

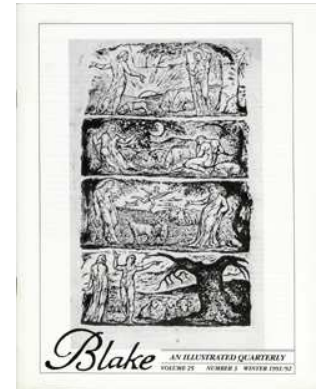
AN ILLUSTRATED QUARTERLY
BLAKE

M I N U T E
P A R T I C U L A R

Blake and the Edinburgh Literary Gazette—with a
Note on Thomas De Quincey

David Groves

Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly, Volume 25, Issue 3, Winter 1991/1992, pp.
133-135



MINUTE PARTICULARS

Blake and the *Edinburgh Literary Gazette*—with a Note on Thomas De Quincey

David Groves

The *Edinburgh Literary Gazette* of 1829-30 was "edited by the Rev. Andrew Crichton: and the literary department . . . principally entrusted to Mr [Thomas] De Quincey and myself," wrote the poet David Moir in 1838.¹ This weekly periodical has received virtually no attention from scholars. One cause of its neglect is probably the *Gazette's* policy of withholding the names of the authors of its articles. Some of its better-known contributors, including De Quincey (the "English Opium-Eater"), the Scottish novelist John Galt, and the poets Thomas Hood and Allan Cunningham, probably feared that they might jeopardize their positions with more lucrative journals such as *Blackwood's Magazine*, if their pieces in the fledgling *Gazette* appeared with their names attached.² Many of the *Gazette's* regular contributors may have read the remarks about William Blake in that journal in 1830. Although the authorship of this review remains a mystery, some evidence seems to suggest that Thomas De Quincey may have played a role in its publication. In any event, the article is interesting for its discussion of Blake as both poet and painter, and for bringing Blake's work to the attention of readers outside England.

The occasion of these remarks about William Blake was the publication of the second volume of Allan Cunningham's *Lives of the Most Eminent British Painters*, in London. Cunning-

ham's work attracted much interest in Edinburgh, partly as a result of Cunningham's fame as a Scottish poet and essayist. The first volume of the *Lives* had received an anonymous critique (almost certainly written by Reverend Crichton) in the *Gazette* of July 1829.³ Crichton quit the *Gazette* in anger in early December: he cannot have written the two succeeding reviews of Cunningham's *Lives*, which appeared in the *Gazette* in the following year.⁴ Unlike the first notice of Cunningham's *Lives* (which had contained Scottish words, phrases, and place-names), the second review is almost entirely English (rather than Scottish), with its references to William Hazlitt, Henry Fuseli, and several other literary or artistic figures in contemporary London. The second review has never been reprinted, or mentioned in print, since it first appeared on 13 February 1830:

FAMILY LIBRARY, NO. X—
CUNNINGHAM'S LIVES OF BRITISH
PAINTERS.⁵

The Family Library, No. X. The Lives of the most eminent British Painters, Sculptors, and Architects. By Allan Cunningham. Vol. II. London: J. Murray. 1830.

ALTHOUGH sufficiently alive to the merits of Lockhart's *Napoleon*, and Milman's *Jewish History*,⁶ we are free to confess that none of the volumes of the Family Library have hitherto delighted us more than the *Lives of the Painters and Sculptors* by Allan Cunningham.

At first we had doubts as to whether Allan was exactly the best calculated person for the task, and we thought that a formidable competitor might be found in Hazlitt,⁷ by any other periodical caterer, in monthly volumes, to the public taste. We have, however, been most agreeably disappointed. In the collection of facts and materials, the imagination of the poet has been kept in subjection. His biographies are well digested, and are written with that feeling which never fails to raise a corresponding interest in the heart of the reader.

In the former volume we were particularly pleased with the life of Gainsborough: although in Hogarth he had an ampler fund of materials to draw from. The volume before us takes in West, Opie, Bird, Morland, Fuseli, and Blake.⁸ Of the latter, we confess, we were comparatively

ignorant: but from Mr. Cunningham's account it is evident that his mind was characterised as much by singularity as originality. It is a dangerous thing for a man in this matter-of-fact age of the world, "to see visions and dream dreams:"⁹ especially as (if we take the case of Haydon for an instance) the public taste seems scarcely yet to have arisen from portrait to historical painting.¹⁰

We are thus induced to make a few extracts from the biography of Blake, not only as we regard it as the most singular in the volume, but as it is likely to be the newest to our readers. He appears to have been a poet as well as a painter.

