Alex Broadhead, The Language of Robert Burns: Style, Ideology, and Identity. Lewisburg, PA and Plymouth: Bucknell University Press, 2014. Pp. 237. $75. ISBN 9781611485288.

Donaldson, Christopher

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This study makes an outstanding contribution to the on-going reassessment of the function of language in Robert Burns's literary works. Applying ideas and methods from modern sociolinguistics, Broadhead undertakes a perceptive evaluation of Burns's linguistic astuteness, and he challenges the common misconception of the poet as a vernacular writer marginalised by his mixing of English, Scots and local dialects. Instead, Broadhead offers a critically nuanced account of the poet's multilingualism and linguistic experimentalism, and one that emphasises Burns's role in initiating not only an 'imaginative reconceptualization of […] the language of Scottish literature' (72-3), but also a 'radical revaluation of poetic language' that subsequently influenced the linguistic thinking of Shelley and Wordsworth (171). In the process, Broadhead succeeds both in offering a new perspective on the linguistic complexity of Burns's literary endeavours and in illuminating the centrality of language in the poet's cultural and literary legacies.

Broadhead develops this new perspective over the course of five chapters, each of which ranges across Burns's oeuvre in order to address different aspects of the poet's language and his linguistic routines. Broadly speaking, these chapters can be divided into two sections. Chapters 1 and 2 attend to Burns's thinking about language, initially by way of his poems and songs, and then by way of his prefaces, dedications and glossaries. From here, Chapters 3 to 5 turn to consider three distinct qualities of Burns's linguistic repertoire, specifically: his strategic deployment of national linguistic stereotypes; his transformative mixing of different languages and dialects; and his creative use of code-switching. Consequently, Broadhead shows us not only how Burns sought 'to transform and to reinvent' the 'functions, boundaries, and taxonomies' of language (1), but also how, as a poet, he succeeded 'in creating new fusions of existing [linguistic] varieties' (158).

Broadhead's specific interest in Chapter 1 is the ideological significance of the metalanguage (or 'language about language') found in Burns's verse. As a poet, contends Broadhead, Burns was intensely aware of the '*constitutive* power of language' in creating,

consolidating and reinforcing 'social identities' (5). In building up this claim, Broadhead principally turns to the presentation of English and Scots in *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect*, arguing that the collection enabled Burns both 'to carve a space' in which Scots could be appreciated as more than simply a counterpart of English, and, in the process, to encourage a more nationally coherent and self-contained sense of its linguistic identity (71). In Chapter 2, Broadhead elaborates on these ideas by attending in detail to the rhetorical functions of the general preface included in the 1786, Kilmarnock edition of Burns's *Poems* and the personalised dedication that was added to the collection when it was published in Edinburgh the following year. Broadhead argues that whereas the former text 'sought primarily to appeal to Anglophone literary reviewers and to pre-empt their criticism by downplaying the difference between English and Scots', the latter 'sought to assert the national linguistic heritage [Burns] shared with his Scottish subscribers' (80).

The consideration of Burns's use of linguistic stereotypes in Chapter 3 follows a similar trajectory. Here Broadhead argues that, rather than 'promot[ing] a narrow and false image of Scottish culture', Burns's employment of stereotypically Scottish words, grammar and pronunciation 'enabled' him 'to project the persona of a "parochial" speaker or bard', and 'to reconfigure […] the relationship between the local and the national' (120-21). Like the other aspects of Burns's language that Broadhead goes on to explore in his final chapters, stereotypes are, therefore, shown to be part of a 'complex identity performance' (119) that is central to Burns's literary praxis. Picking up on this idea, Chapters 4 and 5 branch out to consider Burns's linguistic fusion and alternation as characteristic of his poetics. 'Burns's poetry', writes Broadhead, 'is truly multilingual, comprising different registers of English, Broad Scots, Scottish Standard English, and local dialects of Scots' as well as 'idioms from French and Latin' (142). In combining and alternating between these linguistic varieties, he concludes, Burns helped to transform them, and to create a language that requires and rewards our close attention.

What emerges from Broadhead's study, then, is neither a portrait of a Scottish poet struggling to preserve his culture and dialect, nor one of a poet stretching his talents to compose in a language other than his own. Rather, Broadhead provides an account of a poetical polyglot and verbal artist with a remarkable ear for language and a tremendous capacity for combining different linguistic registers and different styles in his verse.

Broadhead's analyses consolidate, extend and refine previous scholarship. His chief contribution in this respect stems from his intensive application of sociolinguistic theory. Non-linguists may find some of the sociolinguistic concepts and terminology employed in this study difficult. But by thinking through Burns's language and writing about language in these terms, Broadhead increases our appreciation of Burns's linguistic thinking and his stylistic routines.

Christopher Donaldson
University of Birmingham

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