

*"Duncane Laideus Testament" and Other Comic Poems in Older Scots.*

Janet Hadley Williams, ed.

Scottish Text Society Fifth Series 15. Woodbridge: Scottish Text Society, 2016. xiv + 264 pp. \$60.

Janet Hadley Williams makes a valuable contribution to older Scottish studies in this latest Scottish Text Society edition, which offers a new compilation of eleven poems that have hitherto been unavailable in modern scholarly editions. The volume is geared toward scholars of Scottish literature, history, and linguistics, all of whom will find much of interest here. The poems are a diverse lot, which range in date from the late fifteenth to the second half of the sixteenth century, and in length from 16 to 441 lines; metrically, they include four- and five-stress rhyming couplets, rhyming alliterative long lines with wheels, rhyme royal stanzas, and a Scots interlaced sonnet. They are arranged in the probable order of their composition. Their genres vary widely: they include "satiric testament, confession, spoof cursing, mock-conjuration, letter, dream, beast fable, 'elrich fantasy,'" and more (ix). Four are attributed to known authors: Roule, Lichtoun, Alexander Cunningham, and Sir David Lyndsay (only the last of whom is a well-known poet); the rest are unattributed. The poems are grouped together in this collection due to their language—Older Scots—and their comedic elements: ranging from religious parody and political satire to a mock-heroic romance featuring a giant ogress who laughs so hard that she farts out a massive hill, they require varying degrees of context in order to grasp their humor.

Happily, the abundant editorial apparatus fully supplies the necessary context. Following a brief, general preface the volume opens with an introduction for each poem, which contains a discussion of the witnesses (manuscript and/or print), date, authorship, title, meter, and genre. Where relevant, Hadley Williams also discusses considerations of audience and language. Some of the introductions are more detailed. For example, the introduction to Alexander Cunningham's "Ane Epistle direct fra the holye Armitte of Allarit to his bretheren the Gray Freires" includes a thorough discussion of three later witnesses, which are particularly interesting for what they reveal about changes in religious attitudes, and in the Scots language, over time. For *Duncane Laideus alias Makgregouris Testament*, the longest and arguably most complex of the poems, Hadley Williams also includes a discussion of the hand in which the manuscript is written, the watermarks of its paper, and historical context concerning the relations of the Campbell of Glenorchy and MacGregor families in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. While the introductions do not attempt detailed interpretive readings of the poems, they provide the necessary information to facilitate such interpretation, and frequently gesture toward productive avenues for additional scholarship.

The texts have received careful editing, with substantive variants and conjectural emendations noted on the same page for easy reference. For Roule's "Devyne poware of michtis maist," which occurs in substantially different versions in two different

manuscripts, Hadley Williams has printed both versions in facing-page format. The poems themselves are skillful and inventive productions, worthy of the wider readership that this edition will help them reach. Fine literary productions in their own right, they also reveal much about religious, political, and cultural life in late fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century Scotland.

The explanatory notes, which are grouped together following the texts themselves, are particularly thorough and helpful. They frequently gloss unfamiliar words, phrases, and lines; in many cases, a reader with limited familiarity with Older Scots will do better to turn to the notes than to the (excellent) glossary. The notes also explain allusions to historical personages and events. Much astute critical commentary is to be found here, as well—for example, Hadley Williams’s discussion of otherness and monstrosity in relation to the pejorative references to Jews and Muslims in the “Gyre Carling.” The notes are most impressive, however, in their tracing of intertextual echoes and allusions: one line of a poem will frequently yield references to five or more other literary works, and a tantalizing picture emerges of Scotland’s late medieval / early modern literary scene. The ample bibliography of primary and secondary works will facilitate further scholarship; the volume also includes a full glossary, and an index of names and places. This edition is a welcome addition to the field of older Scottish studies.

Katherine H. Terrell, *Hamilton College*

*Verse Libel in Renaissance England and Scotland.* Steven W. May and Alan Bryson, eds.

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Steven W. May and Alan Bryson’s edition of verse libel is a valuable counterpart to Alastair Bellany and Andrew McRae’s digital edition, *Early Stuart Libels: An Edition of Poetry from Manuscript Sources* (2005). Whereas *Early Stuart Libels* includes over 350 poems presented in the form of a historical edition, with semidiplomatic transcriptions of poems from a single manuscript representing a particular moment in their transmission, May and Bryson concentrate on 52 poems, scrupulously edited according to the principles of textual criticism and elegantly presented. In doing so, their anthology confers on this most informal and errant of genres the credibility of a scholarly edition.

Verse libels were part of the fabric of early modern Britain, sometimes literally so, pasted onto walls and nailed to doors. By the early seventeenth century, they were one of the most collected genres of poetry in manuscript miscellanies. The recorded history of English verse libel can be traced to *Beowulf* and the hero’s humiliating attack on Unferth’s honor. Personal invective is one of the defining features of verse libel, although, as May and Bryson’s edition demonstrates, this is an inventive and highly