Though Blake lost himself a little in the enchanted region of song, he seems not to have neglected to make himself master of the graver, or to have forgotten his love of designs and sketches¹¹

The account of his drawing portraits from imagination, under the impression that they stood meantime visibly revealed, is very strange, and somewhat unaccountable: as also of his holding converse with the spirits of the departed great on the sea-shore at twilight.¹² There is something wildly impressive in this enthusiasm, awakening at once our pity and our admiration. As was to have been expected, this waywardness of disposition led to an old age of poverty and neglect, sweetened alone by the companionship of his admirable wife. We have given their courtship: let us conclude with Blake's death-bed:—

He had now reached his seventy-first year, and the strength of nature was fast yielding. . . .¹³

It is delightful to trace to progress of a man of true genius. No earthly impediments can resist his progress: on he goes, conquering and to conquer.¹⁴ soaring and ascending over the clouds that at first hid him from sight, or obstructed his early aspirations. Such is Allan Cunningham, to whom we shortly intend dedicating a leading article.¹⁵ He has written a multitude of good things: but, excepting his inimitable imitations of the old ballad,¹⁶ his "Lives of the Painters, Sculptors, and Architects," is his best.

The reference to Cunningham by his first name alone, in the second sentence of this review, is very striking. Of all the known regular contributors to

the *Edinburgh Literary Gazette* in 1830, only Thomas De Quincey and Thomas Hood knew Allan Cunningham: all three men had worked extensively for the *London Magazine* during 1821-23. On the surface, an article in the 1830 *Gazette* which refers to Cunningham simply as "Allan" might be suspected as having been written by either De Quincey or Hood. Yet the statements about Blake seem too matter-of-fact to be plausibly attributed to either of those authors. The article also contains more biblical allusions than would perhaps be expected in a short piece by Hood or De Quincey. Since the same review also refers to "Mr. Cunningham," it may have been the product of more than one pen. David Moir, who was the most frequent reviewer for the 1830 *Gazette*, makes no mention of the three notices of Cunningham's *Lives*, in his voluminous surviving papers.¹⁷

A third review, concerning the third volume of Cunningham's *Lives*, appeared in the *Gazette* of 12 June 1830. Although this final piece does not mention Blake, it seems to have been written by the same critic who wrote the second review.¹⁸ The third review refers to Cunningham by his first name, and even as "our friend Allan." The evidence of a possible connection with De Quincey comes in the form of a private letter, from the owner of the *Gazette* to David Moir, dated five days before the publication of the third review: the letter simply states enigmatically (after discussing Moir's own work for the *Gazette*), "De Quincey is in town & at Wilson's as you will see from the inclosed."¹⁹ Whether "the inclosed" was an article of De Quincey's, an article by someone else which De Quincey was merely conveying to the *Gazette*, a book intended for review, or something quite different, is unclear. Since De Quincey undoubtedly knew about William Blake,²⁰ and had a high opinion of Allan Cunningham,²¹ it is conceivable that the two reviews of Cunningham's *Lives* in the 1830 *Gazette* might have been among the rapid pieces of journalism which De Quincey

was obliged to produce, for economic reasons, at about that time.²² But in the absence of external evidence, the most that can safely be claimed is that De Quincey probably saw the article about Blake in the *Gazette*.

Whoever wrote the remarks on Blake in the *Edinburgh Literary Gazette*, it seems likely that the piece attracted some interest, not only among readers in Scotland, but more especially among those contributors to the *Gazette* who had been acquainted with Allan Cunningham. The *Gazette* enjoyed a relatively high reputation during its fourteen months of existence, with an appeal that was mainly "confined to the sound reasoner, and philosophical enquirer."²³ Although the *Gazette* seemed "eminently fitted to succeed,"²⁴ its circulation unfortunately never exceeded 300.²⁵

A grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, for the purpose of researching Scottish periodicals, allowed me to live in Scotland while writing the present article.

¹ David M. Moir, "Life of Dr Macnisch," in his edition of *The Modern Pythagorean: a Series of Tales, Essays and Sketches, by the late Robert Macnisch, LL.D.*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1838) 1: 153. Moir (1798-1851) was a popular Scottish poet, known to readers of *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* through his pseudonym "Delta" (or, "Δ"); he is mainly remembered today as the friend and biographer of John Galt.

