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(previously 'Cardiff Corvey: Reading the Romantic Text')



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Aims and Scope: Formerly *Cardiff Corvey: Reading the Romantic Text* (1997–2005), *Romantic Textualities: Literature and Print Culture, 1780–1840* is an online journal that is committed to foregrounding innovative Romantic-studies research into bibliography, book history, intertextuality, and textual studies. To this end, we publish material in a number of formats: among them, peer-reviewed articles, reports on individual/group research projects, bibliographical checklists, and biographical profiles of overlooked Romantic writers. As of Issue 15 (Winter 2005), *Romantic Textualities* also carries reviews of books that reflect the growing academic interest in the fields of book history, print culture, intertextuality, and cultural materialism, as they relate to Romantic studies.

had appealed to diverse literary audiences (p. xxviii). This new edition ensures that it will continue to do likewise. 

Wendy Hunter
University of Sheffield

Gillian Hughes, *James Hogg: A Life* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 360pp. ISBN 978-0-7486-1639-8; £25 (hb).

GILLIAN HUGHES IS A GENERAL EDITOR of EUP's Stirling/South Carolina Research Edition of the Collected Works of James Hogg. Among other works by Hogg, she has edited *Altrive Tales* (2003) and the three-volume *Collected Letters* (2005–08), and co-edited *Contributions to Annuals and Gift-Books* (2006). As such, Hughes is perfectly placed to deliver an authoritative biography of an author who deserves serious critical and biographical attention. Hogg's life and work have been subject to increasing critical study over recent decades, and he has finally emerged from the shadow of his contemporaries, particularly his friend Sir Walter Scott. Until recently, Hogg's life and work would be consistently defined within the context of those of Scott, his more illustrious and accessible competitor. However, thanks to work by scholars such as Hughes, Peter Garside, Ian Duncan, and Janette Currie, among others, Hogg's life and talent can now be appreciated entirely on their own terms. Hughes's *James Hogg: A Life* is an invaluable contribution towards Hogg's re-emergence as one of late Romanticism's most important figures.

Perhaps typically for a Scottish author of this period, Hogg's work deals predominantly with fractured identities, often viewing the same historical period or event from multiple points of view and through various authorial voices. The most famous example of his gift for such diversity is his 1824 novel *Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, a book berated by contemporary criticism and barely read, let alone understood, until the middle of the twentieth century. However, the themes of the instability of history and narrative raised in *Confessions* are constantly addressed in his lesser-read works, particularly in his collections of short stories. Hughes addresses Hogg's range of narrative mode and technique, but avoids overbearing the reader with literary criticism; rather, the facts and influences of Hogg's life are drawn together to provide context and clarity to the creation of such work. Hogg's personality—and the complex nature of his social and professional interactions—provide, for the first time, a framework within which the full range of his writing can be fully grasped.

Hughes faced a daunting challenge in collecting information on Hogg's early life, tracing his development into the writer who could mimic his peers, while producing fiction of astounding originality in *Confessions* and *The Three*

Perils of Man. There is very little established fact about Hogg's life prior to his meeting with Scott—a meeting which is itself described and debunked by Hughes as 'one of the great moments of Romantic myth-making'. Hogg's life seems to have followed the trajectory of one of the many Border ballads about which Scott consulted him: before his well-documented literary success, details about his childhood and formative years are blurred by tradition and rumour, and many of them are provided by Hogg himself in his 'Memoir of the Author's Life' and 'Reminiscences of Former Days'. As so much of Hogg's fiction demonstrates, Hogg himself is hardly a reliable authorial voice, even regarding his own life: his own birthday, for example, which Hogg places on 25 January 1772 (conveniently sharing the day with Robert Burns), is reassessed as being somewhere closer to the end of 1770. Hughes has used the wealth of information available to her through her research on numerous other editorial projects to unearth obscure factual and anecdotal accounts of a young Hogg, his family, and his career path, and to separate out more elaborate claims. As with a young William Shakespeare, it has been difficult to understand how Hogg could have reached his level of reading, writing, and literary allusion given his social and geographical background, but Hughes lays out a sensible timeline based on socio-economic conditions of the places to which his family moved, and accounts of his likely sources of education and reading material.

