

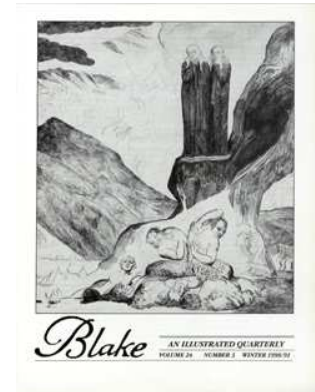
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deeply. Field's review thus serves to underscore how often Blake was a subject of discussion among members of the Wordsworth circle, and how much we owe to figures like Charles Lamb and Henry Crabb Robinson for helping to preserve the reputation of William Blake.

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¹ An amusing account of Horne's difficulties in translating Chaucer may be found in Ann Blainey, *The Farthing Poet: A Biography of Richard Hengist Horne, 1802-1884, A Lesser Literary Lion* (London: Longman's, 1968) 115.

² G.E. Bentley, ed., *Blake: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975) 220.

³ See Robinson's *Reminiscence* of Blake in G.E. Bentley, Jr., *Blake Records* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1969) 537-38.

⁴ Bentley, *Blake Records* 537.

⁵ Bentley, *Blake Records* 537-38.

⁶ Bentley, *Blake Records* 362.

⁷ See Geoffrey Little's biographical introduction to his edition of Field's *Memoirs of Wordsworth* (Sydney: Sydney UP, 1975) 7-17.

⁸ Bentley, *Blake Records* 538.

⁹ This copy can be found in the Wordsworth Library in Grasmere.

¹⁰ Barron Field to Wordsworth, 10 April 1828, published in Little 133. The manuscript is in the Wordsworth Library.

¹¹ Little 49.

¹² Wordsworth initially offered "The Mantic's Tale" to Powell in a letter dated "[late 1839]" by Alan Hill. Objections were raised by Edward Quillinan and, perhaps, Isabella Fenwick, and in a letter of 1 May 1840, Wordsworth withdrew his offer. See *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, ed. Alan Hill, 7 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1982) 6: 755-56, 7: 35, 39, 71.

¹³ Field's suspicions of Powell were later borne out in ways he could not have predicted. Powell was discovered to have supported himself by embezzlement and forgery; he faked insanity to avoid prison, and spent the rest of his days in New York. See Blainey 114.

¹⁴ These reviews are all listed in N. S. Bauer, *William Wordsworth: A Reference Guide to British Criticism, 1793-1899* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1978) 133-35.

¹⁵ *The Athaenum* (6 February 1841): 107-08. Blainey 105, 115, notes that Chorley was a perennial enemy of Horne.

¹⁶ Little 51.

¹⁷ Field had the opportunity to give Wordsworth the review (providing he had finished it by then) in September 1841 when he spent time in the Lake District (Little 51). Field also tells of helping Wordsworth write an article on Talfourd's copyright bill at this time.

¹⁸ Shortly after Wordsworth's death, as materials for Christopher Wordsworth, Jr.'s memoir of the poet were being collected, there was correspondence between Robinson and Edward Quillinan about Barron Field's papers. It seems possible that Robinson or Edward Quillinan may have had access to them, so perhaps at that time the review passed into the hands of the Wordsworth family. See *The Correspondence of Henry Crabb Robinson with the Wordsworth Circle*, ed. Edith Morley, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1927) 2: 738-39.

¹⁹ According to Bentley, *Blake Records* 231, "Crabb Robinson wrote in his Diary for Tuesday, January 12th, 1813: 'In the Eveng at Coleridge's lecture. And then at home. Mrs. Kenny[,] Barnes & Barron Field there—The usual gossiping chat—F & B. both interested by Blake's poems of whom they knew nothing before[.]—'"

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In Robert Cromek's 1808 edition of Robert Blair's *Grave*, with designs by Blake, the name of "John Clerk, Esq." appears in the list of sixteen Edinburgh subscribers to the volume.¹ No Blake scholar has yet identified this intriguing figure, or discussed his wide influence in artistic, literary, and social circles. Perhaps none of Blake's first readers were as paradoxical, irascible, immoral, or influential as John Clerk. Clerk (1757-1832) is now such a forgotten figure, however, that few if any modern readers will know of him.² In his time, Clerk was famous as an Edinburgh lawyer and judge, and an art collector.

It was almost certainly Blake's designs, rather than Blair's poem, which led the 50-year-old lawyer to subscribe to *The Grave*. Clerk had studied as an artist in his youth. He had little interest in poetry, but for many years he continued to paint and draw in his spare moments. Several of his drawings appeared in the *Scots Magazine*, and elsewhere.³ Presumably Clerk found pleasure in Blake's designs to *The Grave*; in any event, the book was still in his library when he died.⁴

With a personality like "crystallised vinegar," Clerk was notorious for his atheism, self-righteousness, and "drollery": "It was impossible that he could be wrong because he acknowledged no judge in heaven or earth but John Clerk."⁵ Something of his legendary abrasiveness may be gauged from an episode involving his friend Henry Raeburn the painter, when they were both students:

One day John [Clerk] asked [Raeburn] to go and dine with him in his garret [above Parliament Square in Edinburgh]; On going into his room the landlady came in and put on the table John's ordinary dinner—four herrings and three potatoes—John got up in a terrible rage and chucked the two plates out of the window and turned about to the astonished landlady and said What for ye bitch did ye no bring aucht herrings and sax tawties . . .⁶