² The *Gazette* promised to identify the contributors of its various articles, but was prevented from doing so by the sudden bankruptcy of its owner David Blackie in 1830, followed by his sudden death from cholera in 1832 (see Moir, "Life of Dr Macnisch," [153n]). The *Gazette's* four "valued correspondents" in London were "Miss Landon" (known to readers as the poetess "L. E. L."), and "Messrs. T. Hood, Alaric Watts, and Allan Cunningham" (anon., "To Correspondents," *Edinburgh Literary Gazette*, 1 [1829]: 192). By 1830, contributors included the poets Maria Jewsbury, William Howitt, and Thomas Pringle, and miscellaneous Scottish writers Andrew Laing, William MacGillivray, John Malcolm, Andrew Picken, Leitch Ritchie, and David Vedder (all of whom are named in the two special Anniversary Numbers of 15 May and 22 May 1830). Others who

were said to contribute included William Jerdan and James Fraser (the editors, respectively, of London's *Literary Gazette* and *Fraser's Magazine*). John Parker Lawson, and the Edinburgh drama critic Christopher Torrop (see anon., "Literature: *The Edinburgh Literary Gazette*," *Glasgow Courier* [newspaper] 5 Nov 1829 [21]). Robert Macnisch (known to readers of *Blackwood's Magazine* as "The Modern Pythagorean") was also advertised as a contributor (see *Edinburgh Evening Post* [newspaper] 16 Jan. 1830 [23]). For further information on the *Gazette*, please see my articles "Thomas Hood, London, and the *Edinburgh Literary Gazette*" in *English Language Notes*, 27 (March 1990): 34-39, and "John Galt, the *Edinburgh Literary Gazette*, and 'The Black Ferry'" in *Scotia: American-Canadian Journal of Scottish Studies* 12 (1988): 44-54.

³ Anon. rev., "Cunningham's *Lives of British Painters*," *Edinburgh Literary Gazette: Devoted Exclusively to Literature, Criticism, Science, and the Arts*. 1 (1829): 169-70. This initial review of Cunningham's work may reasonably be attributed to Andrew Crichton. (Crichton was born in Kirkmahoe, Scotland, where he knew Cunningham slightly as a youth: the reviewer claims Cunningham as "an early acquaintance," and refers fondly to "Kirkmahoe" [169]. For information on Crichton, see the *Dictionary of National Biography*.)

⁴ Crichton "resigned the editorship" on 12 December 1829, and subsequently had "no further connexion" with the *Gazette* (see anon., "Literary Chit-Chat and Varieties," *Edinburgh Literary Journal* 3 [1830]: 28).

⁵ Anon. rev. in *Edinburgh Literary Gazette* 2 (1830): 103-04. The only other mention of Blake was a brief announcement, in the "Literary Intelligence" column of 28 Nov. 1829, that "The next number of the Family Library" would be "the second volume of the *Lives of British Painters*, including West, Fuseli, Barry, Blake, Opie, and Morland" (*Gazette* 1 [1829]: 463).

⁶ John Gibson Lockhart's *History of Napoleon Buonaparte*, and Henry H. Milman's *History of the Jews*, were both published in 1829, in the same "Family Library" series (published by the firm of John Murray) in which Cunningham's *Lives* appeared.

⁷ The reference is perhaps to William Hazlitt's conversational portrait of the painter James Northcote, entitled *Boswell Redivivus* (1827).

⁸ The quotation is from the New Testament: "Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see

visions and your old men shall dream dreams" (Acts 2.17).

⁹ The artists mentioned by the reviewer are Thomas Gainsborough (1727-88), William Hogarth (1697-1764), Benjamin West (1738-1820), John Opie (1761-1807), Edward Bird (1772-1819), George Morland (1763-1804), Henry Fuseli (1741-1825), and Blake. The reviewer has neglected to mention James Barry (1741-1806), who also merits a chapter in Cunningham's second volume.

¹⁰ The historical painter Benjamin Robert Haydon (1786-1846) was imprisoned for debt during 1822-23.

¹¹ The review quotes three paragraphs (beginning with this sentence), dealing with Blake's "intertwin[ing] of poetry and painting," and his relationship with his wife Catherine, from Cunningham's volume (147-49). The three paragraphs are printed as a single paragraph, and contain numerous other minor alterations, in the review.

¹² Cunningham describes Blake's "friendships with Homer and Moses: with Pindar and Virgil: with Dante and Milton," during his three years at Felpham, beginning in 1800: "These great men, [Blake] asserted, appeared to him in visions, and even entered into conversation" (*Lives* 2: 159).

¹³ The review quotes three paragraphs (beginning with this sentence), dealing with Blake's last days and death, from Cunningham's volume (179-80). As with the preceding quotation, the three paragraphs appear as one, and contain several minor alterations, in the review.

¹⁴ The reviewer alludes to the New Testament: "And I saw, and behold a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow: and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer" (Revelation 6.2).

¹⁵ Although the *Gazette* carried many notices and reviews concerning Cunning-

ham, the promised "leading article" never materialized.

