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The Bard: Robert Burns, A Biography by Robert Crawford
(review)

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seem only tangentially related to each other, and they do not employ enough of Milton's own language to help support the most important arguments. Donnelly quite smartly tears down reductive binaries about Milton, only to erect similarly reductive binaries, between modern and non-modern, or Protestant and non-Protestant. This treatment of religious history in particular has the unfortunate result of blurring the formative complexities in the debates between Presbyterians (with whom Milton had initially sided), the Independents, and the English Church. This history, in which hermeneutics deeply structure the theological and ideological tensions of these warring parties, deserves to be treated more precisely. Because of this, Donnelly's promising arguments are unable to realize fully their potential.

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The Bard: Robert Burns, A Biography. By Robert Crawford. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009. ISBN 978-0-691-14171-8. Pp. 480. \$35.00.

Sometimes it's best not to know too much about someone whose work you admire. In March of 1788, a week after the first of his twins by Jean Armour was buried, Robert Burns (1759-96) was having a sexual relationship with Agnes McLehose in Edinburgh. Burns returned to Jean in Mauchline later that month for the burial of the second twin, and in April he writes to say that he had officially married her. Later that year, Agnes' maidservant gave birth to Burns' son, while the poet continued a sycophantic, successful campaign to become an excise officer—a hated tax inspector for the British crown. Shortly thereafter he began writing republican poems (unpublished during his lifetime) in praise of the French Revolution. In this biography of the Scottish poet, Robert Crawford offers this explanation of the latter contradictions: “The more the bard positioned himself as a figure of regulatory authority, the more rebellious he became” (351). There's a more economical way to explain all of this: hypocrisy.

Throughout this book, we do not see a single example of Robert Burns acting with moral courage when his character was tested. He groveled to obtain and preserve his tax job. He dallied sexually when he thought no one was looking and returned to Jean only when his affair with Agnes became hopeless. He privately played the radical when it was chic then abandoned his principles in public when it became dangerous. Crawford admits that Burns “led something of a double life” in politics and acknowledges the “clashing inconsistencies” in his treatment of women (364, 294). These are understatements. Like an athlete whose early success brings out the latent weakness in his character, the triumph of Burns' Kilmarnock volume of poems (1786) clarified and intensified the personal shortcomings of the twenty-seven-year-old poet.

Crawford's biography is strongest on the background of Burns' verse. He provides valuable insight into Burns' participation in the eighteenth-century version of global citizenship—Masonry—with its optimistic emphases on fraternity and equality. Crawford skillfully locates Burns' eighteenth-century literary debts in his familiarity with Pope, Mackenzie, Shenstone, and others, and he gives a good account of the Scottish vernacular poets—Robert Fergusson and Allan Ramsay—that enabled Burns to develop his distinctive voice.

For all these strengths, however, the book does not accomplish its primary goals: "to offer a clear manageable account of [Burns'] life which gives some indication of what made him a great poet." Instead of "over-aestheticising Burns," Crawford says that he intends "to show his political as well as his lyrical imagination" (11).

The book is hampered by numerous small irritations. It spends too long describing the current state of buildings or landscapes that were familiar to Burns, such as today's Mauchline, whose residents (we learn) are "warm, friendly, proud of their town's place in a history which takes in more than simply Burns" (182). Then, some of Crawford's text is downright weird: he commends Burns for reading Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, published in 1759, the same year Burns was born: "Few people today have read a work of philosophy published in the year of their birth" (135). True enough. I suppose one could add that few people today have even read a work of philosophy. Why mention it?

Crawford's credibility begins to decline when he makes large claims on the basis of rather loose writing. For instance, he says the costly British victory at Bunker Hill (1775) "led to eventual rebel [i.e., American] triumph" eight years later (148). Elsewhere he says the Glorious Revolution of 1688-89 "brought the royal House of Hanover to power in Britain" (306). This is simply incorrect. It brought to power the two (Protestant) Stuart daughters of James II, and more Stuart monarchs would have succeeded them if they had had children.

Crawford makes these shaky assertions because of the political claims of his book. He wants to portray Burns as the "greatest poet of democracy" in a line that includes Whitman and Blake (14). This requires him to combine certain American, French, and Jacobite sentiments to produce the political brew he has on offer. "Burns' conversation moved readily from Jacobite convictions to Jacobin, republican ones," he writes (396). Maybe we could follow this political line of thought after a couple of whiskies. But making the Stuart believer in divine right of kings, Charles Edward Stuart, lie down with Danton and Desmoulines really doesn't make any serious political sense. Nor does it do justice to the complex history of contemporary American republicanism or its increased disenchantment with republican France during the Citizen Genêt Affair (1793). The great editor of Burns' poems, James Kinsley, describes his political principles as "abundantly motley" (*The Poems and Songs of Robert Burns* 1233). Crawford applies the slang term "bolshie" to Burns (155). Both of these seem right. "Bolshie" suggests the

finger in your eye, but it doesn't take us further than the rebellious, angry young man who's capable of stirring us up for a good march. Burns' political verse has this merit. However, one doesn't find serious attention to the problems of democracy: how to reconcile liberty and order; how to avoid the excessive individualism that egalitarianism brings; how to reconcile individual rights with the claims of religion, the family, and local tradition. If you want deep insight into democracy, you'll have to turn to Robert Frost, Robert Penn Warren, Wendell Berry, and others.

