

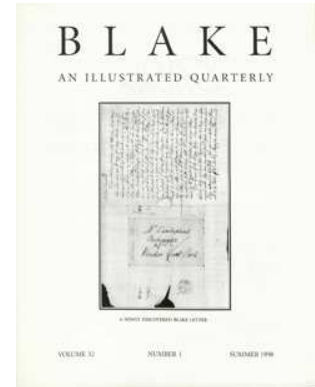
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Blake, the Edinburgh Literary Journal, and James
Hogg

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MINUTE PARTICULARS

Blake, the *Edinburgh Literary Journal*, and James Hogg

BY DAVID GROVES

The *Edinburgh Literary Journal* was a weekly magazine of 1828-1832, founded by a 25-year-old law student named Henry Glassford Bell.¹ It normally ran to 14 pages plus advertisements, and it claimed a circulation of about 2000.² Published by the Constable firm, the *Edinburgh Literary Journal* was in some ways a continuation of Constable's defunct *Scots Magazine*, where an important review of Blake had appeared in 1808.³ Although Bell's *Journal* has been largely ignored by scholars, it was a colorful, sprightly magazine, which carried short works by Shelley⁴ and other British authors like John Lockhart (editor of London's *Quarterly Review*), Allan Cunningham (the friend of Thomas De Quincey), Robert Morehead (a former editor of the *Scots Magazine*), the dramatist James Sheridan Knowles, and poets Alexander Balfour and William Tennant.⁵ The *Journal* became controversial among Scottish periodicals by its outspoken attacks on the Scots novelist John Galt,⁶ and on *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* and the powerful Blackwood firm in general.⁷

¹ Bell (1803-74) edited the *Journal* until the middle of 1830 (see W. Norrie, *Edinburgh Newspapers Past and Present* [Edinburgh: Waverley, 1891] 19). From 1830 to 1839, Bell worked as a lawyer, and from then to 1868 he was Sheriff-Substitute in Glasgow. His correspondence would likely be interesting, if it could be found. The best account of his life is an obituary in the *Journal of Jurisprudence* (18 [1874]: 97-103; see also anon., *Memoirs and Portraits of One Hundred Glasgow Men*, 2 vols. [Glasgow: Maclehose, 1886] 1: 29-32).

² "The circulation of every number has ... exceeded fifteen hundred copies, whilst that of several has extended to ... twenty-five hundred" (anon., "A Few Words Concerning our own Affairs," *Edinburgh Literary Journal*, 1 [14 March 1829]: 241-43).

³ A review in the *Journal* of 27 February 1830 describes the Constable firm as "our own publishers" (3:123n.). The 1808 review of Blake in Constable's *Scots Magazine* is reprinted in my article, "Blake, *The Grave*, and *Edinburgh Literary Society*" (*Blake* 24 [1991] 251-52).

⁴ The link with Shelley illustrates the *Journal's* ties with the old *Scots Magazine*. In 1810, Shelley sent his poem "A Wandering Jew" to Archibald Constable, but it was still unpublished when the *Scots Magazine* folded in 1826. Somehow the poem was transferred to Bell's *Journal*, where excerpts from it appeared on 27 June 1829 (2: 43-45). See *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley* ed. F. L. Jones (Oxford: Clarendon, 1964) 1: 17n-18n. This connection between the two journals may perhaps shed light on the coincidence of their two articles on Blake, separated by almost the same long interval.

⁵ A list of contributors appeared in the article cited in note 2 (above).

⁶ The attacks reached a zenith in 1830, when the *Journal* charged Galt with "disgrac(ing) the history of English literature" (4:165). Dislike of Galt's pedestrian prose may help to explain the *Journal's* interest in Blake and Hogg.

⁷ In the article cited in note 2 (above), readers were told that William Blackwood declined sending "any further review copies of his

But the *Journal's* most famous contributor was the poet and novelist James Hogg, "the Ettrick Shepherd." Although Hogg would turn 60 in 1830, he was a close friend of Bell's,⁸ and his tales, poems, and essays made Hogg the *Journal's* most frequent contributor of signed works. During the three-and-a-quarter years of its existence, the *Edinburgh Literary Journal* published more pieces by Hogg than did any other publication.

