

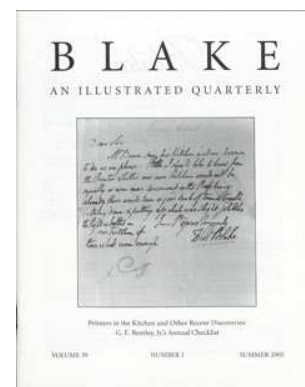
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“Great and Singular Genius”: Further References to
Blake (and Cromek) in the Scots Magazine

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attendant cultural associations also resonate through Blake's earliest poems, published as *Poetical Sketches* in 1783. He laments the attenuated state of both traditions. "The shepherd leaves his mellow pipe" in "Gwin, King of Norway," while "the languid strings do scarcely move" for the "bards of old" in "To the Muses."⁴ Here and elsewhere in Blake's poems and designs, the shepherd's pipe is a more common motif than the lyre, but carries much the same meaning. The specifically British associations of the harp are indicated in "A War Song to Englishmen," in which King "Alfred shall smile, and make his harp rejoice" (E 440). *Songs of Innocence*, etched and first printed in 1789, also indicates the complementary differences between pastoral musician and bard. The "Introduction" to the anthology (E 7), coupled with the frontispiece directly illustrating that poem, announces a revived lyricism, while "The Voice of the Ancient Bard" (E 31-32) reaches toward an epic vision that encompasses experience as well as innocence.⁵ In the design above the text, the bard strums a triangular harp even larger than the one played by his younger counterpart in the verso sketch (illus. 2). Poised chronologically between *Poetical Sketches* and *Songs of Innocence*, the drawings reproduced here show Blake experimenting with visual representations of the two poetical modes, and the states of consciousness they embody, in which he worked throughout most of his career.

Iliad of Homer Engraved by Thomas Piroli from the Compositions of John Flaxman Sculptor (Rome: [Piroli], 1793). For some of Blake's major pictures of the large triangular Celtic or Welsh harp, see his illustrations to Thomas Gray's "The Bard" (Butlin #335.53) and "The Triumphs of Owen" (Butlin #335.89), and the tempera painting and recto/verso drawings of *The Bard, from Gray* (Butlin #655-56). Homer holds a large lyre in Blake's first design to Gray's "The Progress of Poesy" (Butlin #335.41). In Ireland, Scotland, and Wales, the Celtic harp became a symbol of national independence in the late eighteenth century; see Katie Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1997) 3-34. For Blake's possible allusions to the Irish harp and its attendant politics in *Jerusalem*, see Catherine L. McClenahan, "Blake's Erin, the United Irish, and 'Sexual Machines,'" in *Prophetic Character: Essays on William Blake in Honor of John E. Grant*, ed. Alexander Gourlay (West Cornwall, CT: Locust Hill P, 2002) 165-67.

4. *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman, newly revised edition (New York: Doubleday, 1988) 417-18, hereafter cited as "E" followed by page number. According to the prefatory "Advertisement" to *Poetical Sketches* (E 846), the poems were composed well before 1783, roughly 1770-78.

5. "The Voice of the Ancient Bard" was composed and etched no later than 1789 and was included in most separate copies of *Songs of Innocence*. In later copies of the combined *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, printed 1818-27, Blake moved "The Voice of the Ancient Bard" to the *Experience* section, which the poem anticipates. The "Bard," who "Present, Past, & Future sees," is invoked in the "Introduction" to *Experience* (E 18). For printing dates, see the chart in Joseph Viscomi, *Blake and the Idea of the Book* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1993) 376-81.

