 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. It will be of interest to all scholars and students of early modern Scottish literature and history.

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⁹ Note that, as MacDonald specifies, the one known work by Lauder *not* included in this edition is his English translation of Marie du Moulin's *Les dernières heures de monsieur Rivet* (Breda, 1651), published as *The last bowers, of the right reverend Father in God Andrew Rivet* (The Hague, 1652; ESTC R218023).