There are reasons to suspect that the "Ettrick Shepherd" played something of an advisory or quasi-editorial role in the *Journal*. Henry Bell's youth, and the fact that he was never again an editor, nor at any time a figure of much literary importance, invites the suspicion that Hogg was a guiding spirit. Moreover, the *Journal's* very first issue carried a letter of support from Hogg, praising its independence, and promising to support it with his writings.⁹ The new periodical probably owed much of its success to this and other contributions by Hogg.

In 1830, the *Edinburgh Literary Journal* published three favorable, anonymous reviews of the second and third volumes of Allan Cunningham's *Lives of the Most Eminent British Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*. The second of the three discusses Cunningham's account of the painters Benjamin West, James Barry, and William Blake. Although the remarks on Blake are not illuminating, they at least show that he was a figure of some interest in literary Edinburgh:

To Barry succeeds Blake—a poet-painter, whose enthusiastic imagination taught him to believe that he held converse with the world of spirits, and who painted not so much from existing nature, as from the shapes which were continually presenting themselves to him in his daydreams. He was nevertheless one of the happiest of his race; and, whether it be singular or not, this happiness is mainly to be attributed to his wife, concerning whom we have the following particulars: ...¹⁰

This excellent woman—whose character partly re-

books to the *Journal*; "unless we consent to praise every one of (his) publications," the *Journal* added sarcastically, "we shall receive no support from him!"

⁸ Their friendship is discussed in my booklet, *James Hogg and the St Ronan's Border Club* (Dollar [Scotland]: Mack, 1987).

⁹ The letter also criticized *Blackwood's Magazine* for being "devoted to party, not only in politics," but also "in literature" ("A Letter from Yarrow; The Ettrick Shepherd to the Editor," 1 [15 Nov. 1828]: 9-10). At the time, Hogg needed an ally in his simmering dispute with Blackwood. John Wilson, who was the chief writer for *Blackwood's*, told Blackwood that Hogg "deserved punishment" for siding with the "enemy," Bell; "I would see [Hogg] damned before I ever again printed one article of his" (undated letter, National Library of Scotland MS 4028, folio 333; cited by permission of the Trustees of the NLS). Hogg perhaps needed to keep his behind-the-scenes influence with the *Journal* a secret, in order to avoid a final rift with Blackwood.

¹⁰ An excerpt consisting of two paragraphs from Cunningham's book follows--The excerpt begins, "When he was six-and-twenty years," and ends, "whenever he chose to see them" (see *Lives of the Most Eminent British Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*, 6 vols. (London: Murray,

minds us of Klopstock's Meeta—was true to him to the last, and, after a long life of mutual affection, we find her soothing him on his death-bed: . . .¹¹

The affection and fortitude of Mrs Blake, entitle her to much respect. "She shared her husband's lot," says Mr Cunningham, "without a murmur,—set her heart solely upon his family and soothed him in those hours of misgiving and despondency, which are not unknown to the strongest intellects. She still lives to lament the loss of Blake, and feel it."¹²

No one will learn much about Blake's art here. But the comments are interesting for their sympathetic account of his temperament, "enthusiastic imagination," and spiritual beliefs. The information that Blake was both poet and painter, may have been news to some northern readers in 1830.

Nothing in the review betrays the identity of its author. Bell himself was probably the *Journal's* most frequent critic,¹³ and a likely candidate, therefore, for the authorship of this one. But some external evidence suggests that James Hogg may have played a part, either in writing the notices of Cunningham, or at least in seeing that they appeared in the *Journal*. Hogg was certainly one of the *Journal's* reviewers,¹⁴ and, unlike Bell and its other regulars, he had been a friend and correspondent of Allan Cunningham's for almost three decades.¹⁵ The evidence which seems to link Hogg to the lines on Blake begins with an accusation, by an English critic in 1831, that Hogg was in the habit of supplying the *Journal* with anonymous panegyrics for Cunningham. The accusation was as follows: "See Hogg's praise of Cunningham in the *Edinburgh Literary Journal*, &c.; and Allan's praise of the