"Great and Singular Genius": Further References to Blake (and Cromek) in the *Scots Magazine*

BY DAVID GROVES

The generous review of "Blake's Illustrations of Blair's Grave" in the *Scots Magazine* of November 1808 has been known for some time.¹ No critic, however, has yet noted the existence of two short anonymous notices, earlier in the same magazine, which paved the way for the volume's reception in Edinburgh. The first, in July 1807, appeared as the first of three paragraphs in the "Scottish Literary Intelligence" column. It announces the forthcoming Blake-Blair volume and describes an exhibition, organized by the book's publisher Robert Cromek, in St. James's Square in Edinburgh. The exhibition featured Blake's original paintings for Robert Blair's poem *The Grave*, as well as a painting to illustrate *The Canterbury Tales*:

A Splendid Edition of Blair's Grave is about to be published, illustrated with paintings by Mr Blake, an artist and poet of great and singular genius. These paintings are now exhibiting in James's Square No. 9. by Mr Cromek, a very ingenious young artist, who proposes to engrave them for the above-mentioned work, for which he is now taking in subscriptions. A beautiful painting of the procession of Chaucer's pilgrims is exhibited at the same time, and Mr Cromek is also taking in subscriptions for an engraving which is to be made from it.²

The "paintings" by Blake here were presumably the set of nineteen watercolors which have recently come to light, in what has been described as "the most exciting Blake discovery" in many decades, "and arguably the most important since Blake began to be appreciated in the second half of the nineteenth century."³ Evidently at this time in 1807, Cromek was planning to engrave Blake's designs himself. It is unclear whether the painting of "Chaucer's pilgrims" is the well-known one by Thomas Stothard, commissioned by Cromek and finished in

1. The review is reprinted in my note "Blake, *The Grave*, and Edinburgh Literary Society," *Blake* 24.1 (summer 1990): 35-36.

2. Anon., "Scottish Literary Intelligence," *Scots Magazine, and Edinburgh Literary Miscellany* 69 (1807): 522.

3. Martin Butlin, "New Risen from the Grave: Nineteen Unknown Watercolors by William Blake," *Blake* 35.3 (winter 2002-03): 68-73 (68). The paintings apparently remained in Edinburgh after the exhibition, and were sold to a Scottish collector in 1836. See also G. E. Bentley, Jr., "Thomas Sivright and the Lost Designs for Blair's *Grave*," *Blake* 19.3 (winter 1985-86): 103-06.

1807, or the watercolor which Blake completed at about the same time, and which was also commissioned by Cromek.⁴

Meanwhile, Cromek's reputation in Edinburgh continued to grow as a result of his lucrative researches into Scottish poetry. The December *Scots Magazine* announced that "An interesting literary discovery of unpublished works of the late Robert Burns, has been made by Mr Cromer [sic], in a late tour through Scotland." Many Scots readers would have been stirred by this glowing account of newfound poems and letters by Burns being "rescued from oblivion" by Cromek.⁵ Coming so soon before the Blake-Blair volume, this advance publicity for Cromek's edition of *Reliques of Burns* probably contributed to the success of *The Grave*, with Blake's designs, in Edinburgh.

No mention of Blake appeared in the *Scots Magazine* between July 1807 and September 1808. But in that month, the magazine noted the actual publication of Blair's *Grave* and its engravings by Luigi Schiavonetti based on Blake's paintings. This briefer notice gives the size of the volume and its price of two pounds, twelve shillings and sixpence: "Illustrations of Blair's Grave, in 12 Etchings, executed by Louis Schiavonetti, from the Original Inventions of William Blake, 4to. 2l. 12s. 6d."⁶ The long review of *The Grave*, praising Blake for his "genius" and "beautiful" though "eccentric" designs, followed quickly in November.⁷

There appear to be no further citations of Blake in the *Scots Magazine*.⁸ But in December 1808, its readers were told that Cromek's long-awaited work on Burns was now in print: "Reliques of Robert Burns: consisting chiefly of original Letters, Poems, and Critical Observations on Scottish Songs. Collected and published by R.H. Cromek. 8vo. 10s. 6d."⁹ Long extracts from the *Reliques of Burns* followed in January 1809, and a laudatory review in March.¹⁰ Then, in August 1809, the

4. For Stothard's and Blake's rival illustrations to Chaucer, see Peter Ackroyd, *Blake* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1995) 271-72, and G. E. Bentley, Jr., *Blake Records* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1969) 209, 216-17. Blake exhibited his own painting for Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* in London in May 1809.