What is so beneficial to scholarship in this field is the way in which the realities of rural life in Scotland at the end of the eighteenth century are realised. Like a *Waverley* hero, Hogg's development from shepherd to self-educated man of letters takes us through the Borders landscape, the local institutions and farming communities of Selkirkshire, and finally to the city of Edinburgh. Like his hero Burns, Hogg's trajectory enabled him to transcend social and professional boundaries which were rarely breached. The early chapters in particular flesh out a society in which Burns was simultaneously operating not too far away in Dumfriesshire. Hogg's earliest life was defined by a poor but relatively secure family environment; his father, Robert, was a shepherd, who hit bankruptcy when James was a vulnerable seven years of age, and James was consequently forced to work as a cowherd for a local farmer. Hughes here makes a neat comparison between Hogg and a young Dickens: each author's creative imagination was deeply informed by their childhood experiences of familial upheaval. In Hogg's case, he formed a lifelong sympathy with various disparate social, religious, and political groups that suffered repression from forces greater than themselves, a theory Hughes points out that unites his apparent identification with both the Covenanters of the seventeenth century (*The Brownie of Bodsbeck*) and the Jacobites of the eighteenth (demonstrated in his collection of Jacobite songs for *Jacobite Relics of Scotland*).

The first two chapters provide a biographical context within which Hogg's subsequent creative life can be fully understood. A central achievement of this book is the way in which Hughes is able explicitly to link events and circumstances of the author's life with his work, and beyond that with the society

in which he was operating. The ambitious project of his *Spy* publications, for example, is a clear exercise in combining his own experience as a social and literary outsider with his talent for mimicry. *The Queen's Wake* (1812), the poem which finally won him the fame he felt he deserved, is described by Hughes in terms of its breadth of style and its allusions not only to himself as the central narrator-figure of the Ettrick Bard but to his friends and influences: Scott, James M'Turk, John Grieve, and James Gray are all friends who are integrated into the fabric of the narrative, conflating a highly fictionalised poetic form with people with whom he formed important and often lifelong relationships.

These friendships were often complex. With the publication of *The Queen's Wake*, Hogg's life and career were changed forever. He was hailed as a natural genius, a loaded phrase which did not necessarily serve him well in the eyes of the Edinburgh literati, on whom he was commercially and socially reliant. He was welcomed into Edinburgh society as the heir to Burns, an epithet which was only partly true. In fact, flattered as he was by the comparison, this became a pigeon-hole that he would spend much of the remainder of his career trying to escape. Hogg's life, particularly as presented by Hughes, is a difficult mixture of professional necessity, social uncertainty, and raw talent. The professionalisation of authorship, in the developing world of mass media and middle-class consumption, dictated that the author write *as* a professional: writing for a broader audience with specific tastes and to deadlines. Hogg's resistance in conforming to his persona as the Ettrick Bard mitigated against him being able to compete in this arena with professionals like Scott. Even Scott himself, a staunch supporter of Hogg when it did not interfere with his own literary pursuits, attempted to apply a straitjacket of sorts, as guilty of belittling Hogg's prose output as any of the more overtly aggressive reviewers of the day.