Shepherd [i.e., Hogg] in the [London] Athenaeum, etc."¹⁶

Although the *Journal* denied this hint, it did so in a rather ingenious way, by pretending that the charge referred solely to a paragraph about a public dinner given to Cunningham.¹⁷ "Hogg did not write the paragraph," the *Journal* replied; "his accuser could have no reason to believe that he did, but his own dirty suspicions."¹⁸ That statement raises more questions than it answers. It does not by any means refute the claim that Hogg used his influence in the *Journal* to praise Allan Cunningham. Moreover, the paragraph about Cunningham's dinner was merely an impartial account,—whereas the complaint from England referred explicitly to "praise" and "panegyric"¹⁹ of Cunningham. In pretending that the English critic was referring to this paragraph, the *Journal* side-stepped his challenge, in a way that seems a little suspicious. A reply so evasive leaves us free to wonder if Hogg did indeed have a hand in the paragraphs about Blake.

Some readers of Bell's *Journal* may have noticed that much of the passage on Blake would have applied with equal justice to the *Journal's* own main poet, James Hogg. Hogg, too, maintained (as the review says of Blake) "that he held converse with the world of spirits." In a poem of the same year, Hogg inveighed against the rationalism that was turning "people now-a-days" into "mere machines,"

Pruned vegetables—flowers of formal cut;
A class of nature wholly by itself;
And not as relatives of heaven and hell,
And all the mighty energies between . . .²⁰

Hogg also enjoyed (as the review says of Blake) a happy marriage. His good spirits (again like Blake, according to the review) were almost proverbial, in spite of discouraging treatment from publishers and critics. Finally, Hogg somewhat resembled Blake in cultivating an image of himself as a writer unrestrained by "cold ungenial rules," and free to explore the "boundless wilderness" of existence, like a "meteor of the wild":

To gleam to tremble and to die
'Tis Nature's error—so am I.²¹

whom were much younger, and little-known outside Scotland). Hogg's reminiscence, "My first Interview with Allan Cunningham," appeared in the *Journal* on 16 May 1829 (1: 374-75).

¹⁶ Alaric A. Watts, note to his poem "The Conversazione," in *The Literary Souvenir* for 1832, ed. Watts (London: Longman, 1831) 224n.

¹⁷ The untitled, unsigned paragraph appeared in the "Literary Chit-Chat and Varieties" column, 6 (30 July 1831): 71.

¹⁸ Anon., "Mr Alaric Watts," *Edinburgh Literary Journal* 6 (29 Oct. 1831): 260.

¹⁹ Watts, note to "The Conversazione" 223n.

²⁰ "A Real Vision: By the Ettrick Shepherd," *Blackwood's* 28 (July 1830): 63-65.

²¹ "To Miss M.A.C. — E" (1832; rpt. in *James Hogg: Selected Poems and Songs*, ed. D. Groves [Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, [1986]: 203-04 (204).

[1829], 2: 147-48). In the review, the excerpt is given the title "BLAKE'S COURTSHIP AND MARRIAGE." Each of the excerpts in this review has minor changes of punctuation and capitalization.

¹¹ An excerpt of three paragraphs from Cunningham follows. It begins, "He had now reached," and ends "when he ceased breathing" (*Lives*, 2: 175-76). In the review, the excerpt is entitled "BLAKE'S LAST ILLNESS AND DEATH." "Meeta" was the wife of the Danish poet Immanuel Klopstock.

¹² Anon. rev. in *The Edinburgh Literary Journal: Or, Weekly Register of Criticism and Belles Lettres*, 2 (20 Feb. 1830): 112-15 (113-14).

The quotation about Catherine Blake is from Cunningham's *Lives* (2: 179). The other reviews of Cunningham's *Lives* appeared in the *Journal* on 25 July 1829 (2: 101-04), 13 Feb. 1830 (3: 101-02), 12 June 1830 (4: 338-39), and 12 Feb. 1831 (6: 106-07). No other volumes by Cunningham received comparable attention in the *Journal*.

