

Sebastiaan Verweij, *The Literary Culture of Early Modern Scotland, manuscript production and transmission 1560-1625* (Oxford: OUP, 2016) xviii + 303 pp.

Any initiative to write about Scottish early modern literary culture from the point of view of the primary witnesses of manuscripts is to be commended, particularly a study which explores what can be gleaned from them about their use and circulation. This is not an over-studied field: many earlier studies require to be revised, there are clearly discoveries still to be made. Early modern Scotland offers immense scope for research: it is far from certain that the canon of Scottish renaissance literature in the vernacular has been fully explored or established; it is certain that the canon of Scottish renaissance Latin has not. Early modern Scottish Literary culture is wholly worthy of study in itself and as part of the Europe-wide comparative study of renaissance and renaissances. In some respects it is still much easier to identify a Scottish renaissance on a European model, than it is to pinpoint a cogent renaissance in England. The fascination of that comparison alone would be a reason to welcome Sebastiaan Verweij's new book.

The opening chapters cover Court writing and James VI's own works. Detailed attention is given to the manuscripts of the courtier, translator and poet William Fowler, including some consideration of the work of professional scribes in his circle (a compilation now in the Drummond of Hawthornden manuscripts, NLS MS 2065, looks particularly worthy of further investigation). The chapter 'Urban cultural identities' includes an account of the musician Andrew Melvill's notebook, AUL MS 28, which perhaps serves to draw attention to the need to integrate work on surviving musical manuscripts of the period with literary study. This chapter also offers fascinating material on town clerks' 'protocol books' as hosts to literary jottings and transcriptions, and a thorough discussion of the largest surviving urban compilation manuscript the 'Bannatyne', convincingly set in context. The study of other urban literary manuscripts, those eclipsed by the Bannatyne, contains some of the most interesting and rigorous work in the book; the chapter on regional manuscript production contains much of interest, although it also highlights the somewhat uncertain stance of this book with regard to printed evidence. There is a very great deal more to be said about the polymath Gordon of Straloch than is said here. The discussion of the Maitland manuscripts, literary compilations from an elite family, is in many ways exemplary. The last chapter on the later regional poetic collections, the Tibbermure and Lude manuscripts, does fall outside the stated date-range (as does much material cited throughout – one of several loose ends which should have been addressed as dissertation was revised into book) but the material itself is worthy of discussion and the passage on the presence of Gaelic music in Perthshire opens up a rich field for further study.

There must inevitably be some caveats attending the appearance of such a wide ranging study of such a diversity of material. While the identified subject-range of the book is manuscript before 1625, in fact, Dr Verweij allows himself a not wholly consistent degree of latitude with both date and medium in this study. This being the case, some consideration of the printed 1635 *Funerals* for Bishop Patrick Forbes (which printed volume is in itself an extraordinary testament to a gathering-together of manuscript material) really would have offered rich information about 'urban cultural identity', in that it constitutes a declaration of identity for a wide group of Aberdonians at home and abroad.

In summary, there are many things to praise in this work, not least the close and informed engagement with the primary materials, including several manuscripts considered for the first time. Many of the characterisations of manuscripts and sequences of manuscripts are careful, thoughtful and useful. There is commendable willingness to engage with Latin texts when they are unavoidable, although unfortunately there is a general reluctance to admit just how much of early modern Scottish literary production was in that language.

This is the first of two elephants in this book's room: Latin was everywhere in early modern Scotland and in the culturally important Scottish Diaspora, it is hard to underestimate the volume and importance of Scottish literary production in that language. The sheer volume of production in Latin is perhaps the chief characteristic of early modern Scottish literary culture. This book, focusing to a considerable extent on the minority Scots vernacular, fails to represent the true shape of the Scottish renaissance. This is not an opinion, it is an understatement of fact. The second elephant is the city of Aberdeen – although the culturally-distinctive second city is given some attention, including a gallant attempt to come to terms with Andrew Melvill's manuscript – many of the book's generalisations are simply untrue in the light of documented Aberdonian realities. In short, the main problem would seem to be that of trying to give an account of Scottish literary culture from within an English Literature department – trying to find a vernacular culture with a court, a capital and country houses as its chief centres – whereas in reality a cosmopolitan, mostly Latin, literary culture appears to have operated on a much more diverse model of multiple cultural centres, not all of them in Scotland itself.

I hope it does not sound ungenerous to remark that more care could have been taken with the preparation of this text for publication as a book—it still bears many traces of its origin as an able and enterprising doctoral dissertation. The editorial process should have pruned what comes to feel like the over-anxious reference to every word previously written on all material cited (especially as the quoted material ranges from the authoritative to the frankly insignificant) a demonstration of diligence necessary in a dissertation, but distracting in a monograph. This book has many virtues as what it actually is – a study of groups of related manuscripts from early modern Scotland – but is not a full account of the literary culture of that nation, although it offers material which constitutes a valuable step towards such an account.

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