

**Corey E. Andrews, *The Genius of Scotland: The Cultural Production of Robert Burns, 1785-1834*. Leiden: Brill Rodopi, 2015. Pp. 290. pb €72. ISBN 9789004294363.**

Henry Mackenzie's description of Burns as a 'Heaven-taught ploughman' in his 1786 unsigned essay for the *Lounger*, is surely one of the most influential soundbites in the history of literary criticism. Building on Burns's own self-presentation as an untutored 'Rhymer', this label carried a weight of appeal that at times entirely swamped the reception of the Ayrshireman's complex poetics. The notion of Burns as 'Heaven-taught' went hand in hand with the widespread identification of him as an authentic expression of Scottishness. These co-dependent aspects of the Burns phenomenon are the immediate subject of Andrews's monograph, teased out via the central term 'genius'. This keyword, as he explicates, carried a significant range of meaning in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, including both the notion of a singular prodigy, and the spirit of a people or place.

Andrews offers an unusual and welcome approach to his subject, laying his emphasis on the 'cultural production' of Burns in reviews, criticism and poetic responses, rather than in the work of the poet himself. At its best this book provides a methodical survey of the literary-critical field in which the contested and idealised figure of Burns evolved during the poet's lifetime and across the nineteenth century. It is capable of real insight into the complexity and ideological freighting of the process of his establishment as such a major emblem of the Scottish nation. In juxtaposing the reflections of relatively well-known figures like John Keats, Anne Grant and Robert Tannahill against those of minor names like William Hamilton Drummond and James Graham, Andrews provides his book with a plurality of vision that nicely captures the intricacy and scale of Burns's impact.

Early in the work Andrews traces the progress of what he terms 'Genius Theory' in the thought of the Scottish Enlightenment, which is shown to have laid the foundations for Burns's particular celebrity. Studies then focus on different phases in the cultural production of Burns, before turning to his posthumous influence on the landscape of Scottish poetry, including a concluding piece on James Hogg. The selections of material are generally well-handled, though there are slips in the quality of argumentation. These occur most frequently in moments of theoretical analysis, which do not always feel sufficiently well-integrated or unpacked. Andrews's extensive use of Bourdieu is a positive choice that yields leverage on the questions of cultural capital, class, commerce and aesthetics that shape Burns's experience, but more could be done within this framework. Equally, though this monograph draws on a good range of Burns scholarship, its insights could perhaps have been sharpened with closer attention to the work of Nigel Leask, whose *Robert Burns and Pastoral* is currently the critical benchmark on the 'Heaven-taught' dimension to Burns. The material on Hogg is in general less secure, though Andrews does achieve a rendering of the considerable presence of Burns in Hogg's career, as he negotiated his own success under the banner of the 'Ettrick Shepherd'. Passing mention is made of Hogg's other overarching influence, Walter Scott, a relationship about which Ian Duncan has written so effectively; and the contrasting yet parallel roles played by Burns and the 'Author of Waverley' in Hogg's career remain intriguing subjects.

For all its public impact, the 'Heaven-taught ploughman' label could be restrictive and patronising for Burns, refusing him the degree of sophistication clearly present in his works, limiting his relevance in the same breath as it praised his exceptionality. One of Andrews's most interesting contestations is that Burns's later career sees a transition, as the poet attempted to distance himself from this iteration towards the figure of a 'Scotch Bard'. Certainly Burns's turn to focus on song in the 1790s signalled a recalibration of sorts. Yet, perhaps partly due to Andrews's emphasis lying chiefly beyond Burns's own agency, this

argument feels underexplored, with the poet's relationship to his persona(e) begging a more thorough mapping.

This is a worthy contribution to the field of Burns studies that will also be of interest to students and scholars of Scottish culture, Romanticism and cultural nationalism. Though not without imperfections, Andrews's book bears out its stated aim to 'interpret the various permutations of the poet's iconic identity as the "genius of Scotland"' (28). The image of Burns has played and continues to play a major role in Scottish culture and beyond, subjected to much ideological appropriation. William Wordsworth's elegiac responses are a telling example – as Andrews shows, they reveal considerably more about the mourner's performance of self than they do about the dead poet Burns. The body of collective imagining around the man and the poet is an unwieldy and often contradictory cultural phenomenon – one which Andrews succeeds in placing a spotlight upon.

*Gerard Lee McKeever*  
*University of Glasgow*