

Ian Brown and Gerard Carruthers, eds., *Performing Robert Burns: Enactments and Representations of the 'National Bard'*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021. Pp. iv + 210. £75.00. ISBN 9781474457149.

Adam White, *John Clare's Romanticism*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017. Pp. 332. £89.99. ISBN 9783319538587.

Performing Robert Burns: Enactments and Representations of the 'National Bard' offers thirteen chapters on various forms of representation and performance related to Robert Burns. This volume is wide-ranging, where classical music, folk music, theatre, film, and public events are discussed, while also traversing the decades immediately following Burns's lifetime, before concluding with a contemporary performer's account.

The volume begins with a chapter by the editors, Ian Brown and Gerard Carruthers, offering a broad picture of Burns's cultural prominence, not just in Scotland, but globally, where songs such as 'Auld Lang Syne' have been performed from Glasgow to New York. This chapter, as throughout the volume, stresses Burns's importance as a songwriter, noting he either wrote or edited 'more songs than poems', and touches on the significant impact Burns has had on Scottish folk traditions as well as American ones; songwriters such as Bob Dylan have hailed Burns as a vital influence (1). The second chapter, by John Burnett and Carruthers, examines the possibilities of considering the role of editor as a form of curation or performance. This chapter also touches on Burns's calculating presentation of his own image, as seen in the prefaces to his Kilmarnock and Edinburgh editions of *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect*. The third chapter, by Jim Davis with Tracy Cattell, focuses on Burns and theatre. Although Burns's literary engagements with theatre were limited, this chapter discusses Burns's various forms of support for the theatre, including a prologue he wrote for the actress Louisa Fontenelle (1769/73-1799) that contained 'potentially subversive' lines, drawing from Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man* (36). This chapter draws from Burns's letters and correspondences to give some sense of his interest and awareness of drama and the stage, despite never producing any dramatic works.

Paul Maloney provides the fourth chapter on Burns and Music Hall. Maloney covers a number of subjects, including parody, where in one instance, 'Tam o' Shanter' is (liberally) transformed onto a football pitch, illustrating the reach of Burns in the Scottish cultural imagination and the willingness to keep him there. Maloney and Adrienne Scullion discuss 'Tam o' Shanter' on the stage in the fifth chapter. Stage productions of this well-known poem used the audience's familiarity to adapt and rework the story, often as a way of commenting on Burns's legacy. Ronnie Young discusses 'Performing Identity and the Burns Supper', where the ritual elements of Burns Suppers provide a complicated – and changing – negotiation of national symbols and traditions. Christopher A. Whatley's chapter focuses on 'Burns, Public Ceremonial and Civic Scotland' in the long nineteenth century. Whatley shows Burns as a stabilising force for Scottish society, where he was publicly celebrated and commemorated across the political and class spectrum, often in 'large-scale' events (116). Rhona Brown provides a highly engaging account of three twentieth-century plays on Burns. Brown illustrates the uniqueness of each play, as well as the shared, near obsessive, focus on womanising as central to depicting Burns.

Alistair Braidwood looks at Burns and film and discusses several early biopics. Braidwood reminds us that nearly all of the Burns biopics are at least fifty years old, and rightly calls for a 'serious attempt to bring Burns back to the big screen' (147). Kirsteen McCue examines Burns within orchestral repertoire from 1879 to 1959. As with other modes of

performance, representing Burns via orchestra proved ‘as contradictory as Burns was himself’, where the desire to perform Burns never wavers, though a consensus about the poet remains elusive (157). Katherine Campbell explores the performance of Burns’s songs in the folk tradition. Campbell draws from an illuminating definition of folk music, while also discussing several important folk collections containing Burns’s songs. Campbell highlights how Burns’s verses were themselves amalgamated from other songs, and subsequently underwent further variations in the hands of others, a feature essential to the ‘folk process’ (179). Moira Hansen examines the life and work of Scottish folk musician Jean Redpath. Although Burns was not central to Redpath’s work, he remained a vibrant presence throughout. Hansen also details the importance of Redpath to both the Scottish and American folk traditions. The volume concludes on a touching personal note with a piece by celebrated traditional singer, Sheena Wellington. Wellington’s account links nicely with the work on Redpath and provides an insight into what it means to perform Burns’s music in the twenty-first century, often to a global audience.