5. Anon., "Scottish Literary Intelligence," *Scots Magazine* 69 (1807): 925.

6. Anon., *Scots Magazine* 70 (1808): 683. The notice is the second of three paragraphs in the "New Works Published in Edinburgh" section for September 1808.

7. *Scots Magazine* 70 (1808): 839-40.

8. The *Scots* continued publishing until the end of 1826. One article of some interest (as it mentions a few of Blake's fellow engravers) is the anonymous "Account of a Society Formed for the Encouragement of the Art of Engraving" (72 [August 1810]: 590-92).

9. Anon., "New Works Published in Edinburgh," *Scots Magazine* 70 (1808): 923. The identical notice (with a few changes in capitalization) appeared in the same column for January 1809 (71: 46).

10. Anon., "Cromek's Reliques of Burns," *Scots Magazine* 71 (1809): 30-33 and 198-203 (the title is taken from the table of contents for March). The appearance of these articles, coming so soon after the same journal's review of *The Grave*, would have given Cromek quite a high profile among Scottish readers.

same journal announced that "Mr Cromek is receiving subscriptions for an Historical Portrait of Mr Walter Scott, from the admired Picture by [Henry] Raeburn, which appeared at the last Exhibition [sic] of Scottish paintings."¹¹

Around 1810, Cromek's reputation in Scottish circles began to wane. Perhaps this was due in part to Walter Scott's influence, for Scott told one publisher that "Cromek is a perfect Brain-sucker living upon the labours of others."¹² Cromek's two-volume *Select Scottish Songs*, published in 1810, received neither review nor notice of any kind in the *Scots Magazine*. When his final book, *Remains of Nithsdale and Galloway Song*, came out in 1811, a polite but lukewarm review commended Cromek's "copious" notes and "good deal of valuable information" on the subjects of "witchcraft" and "fairies."¹³ Cromek's death in 1812 passed unnoticed in the *Scots Magazine*.

No critic has noted that Cromek was probably of Scots descent (though born in England). Each of his five volumes was Scottish in some way, and his unusual surname is remarkably close to the Scottish Gaelic words "crom," "cromack," or "cromag," which mean "anything twisted or bent, particularly fingers" (Blake would have enjoyed that!). "Cromack" is also a variant spelling of the Gaelic word "crummock," meaning "a cow with twisted horns" (see the *Scottish National Dictionary*, 1952 edition, III: 251-52 and 267).

11. Anon., "Scottish Literary Intelligence," *Scots Magazine*, and *Edinburgh Literary Miscellany* 71 (1809): 605.

12. Letter to John Murray, 3 Dec. 1810, *The Letters of Sir Walter Scott*, ed. H. J. C. Grierson, 12 vols. (London: Constable, 1932-37) II: 409-10 (409).

13. Anon., "Remains of Nithsdale and Galloway Song ... by R.W. [sic] Cromek, F.A.S. Ed., Editor of the Reliques of Robert Burns," *Scots Magazine* 73 (June 1811): 441-47 (444, 445). "F.A.S. Ed." identifies Cromek as a fellow of Edinburgh's Antiquarian Society. The *Nithsdale* volume has some relevance to Blake, because many of its supposed folk songs were in fact by Allan Cunningham, who later wrote the well-known chapter on Blake in his *Lives of the Most Eminent British Painters*. The imposture was detected by James Hogg, but Hogg was unable to find a publisher for his review on the subject; Hogg's review, alas, has never been traced, although he says he kept the manuscript until at least 1832 (see his "Memoir of the Author's Life" and "Familiar Anecdotes of Sir Walter Scott," ed. Douglas Mack [Edinburgh: Scottish Academic P, 1972] 73).

Blake's Proverbs of Hell:

St. Paul and the Nakedness of Woman

BY HOWARD JACOBSON

Blake's *Marriage of Heaven and Hell* contains a section entitled Proverbs of Hell. This section, like the work as a whole, contains sharp satiric, even parodic, elements directed against the Bible, Blake's devotion to Scripture notwithstanding.