¹⁶ Cunningham wrote many "imitations of the old ballad" for R. H. Cromek's *Remains of Nithsdale and Galloway Song* (1810). Cromek (who also published the 1808 edition of Blair's *Grave*, with designs by Blake) would perhaps have been the best-known link between Cunningham and Blake, in Scotland in 1830, where Cromek was still renowned for his *Reliques of Burns* (1808). For further information on Cunningham's association with Cromek, see David Hogg, *The Life of Allan Cunningham* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1875), and De Quincey, "London Reminiscences" (1840: rpt. *Collected Writings of Thomas De Quincey*, ed. D. Masson, 14 vols. [Edinburgh: Black, 1889-90] 3: 146).

¹⁷ None of the three reviews was mentioned by Moir, either in the formal list of his own contributions to the *Gazette* (which he left at the time of his death in his private papers), or in his almost weekly letters to William Blackwood (in which he regularly informed Blackwood of his latest publications). Moir's correspondence and private papers survive at the National Library of Scotland (see the Blackwood collection, and Accession 9856) and the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Room (University of Toronto Library).

¹⁸ The reviewer displays a familiarity with the previous volumes, and recalls "[h]aving in our former notices had occasion to dwell on our friend Allan's qualifications for the office of an historian" (anon. rev., "Family Library," *Edinburgh Literary Gazette* 2 [1830]: 374-76). The second and third reviews are similar in style and in their "English" perspective: but both are extremely unlike the initial review of the *Lives*; in spite of this reference to "our former notices," the second and third reviews were almost certainly written by someone other than the author of the first review.

¹⁹ David Blackie, letter to Moir, 7 June 1830 (National Library of Scotland MS Acc. 9856, no. 37). By "Wilson's," Blackie refers to John Wilson, the editor of *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, who was a close friend of De Quincey. Manuscripts in the National Library of Scotland are quoted with the permission of its Trustees.

²⁰ De Quincey mentions "that fine mystic, Blake the artist," before quoting from Blake's poetic dedication to the 1808 edition of *The Grave*, in his "Society of the Lakes" (1840: rpt. *Collected Writings* 2: 400). Although this is the sole reference to Blake in De Quincey's known writings, it suggests a fair degree of interest and familiarity with some of Blake's work.

²¹ De Quincey describes Cunningham as "a man of so much original genius" in his "London Reminiscences" (1840: rpt. *Collected Writings* 3: 146). It is perhaps significant that, in a letter of 7 July 1829, Cunningham wrote to an unknown correspondent, concerning De Quincey and the *Edinburgh Literary Gazette*: "I see you are united with my friend Mr De Quincey in this Critical undertaking of yours. . . . I beg you will name my name to him" (National Library of Scotland MS Acc. 15973, f. 32).

²² For a listing of many of De Quincey's anonymous articles, "written with the left hand" from 1829 to 1846, see R. H. Byrns, "Some Unpublished Articles of De Quincey in *Blackwood's Magazine*" (*Bulletin of Research in the Humanities* 85 [1982]: 344-51).

²³ H., "Edinburgh Chit-Chat," *Kelso Mail* (newspaper), 15 Oct. 1829 (1).

²⁴ "Literature: *The Edinburgh Literary Gazette*," *Glasgow Courier* (cited in n2, above).

²⁵ David Blackie, letter to Moir, 14 July 1830 (NLS MS Acc 9856, no. 37).

Six Illustrations by Stothard

Alexander S. Gourlay

In his thorough review of Shelley M. Bennett's *Thomas Stothard: The Mechanisms of Art Patronage in England circa 1800* (Blake 23 [1989]: 205-09) G. E. Bentley, Jr. invited readers to send in any addenda to his addenda to

Bennett's list of Stothard illustrations. An edition of *The Tatler: with Illustrations and Notes* contains what are probably the six illustrations for an "unknown author and title . . . For Rivington" in Bennett's list under the year 1785 (67). The six plates, one in each of six volumes, are inscribed "Publish'd Decr. 1st 1785 by J Rivington & Son's St. Pauls Church Yard London. for the Proprietor's," and were engraved by Heath, Collyer, and Cook. The place of each in the text

is marked at the top of the plate. The book itself was published in London in 1786 by a long list of parties, beginning with "C. Bathurst" and including both Rivington and Joseph Johnson along with 23 others. Robert N. Essick notes in a private letter that the subjects of these plates are described in A. C. Coxhead's *Thomas Stothard, R. A.* (London: A. H. Bullen, [1906] 172-73); he suggests that Coxhead was working from extracted plates in the Balmanno Collection, British Museum.