The chapters in *Performing Robert Burns* offer a coherent and consistent theme, where Burns provides a vehicle for Scottish culture and identity as much as he is celebrated in his own right as an artist.

Adam White’s monograph, *John Clare’s Romanticism*, undertakes a detailed analysis of important themes, terms, and ideas, central to locating various Romantic concerns within Clare’s poetry, and subsequently Clare’s poetic identity and place within the Romantic canon. Although the issue of canonicity is not the main subject of this study, many important arguments with implications concerning the Romantic canon are taken up carefully and convincingly. While Clare remains the major subject of this study, White reads Clare in relation to his Romantic contemporaries and near contemporaries, with extended attention paid to Wordsworth, Byron, Keats, and Burns. One of the book’s central arguments is that Clare’s poetry employs many of the Romantic preoccupations found in the works of the accepted major Romantic writers, such as Wordsworth and Byron, while simultaneously teasing out, through sustained close readings, what distinguishes Clare from other poets of his day. The success of this argument is made through illuminating and deftly handled critical readings of Clare’s poems, across all periods of his writing, alongside poems of Keats, Wordsworth, Byron, and Burns, whilst regularly unearthing textual echoes between Clare and the other poets discussed.

White’s introduction offers an important note on Clare’s texts which sets out certain problems of presentation, compositional process, and intention. White acknowledges the importance of the Oxford English Texts edition of Clare, while also qualifying his praise with diligent hesitancy: ‘I find the idea that he would have wanted uncorrected versions of his poems publicly printed highly problematic, not least because, as he states in an 1818 letter to Taylor: “[a]s I expect the words of the dead are venerably noticed [...] if I knew such things I disapprove of should appear in print after my death it would be the greatest torture possible”’ (19). Other chapters explore terms considered fundamental to Romanticism such as ‘Joy,’ ‘Fancy,’ and ‘Poesy,’ as well as larger philosophical theatres such as ‘The Sublime,’ ‘Time,’ and ‘Childhood,’ along with ‘Ruins’ and ‘Fragments’.

White’s book is impressive because it is able to cover, in detail, so many important concerns relevant to establishing John Clare’s Romanticism, without feeling stretched or forced. In chapter eight, ‘Clare, Keats, Poesy, and Joy’, we find an approach common to White’s study as a whole: ‘By focusing on the relationship between poesy and joy in Clare’s poetry, I show how consistent patterns of aesthetic experience are evident in his work, and I argue that he mobilises an aesthetic vocabulary that is fundamentally Romantic, but which is given a highly distinctive inflection of his own’ (242). Here, White is able to combine Romantic concerns of Joy and Poesy with Keats’s engagement of these terms while drawing out how

Clare both shares these concerns and, more crucially, how they are manifested differently across his poetry.

White's study also pays significant attention to Burns, in part because his fate has been in many ways similar to that of Clare: 'While Burns may have been, unfathomably, ignored in late twentieth-century Romantic scholarship, it is also the case that Clare's Romantic preoccupations still need to be fully fleshed out' (269). The example of Burns allows for a wider discussion of Clare's awareness of Scottish literary culture, and the influence it had on his writing. White looks at Clare's imitations of Burns while also looking to the larger, yet understudied, importance of the genres of song and lyric. White thus expands his argument to consider a deeper conception of British Romanticism and those that we should consider as its proponents. *John Clare's Romanticism* makes a vigorous case for establishing Clare as a major Romantic poet, while offering arguments that both affirm and complicate Clare's relationship to his contemporaries.

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