Hogg's humble agricultural background became a stick with which his competitors could beat him. His greatest impediment to true recognition amongst his professional peers seems to have been a combination of irrepressible talent and working-class roots. His social position was always one which shifted uncomfortably between high society and professional company in the city, and an object of derision and caricature (often cruel). As Ian Duncan has argued, his very name made it all too easy for satirists to reinforce the image of his rural origins. This situation is best exemplified in his complex relationship with *Blackwoods Edinburgh Magazine*, and in particular the serialised publication of the *Noctes Ambrosianae*. Contrived and edited largely by Hogg's erstwhile friends, J. G. Lockhart and Christopher North (pennamen of Professor John Wilson), the *Noctes* consisted of fabricated conversations between semi-fictional characters on contemporary literary, political, and artistic topics. One of these characters was heavily based on Hogg, 'The Shepherd', and increasingly became the focus of contentious dialogues. The Shepherd was a complex creation that wavered uncomfortably on the edge of crude caricature, painting the real Hogg as a 'boozing buffoon'—an image Hughes makes clear is unfair. In this creation lie all the complexities of Hogg's social and professional position: as

uncomfortable as Hogg was with this persona, the success of the *Noctes* provided him with real fame in Britain and throughout the Empire. This caricature is further exemplified in an earlier painting by William Allan of *The Celebration of the Birthday of James Hogg*, reproduced in Hughes's volume. Members of the social group he graced (in this case, the Dilettanti Club), such as Scott, Scott's publisher Archibald Constable, Lockhart, and North/Wilson, are all depicted, soberly providing contrast to the clearly drunk Hogg. Such artistic contrivances as these, in which fact and fiction become blurred and inscribed onto the public consciousness, create the precise problem that Hughes has so successfully unpicked.

As unfair as some of these caricatures may seem on Hogg, he could prove to be his own worst enemy. Hughes resists the temptation to excuse Hogg from some questionable decision-making and from outbursts that were born from a passionate disposition. It's almost impossible not to define Hogg's life and work within the context of his friendships, particularly that of Scott, but it's one of the book's main achievements that Hogg emerges from these pages as a fully formed, flawed, and empathetic character. His temper, sense of humour, and loyalty to friends are all made abundantly clear through anecdote, correspondence, and extraordinary biographical detail. His multiple personalities as shepherd, writer, even scientist, are all conflated into a single hermetic personality. He was constantly torn between his familial calling as shepherd and his natural leanings to authorship; as with his tortured protagonist Robert Wringham, identity was something with which he constantly struggled.

One minor criticism to be levelled at the production of this biography is the fact that some of the illustrations, beautifully reproduced and helping to contextualise the worlds in which Hogg was operating, occasionally appear without subheading or explanatory notation. Although a list of the plates is provided at the beginning of the book, a paperback edition would benefit from a brief reference: without context, plates such as David Octavius Hill's illustrations often distract the reader from the central discussion of its corresponding text. Hill's illustrations are interesting and important contributions to Hogg's later collected works, such as *Tales and Sketches by the Ettrick Shepherd* (1836–37), and would benefit from intertextual reference. However, reproduction of portraits of Hogg by prominent contemporary artists, including Daniel Maclise, William Nicholson, William Allan, John Watson Gordon, and Charles Fox, do provide a fascinating variation in the depiction of a celebrity with very different public personas. For example, Allan's comic, possibly unkind, depiction of Hogg at his *Birthday Celebration* is unrecognisable from the dignified, gentrified character presented by Fox in a frontispiece for an 1832 edition of Hogg's *Altrive Tales*; there is a little truth in both depictions, but neither aptly represents the complicated portrait that Hughes paints throughout this biography.

This book finally provides Hogg with the attention and credit he deserves. His was an intriguing life, even without consideration of the range of work

he produced. Apart from Hughes's ability to apply biographical detail to the understanding of some of his less accessible work, a major achievement of this book is the way in which the society of Scott, Wordsworth, and Wilson is witnessed through the lens of an outsider. The reader can feel Hogg's mortification at Wordsworth's off-the-cuff comment to De Quincey during a 'meeting of the poets' in the Lake District that he did not count Hogg amongst their number; it's possible to interpret Scott's patronage and friendship as something other than truly altruistic when he recommends that Hogg stick to poetry or refuses to contribute to projects such as *The Poetic Mirror*. Hughes's biography in fact provides a neat counterpoint to Allan's depiction of the closeted Edinburgh literary and artistic society, and Hogg's position within it. Finally, Hogg's side is presented; this book provides the context within which the full range of his work and talent can be appreciated entirely on their own merit. 