In later years, Clerk was wealthy and titled; he became "Lord Eldin," and a judge, in 1823. Although a bachelor, he had several children by different women. Once, accosted by two laborers who demanded money on the grounds that he was their father, Clerk "grinningly drew out his purse" and said, "Weel, there's five pounds; and never let me see your ugly mugs again."⁷

Despite his arrogance towards women, children, and the lower classes, Clerk was a prominent reform politician. He was a friend of the critic and politician Francis Jeffrey, and sometimes joined Jeffrey in public demonstrations.⁸ But he was far removed from the sober rationalism of Jeffrey and his circle. All reports agree that Clerk's temper and emotionality rendered him "not qualified for the duties of a judge." Even after his promotion to the bench, Clerk led a scandalous, "Rabelaisian" existence, sometimes "riding down openly in his carriage to his mistress . . . or sitting carousing with the thief Maccoul."⁹

Clerk's judgments in court became increasingly erratic, until public outrage forced his resignation in 1828. His final years were shrouded by some unnamed disease. He became "ungovernably insane"¹⁰ and "quite imbecile."¹¹ Perhaps, in his last lucid moments, John Clerk reflected on the theme of Blair's *Grave*, and its accompanying designs by Blake.

Admittedly these details tell us nothing about William Blake. But they may help readers to appreciate the diversity of Blake's original audience, and to perceive more fully the social context in which Blake sold his work. They may also counteract slightly the common assumption that Blake's work received little attention in contemporary Scotland.

¹ See Robert N. Essick and Morton D. Paley, *Robert Blair's The Grave, Illustrated by William Blake; A Study with Facsimile* (London: Scolar, 1982). The list of subscribers is unpaginated.

² Clerk receives a brief mention in the *Dictionary of National Biography*; his name does not seem to appear in any other twentieth-century work.

³ The last of Clerk's drawings for the *Scots Magazine*. "Craig Crook Castle," was "Engraved by [Robert] Scott," and appeared as the frontispiece in April 1810 [n.p.]; for information on Robert Scott, the engraver with a "mania for Blake," who considered the 1808 *Grave* to be one of the "two greatest books" in his library, see *Autobiographical Notes of the Life of William Bell Scott*, ed. W. Minto, 2 vols. (London: Osgood, McIlvaine, 1892) 1: 68, and my note on "Blake, *The Grave*, and Edinburgh Literary Society" in *Blake 24* (1990): 35-36. A satirical sketch by John Clerk, "The Three Legal Devotees," may be found in John Kay, *A Series of Original Portraits and Caricature Etchings*, ed. H. Paton, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: Black, 1877) 1: plate 119 (attributed to Clerk in the text, 2: 439-40). In suggesting that Clerk "had little interest in poetry," I have relied on the evidence of the *Catalogue* of his library, cited in note 4 below.

⁴ See anon., *Catalogue of the Library of the Late John Clerk of Eldin . . . which will be sold by Auction, by Mr C. B. Tait, . . . On Monday, January 21 1833, and Nine following Days* (Edinburgh: Tait, 1833) 56. Item 1382 in the catalogue is described as "Blake's Illustration [sic] of Blair's *Grave*, 13 plates, engraved by Schiavonetti." In addition to listing the books in Clerk's library, this catalogue shows that he possessed many original paintings and draw-

ings attributed to Rembrandt, Holbein, Van Dyck, Rubens, Correggio, Salvator Rosa, Breughel, Titian, Tintoretto, Raeburn, and others. It is not known who purchased Clerk's copy of *The Grave*, or what price it fetched.

⁵ John Heiton, *The Castes of Edinburgh*, 3rd. ed. (Edinburgh: Nimmo, 1861) 56, 57, 57n. Only the third edition of Heiton's book contains these (and many other) stories about Clerk.

⁶ James White, citing his conversation with Raeburn, in a letter to Allan Cunningham, 29 March 1831, National Library of Scotland MS 832, ff 28-29; cited by permission of the Trustees of the NLS. "Aucht" and "sax" are Scots terms for "eight" and "six." This excerpt has not previously appeared in print; Cunningham gives a drastically bowdlerized version in his *Lives of the Most Eminent British Painters* (5: 210). I have included this quotation partly to show that Clerk adhered to Scottish ways and the Scots language; he was not Anglicized. Clerk's lodgings above Parliament Square would have placed him near the center of Edinburgh's legal and literary establishment.

⁷ The two men's mothers were sisters; "The reader has only to count the kin," comments Heiton, "to understand the morality of [Clerk], who was received into the best society" (Heiton 57n).

⁸ For information on Clerk's political and literary connections, see Henry Cockburn, *Memorials of his Time* (Edinburgh: Black, 1856) 407-08, and John Gibson Lockhart, *Peter's Letters to his Kinsfolk*, 3 vols. (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1819) 2: 43-52. For an account of a Reform meeting at which Francis Jeffrey and John Clerk shared the stage, see anon., "Celebration of Mr Fox's Birth Day," *The Scotsman* 15 Jan. 1823: 33-36.

⁹ Heiton 57-58, *passim*. I have not been able to identify "the thief Maccoul."

¹⁰ Robert P. Gillies, *Recollections of Sir Walter Scott, Bart.* (London: Fraser, 1837) 284. Gillies is citing his conversation with Scott at Abbotsford in 1829.

¹¹ George Thomson, letter to the painter Thomas Stothard, 7 July 1832, National Library of Scotland MS 685, f 88; cited by permission.