Recommended Citation


Robert Fitzhugh
Brooklyn College

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/ssl
Part of the English Language and Literature Commons
Reviews


Any one of these paper-bound volumes is a good introduction to Burns. Sydney Goodsir Smith's, handiest for the pocket, has the least representative selection of poems (21), but gives thirty-three well selected songs, *The Jolly Beggars,* and eight items from the *Merry Muses.* The introduction is appreciative but careless. For example, Burns did not *buy* Ellisland, Jean did not *nurse* Anne Park's daughter, and Burns did not start a library in *Dumfries.* The glossary at page-foot is helpful. There are a few explanatory notes. 

Professor Thornton's book presents the full Kilmarnock text, sixteen additional poems, *The Jolly Beggars* with music, and thirty-five additional songs with music also, including the long-thought-lost tune to *Handsome Nell,* courtesy of Professor T. Crawford. The arrangement is chronological. The prose selections, particularly the letters, are good, but settings might have made them more meaningful to those unfamiliar with Burns. The introduction discusses the Scottish Enlightenment at length, but says little about what Burns accomplished as a poet. Professor Thornton's account of Burns' achievement in song is solid but often technical, particularly in its discussion of music. There is a useful chronological table, and a glossary; the notes at the end of the volume are carefully prepared. The bibliography is more elaborate than a selection of useful titles need be, but inadequate as a critical descriptive list. Herewith, three additions which may be helpful: The 1856
STUDIES IN SCOTTISH LITERATURE

Chambers is fuller than the 1851-52; Scott Douglas' edition (1877-79), Volume VI, is a handy source for the Edinburgh Commonplace Book; and Sir Walter Raleigh's essay on Burns is the distinguishing feature of the 1914 edition of Lockhart's biography of Burns.

Professor Weston arranges his forty-five poems, thirty songs, and The Jolly Beggars by category—e.g., "Masterpieces," "Kirk Satires," "Elegies," and songs of "Love," "Courtship and Marriage," or "Humorous Fancy," and he provides wide-ranging annotation and commentary which is alert to Burns' bawdy tendencies. Songs are given with music, but not The Kirk's Alarm or The Jolly Beggars. The notes are at the foot of the page, and Scots words are glossed, most helpfully, in the margins. Special prefices introduce the songs and each category of poems. The general introduction is a brisk fourteen page sketch of Burns' life and background. Here, as elsewhere, Professor Weston is forthright, and provokes questions. Was the Ellisland soil poor? Was Burns "never" a hard drinker? Is the Clarinda affair well described as "warm but evidently chaste"? What evidence is there that Highland Mary died in childbirth? Did not Burns discover Robert Fergusson before 1784-85? However all this may be, the apparatus of the volume should ease initiation into Burns, and a map of Ayrshire is a happy bonus. A thorough pronunciation guide presumes familiarity with the International Phonetic Alphabet, but even if they have that familiarity, non-Scottish students will get little sense of what Burns' poems sound like in Scots unless they hear a skillful reading. The paucity of good records is much to be regretted.

Of Burns' prose, Professor Weston gives only the Kilmarnock Preface, and the autobiographical letter to Dr. Moore. There is a list of helpful books, with comment. The page and type of this volume are attractive.

Readers of the footnotes may wish to amend a few of them: p. 23, Kyle is the district of Ayrshire, not Coila, who was the tutelary genius of the area invented by Burns; p. 28, James Smith graced the Fornicator's Court, but neither he nor Burns took part in the Mauchline Conversation Club, a relatively staid organization; p. 37, Burns became a Mason in 1781; p. 119, Burns' father was a farmer, not a cotter; p. 140, J. W. Egerer, Robert Burns Chronicle 1962, p. 28, gives evidence that Creech could not have made the grand tour with Lord Kilmours.

ROBERT T. FITZHUGH
BROOKLYN COLLEGE

[258]