In describing Burns' literary achievements, the book's shortcomings are equally serious. Crawford asserts that Burns is "in several ways" the first English Romantic poet (5). But he backs up this claim merely by asserting that Wordsworth found the "companionable tone" in Burns' "Epistle to John Lapraik" powerfully revolutionary, and by claiming that "as a vernacular bard [Burns] was an exemplar for Wordsworth (who read the *Poems* as a 1787 schoolboy), then for Keats, Clare, and other English poets" (188, 261). But these are assertions, not analyses.

Burns' other literary achievements are passed over equally quickly. Crawford doesn't show how Burns refined the Standard Habbie stanza, which he inherited from Robert Fergusson, so that it came to be used with such brilliant effect. How, for instance, did this stanza help Burns' 1786 Kilmarnock volume move beyond the satirical couplets of Pope, the 1782 satires of Cowper, or Fergusson's own verse? Moving to the climactic year of 1787, when Burns began collaborating with James Johnson on *The Scots Musical Museum* (1787-1803), Crawford's biography gives little literary analysis of the remarkable songs that Burns contributed to this six-volume work. As Burns' editor notes, "Almost everything he wrote between the summer of 1787 and late 1792 went to the *Museum*: more than 200 songs, most of them original compositions or pieces reshaped from tradition" (Kinsley *Poems and Songs* 987). Kinsley's edition of the poems gives us far more insight into how Burns revised the fifty or so poems that came into his hands from earlier sources. "Often it is hard to be sure just what is Burns and what is 'old words,'" Crawford writes (322). But isn't the literary biographer supposed to provide some insight into a poet's achievement in his most lasting and popular legacy? Crawford does provide an excellent analysis of Burns' comic wild ride, "Tam O'Shanter," noting its simultaneous celebration and satire of male recklessness as the poem moves from sexual fantasies (amplified by liquor) to careening out-of-control down the road. His analysis of "Holy Willie's Prayer" has similarly powerful insights into its simultaneous satire of hypocrisy and anxiety over the poet's own, complicated relationship to the church. It's a pity there's not more of such writing.

Ironically this biography shows us more about the unappealing side of Burns—his self-promotion, sexual licentiousness, and moral timidity. But Burns' literary art will continue to appeal to us in at least three ways—as a brilliant satirist, a stirring patriot, and above all as a lyrical songwriter. The songs, especially when performed, are ravishing, whether in a new setting or in the brilliant arrangements of Johnson's work in *The Robert Burns Song Book* (2 vols., 1997, 2001) by Serge Hovey (1920-89).

Many fine artists have recorded them—Jean Redpath, Ian Bruce, Ronnie Browne, and Wendy Weatherby, among others. After learning more about his life, I think I'll continue to take my Robert Burns à la carte. As John Crowe Ransom wrote in a different context, "Art needs a little separating."

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Experimental Theology in America: Madame Guyon, Fénelon, and Their Readers.
By Patricia A. Ward. Waco: Baylor University Press, 2009. ISBN 1602581975. Pp. xvi + 279. \$44.95.

Patricia A. Ward's *Experimental Theology in America* is a detailed and remarkably erudite study on the impact that Jeanne Marie Bouvier de la Motte Guyon and François de Fénelon, the Archbishop of Cambrai, had on Protestant devotional literature from the eighteenth century onward. Ward provides a comprehensive explanation as to why these two Catholic mystics have proven to be such an enduring force within Protestant, Evangelical, and charismatic circles in the United States, particularly among Methodists and Quakers. Through a careful appraisal of the works of Fénelon and Guyon and their relation to more than three centuries of Protestant literature, this study investigates why, by the beginning of the twentieth century, these two French Quietists were regularly invoked as spiritual authorities and as figures that exemplified the experience of sanctification.

Ward is not the first to analyze the connection between Quietism and American Protestantism. Scholars such as W. R. Ward and Jürgen Schrader have already explored the links between the Quietism that Guyon and Fénelon refined and popularized toward the end of the seventeenth century and Pietism, Methodism, and Quakerism. But these studies have to a large extent downplayed the importance of Guyon and Fénelon within these traditions. W. R. Ward, as Professor Ward points out, minimized Guyon's influence, arguing that there was nothing "distinctive" in her Quietist mysticism. In so doing, he thus remained "puzzled by her popularity in Germany, Switzerland, Holland and Scotland" (x). Along similar lines, in "Le Piétisme et la littérature de la langue allemande" (1997), Schrader seems to suggest that Guyon's Quietism was to a large extent watered down and diffused in its translation to German Pietism insofar as the doctrines of other mystics were often falsely attributed to her in an effort to lend them credence. For both thinkers the direct influence of Guyon or Fénelon's work is thereby consistently downplayed and, at times, even denied. It is thus Guyon's almost legendary status as a religious martyr (and Fénelon's status as her most tenacious defender) more so than her actual theology that is cast as having left an indelible mark on both Pietism and on