

Meiko O'Halloran, *James Hogg and British Romanticism: A Kaleidoscopic Art*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2016. £58. Pp. xi + 308. ISBN 9781137559043.

James Hogg and British Romanticism makes an original and significant contribution to the ongoing conversation on how Hogg's works engage with and diverge from the artistic vision and practices of fellow Romantics. Comparing the kaleidoscope (invented by Hogg's close friend David Brewster in 1816) to Hogg's artistic method, O'Halloran focuses on how his variegated aesthetic techniques compel readers to co-produce textual meaning by opening themselves up to a broad range of interpretive possibilities. O'Halloran deftly details the strategies behind Hogg's aesthetic, the distinct nature of his kaleidoscopic texts, and the intense impact of reading them. Along the way, she persuasively argues that Hogg deserves a central place in Romanticism since he is not an outlier but rather one whose writing more radically expresses Romantic sensibilities.

In her opening chapters, O'Halloran accurately describes Hogg's works as flexible, energetic, instinctive, experimental, unpredictable, self-reflexive, multi-perspectival, multi-generic, non-moralizing, and witty, stressing their tendency to thematize contestation, multiplicity, and transformation. In Chapter 1, she dwells on Hogg's interest in the motley miscellany and established anthology. In *The Poetic Mirror*, she finds Hogg taking advantage of genre-hybridity to destabilize the relation between the low-brow miscellany and high-brow anthology to establish a place for himself (and other Scottish poets) in the literary canon while questioning the very process of canonization itself. *The Poetic Mirror*, she believes, reveals both the highly competitive nature of the literary marketplace and Hogg's longing for a 'bardic brotherhood' (48). Aspects of *The Poetic Mirror* also remind her of the writing of the bicultural Lord Byron.

In Chapter 2, O'Halloran situates *The Queen's Wake* in the evolution of Hogg's writing practice, focusing on the role of historic events, voices and traditions in his self-fashioning, which is rooted in the mutual prosperity of the bard and Scotland. *The Queen's Wake*, she maintains, is a reconceived British epic (Stuart rather than Tudor) in which Hogg draws on *The Canterbury Tales*, *The Faerie Queene*, and *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* and participates in the 'cult of Mary, Queen of Scots' to rewrite British 'cultural ancestry'; he thereby hopes to prove that a self-taught shepherd-poet can help 'shape and direct national aspiration' (64). The interplay of diverse voices in *The Queen's Wake*, she argues, stresses that poets across the class spectrum should be permitted to form modern Scotland's new identity.

In Chapter 3, O'Halloran examines the influence of the theatre on Hogg's work, connecting his generically-complex and structurally-distinct 'dramatic tale' *The Hunting of Badlewe* to his esteem for Shakespeare's work, involvement in the local theatrical scene, and desire 'to become a great national bard' (123). She also surmises that the theatre inspired Hogg in general to adopt a wider range of personae, to privilege roleplay, and to envision a more active readership. She compares Hogg's role in the parodic *Poetic Mirror* with Shakespeare's Autolycus in *The Winter's Tale*, as both with 'theatrical subterfuge' sell their forged goods to the audience (148). In his densely allusive, multi-generic, and ideologically unstable epic *Queen Hynde*, O'Halloran presents Hogg as a 'theatre director' of sorts who strives to control unjustly censorious readers and includes in his vision of the heroic skill at roleplay, notably in the 'shape-shifter' Wene, a figure of the model author and reader (163, 166).

In the fourth and fifth chapters, O'Halloran turns to Hogg's most admired work, his novel *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, and to his final story collection *Tales of the Wars of Montrose*. O'Halloran finds a less playful or darker mood in these works of fiction that expose the fragility

of selfhood, family, community, and/or nation. She speculates that Hogg's tendency toward 'continuous changeability' intensifies in *Confessions*, 'a new kind of fiction', increasing the sophistication needed to interpret his novel but also rendering readers more sympathetic (215). O'Halloran suggests that Hogg's literary practices, which at times resemble those of Laurence Sterne and William Blake, even inspire the reader to identify with the devilish chameleon Gil-Martin, the figure of a 'flexible' and 'proactive' reader and a compelling performer (209, 212).

O'Halloran claims that the *Tales of the Wars of Montrose*, written in a period of transition, deeply disorients readers with its narrative twists and turns and absence of a unifying narrator to hold together the 'dark fragments of [wartime] history and human experience' it records (15). The reader must work to make it cohere. O'Halloran theorizes, however, that despite the disquieting mood of this collection set in civil-war Scotland, Hogg suggests some transformation is possible, connoted in part by the character James Graham, fifth Earl and first Marquis of Montrose, another 'shrewd reader of others' and performer in his own right (249). If, as O'Halloran stresses, the collection undermines the Enlightenment metanarrative, she still believes it manages to reveal 'the value of human life and the bonds of community' (255).

O'Halloran's pioneering and perceptive study is essential reading for those working on the life and writings of James Hogg and in the fields of Scottish Romanticism, British Romanticism, literary history, and reader response theory.

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