¹³ Bell "did the editorial work" for the *Journal*, and his "contributions . . . in prose . . . were constant and varied" (Obituary, cited in note 1 [above] 98). A contemporary review of the *Journal* found that "Mr Bell [has] few rivals" "In the critical department" (anon., *Edinburgh Observer*, 1 Jan. 1830 (p. 41).

¹⁴ Its review of *The Life of Alexander Alexander*, "By the Ettrick Shepherd" (4 [1830] 280-82) was the *Journal's* only signed review.

¹⁵ Cunningham (1784-1832) moved to London around 1810. He never returned to Scotland, until his visit to Hogg in 1831. It is unlikely that Cunningham knew many of the *Journal's* writers (most of

If any readers in 1830 considered these affinities between Blake and Hogg, they may also have recalled the cryptic allusion to "W — m B — e, a great original," in the ending of Hogg's greatest novel, six years earlier.²²

Yet in spite of tempting evidence, none of the reviews of Cunningham in the *Edinburgh Literary Journal* can be proved to be Hogg's. The most that may safely be claimed is that Hogg probably saw, and enjoyed, those reviews, and he probably read their comments on Blake. Like some readers of the *Journal*, he may also have noticed the similarities between himself and Blake which that passage seems to suggest.

The Orthodoxy of Blake Footnotes

BY MICHAEL FERBER

The disheartening experience of reading the footnotes to Blake's poems in recent student anthologies has launched little theories in my head. Is it a case of *horror vacui*? Some annotators seem unable to let a proper name go by without attaching an "explanation" to it; any explanation will serve, it seems, but preferably an "etymology." Or is it the return of the repressed? Many of these notes have been refuted or strongly questioned for many years now. Is it a medieval deference to "authority"? If so, it is a selective deference, only to those with a loud, confident manner, such as Harold Bloom. Is it mere laziness? We need a note on "northern bar" so let's see what the last couple of anthologies said about it . . . oh, yes, the *Odyssey* and the neoplatonists—that'll do. It's as if, once they get into the anthologies, the notes have a momentum of their own. They clone themselves among the petri dishes of anthologies. Whatever the reason for them, an orthodoxy of footnotes (and endnotes) has emerged and congealed. It deserves a good roar from Rintrah.

I've looked at these editions:

M. H. Abrams, et al, ed. *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, Sixth Edition, Vol. 2. New York: Norton, 1993. (Hereafter "Norton.")

Mary Lynn Johnson and John E. Grant, ed. *Blake's Poetry and Designs* (Norton Critical edition). New York: Norton, 1979. (Hereafter "Johnson-Grant.") I include this edition, well-established and deservedly so, for the sake of completeness, though it is in a different category from the others.

Michael Mason, ed. *William Blake* (Oxford Poetry Library). Oxford: Oxford UP, 1994. (Hereafter "Mason.")

Anne K. Mellor and Richard E. Matlak, ed. *British Literature 1780-1830*. Fort Worth, Texas, Harcourt Brace, 1996. (Hereafter "Mellor-Matlak.")

David Perkins, ed. *English Romantic Writers*, Second Edition. Fort Worth, Texas: Harcourt Brace, 1995. (Hereafter "Perkins.")

Duncan Wu, ed. *Romanticism: An Anthology*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1994. (Hereafter "Wu-1.")

Duncan Wu, ed. *Romanticism: An Anthology*. Second Edition. Oxford: Blackwell, 1998. (Hereafter "Wu-2.")

Among the footnotes that irritate me most (I shall call them "footnotions") are the ones that explain the supposed meaning of the name "Thel." "Thel—her name probably

²² Hogg, *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, ed. D. Groves (Edinburgh, Canongate, 1991) 202. Some connections between Blake and Hogg are suggested in my articles "Blake, Thomas Boston, and the Fourfold Vision" (*Blake* 19 [1986]: 142) and "W — m B — e, a Great Original"; William Blake, The Grave, and James Hogg's *Confessions*" (*Scottish Literary Journal*, 18 [1991]: 27-45).