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Claire Lamont and Michael Rossington (eds), *Romanticism's Debatable Lands* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 264pp. ISBN 978-0-2305-0785-2; £45 / \$74.95.

ROMANTICISM'S DEBATABLE LANDS is a collection of essays that originated in papers delivered at the British Association of Romanticism Studies's 2005 conference on the same theme. In its introduction, the book's editors (also the conference's co-organisers) Claire Lamont and Michael Rossington explain that the term 'debatable lands' was first recorded in the sixteenth century when it denoted an area of contested ownership on 'the Anglo-Scottish border'; specifically the stretch of land in the west between the rivers Esk and Sark (p. 1). The term subsequently widened in application and 'came to be used to describe not only the Anglo-Scottish border but other disputed territories and, by metaphorical extension, disputes of other sorts, social, intellectual or artistic'. Lamont and Rossington conclude that the term 'debatable lands' is 'therefore, an appropriate concept to use to focus attention on certain aspects of writing in English in the Romantic period'. Like the BARS conference, their collection of essays proceeds on that principle.

Romanticism's Debatable Lands is divided into two parts, 'Britain and Ireland' and 'Europe and Beyond'. Three essays in the first part pay homage to the Anglo-Scottish origin of the idea of a 'debatable land': Fiona Stafford, Susan Oliver, and Janet Sorensen each explore characteristics of Anglo-Scottish border literature and print culture in the Romantic period. Mary-Ann Constantine applies the notion of a debatable land to interactions between Welsh and English writers. In the collection's second part, the geographical application of the term is widened beyond Britain. Nanora Sweet explores the incarnation of Naples

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS



Peter Garside is Professor of Bibliography and Textual Studies at the University of Edinburgh. He has co-edited an edition of James Hogg's *The Forest Minstrel* (EUP, 2006), and has more recently published an edition of Walter Scott's *Waverley* (EUP, 2007) for the Edinburgh Edition of the Waverley Novels.

Rachel Hewitt (BA, MSt Oxon, PhD London) is Research Fellow at the Research Centre for Literature, Arts and Science (RCLAS), which is based in the University of Glamorgan. She is the author of articles on Wordsworth, cartography, and the interactions between literature and geographical science. She is currently working on a historical study entitled *Map of the Nation: A Biography of the Ordnance Survey*, which is to be published by Granta in 2010.

Richard Hill completed his PhD at Edinburgh University in 2006, and is now teaching English at the University of Hawaii, Maui Community College. His thesis was entitled 'The Illustration of the Waverley Novels in Scotland: Walter Scott's Contribution to the Nineteenth-Century Illustrated Novel'. He has written articles on Scott, Hogg, and book illustration, and is currently working on the lifetime illustrations of Robert Louis Stevenson.

Wendy Hunter is in the process of completing her PhD thesis at the University of Sheffield, which has a working title of 'Literary Identity in the Work of James Hogg'. She has recently published an article on Hogg's periodical *The Spy* for the *Literary Encyclopaedia* and has contributed to a forthcoming e-book on Hogg's contributions in Chambers' *Edinburgh Journal*.

Nicola Lloyd (BA, MA Wales) is a doctoral research student based in the Centre for Editorial and Intertextual Research, Cardiff University. Her thesis, 'Sentimentalism and the British Novel, 1800–1836', considers the influence of the eighteenth-century discourse of sensibility on fictional sub-genres of the late Romantic period including the national tale, the historical novel, and moral-domestic fiction.

Bernard McKenna is Assistant Professor at the University of Delaware. His work has appeared in *Philological Quarterly*, *LIT: Literature, Interpretation, Theory*, and *Eire-Ireland*. He is also the author of two books: *James Joyce's Ulysses* and *Rupture, Representation and the Refashioning of Identity in Drama from the North of Ireland*.

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