

Judy King and Graham Tulloch, eds., James Hogg, *The Three Perils of Man; or, War, Women, and Witchcraft, A Border Romance*. Edinburgh University Press, 2012. Pp. 558. £80. ISBN 9780748638116.

Thomas C. Richardson, ed., James Hogg, *Contributions to Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, Volume 2: 1829-1835*. Edinburgh University Press, 2012. Pp. 509. £80. ISBN 9780748624898.

‘A GREAT number of people now-a-days are beginning broadly to insinuate that there are no such things as ghosts, or spiritual beings visible to mortal sight. Even Sir Walter Scott is turned renegade, and, with his stories made up of half-and-half, like Nathaniel Gow’s toddy, is trying to throw cold water on the most certain, though most impalpable, phenomena of human nature. The bodies are daft. Heaven mend their wits!’ With this assertion opens Hogg’s short story ‘The Mysterious Bride’, laying out the terms of a contest that surfaces again and again in his writing. In the two latest volumes to appear in the Stirling/South Carolina Research Edition of his works, such questions remain consistently to the fore, reflecting Hogg’s long-term interest in the supernatural tradition and what place, if any, it could claim in the developing literary culture of early nineteenth-century Scotland. Blending contemporary intellectual debate with traditionary material, these publications reaffirm Hogg’s distinctive approach to the epistemological challenges presented at the outset of modernity – with his brand of irreverent humour both welcome and ever-present. The ongoing re-evaluation of Hogg’s work continues to influence the shifting paradigm of Romanticism. In many ways a figure that challenges orthodoxy, the working-class, non-metropolitan sensibilities of his varied writings are part of what continues to win him the audience he lacked for much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The excellent work behind these scholarly editions has been pivotal in driving this reappraisal, with the two latest releases continuing the high editorial standards those familiar with the series have come to expect.

If Hogg’s work can often be characterised by its stylistic diversity, then *The Three Perils of Man* sits squarely at the heart of his oeuvre. This ambitious three-volume novel presents a tale of medieval Borders warfare and the culture of chivalry, within which an extended, inset tangent launches into Hogg’s favoured territory of the uncanny. The initial narrative deals with the struggle between English and Scottish nobles over Roxburgh Castle, in attempts to win marriage with their respective paramours (who furnish a singularly unattractive portrayal of women). This plot is ultimately dominated, however, by a digression that follows a small band of eccentrics on a journey to Aikenwood Castle, where they are hosted by both the warlock Michael Scott, and the devil himself in person.

The editors King and Tulloch note some ‘signs that Hogg was not fully in control of the material’ in the chivalrous plot-line, though their suggestion that these sequences are designed as a conscious rebuttal to Walter Scott’s popular aggrandisement of chivalry provides a convincing context. Hogg paints a shared Anglo-Scottish culture of excess, in which not only the aristocracy but the populous at large has been infected by a chivalric ‘mania’. Most readers, however, are likely to find the inset Aikenwood narrative the most rewarding, allowing the exuberant, erratic tone of Hogg’s writing to luxuriate amongst the folk supernatural of his strongest subject material.

At the heart of this sequence is a storytelling competition around which the novel pivots. Teased and tormented by demonic powers, the detachment to Aikenwood find themselves trapped and decide on competitive storytelling to choose a victim of looming cannibalism. This provides Hogg with a means to employ his considerable powers as a writer

of short fiction, ranging between an impressive variety of registers. From the faux-biblical styling of the Friar's tale to the visceral gluttony of Tam Craik, the Chaucerian device works well as a narrative platform. When the devil makes a series of bewildering entrances, in a portrait positioned somewhere between Milton's discontent and the trickster of folk tradition, Hogg's probing at the nature and relevance of the supernatural once again takes centre-stage.

Worth a brief mention are the interesting editorial questions raised by King and Tulloch's useful introduction, in particular the perhaps controversial decision to replace the name 'Sir Walter Scott' as one of the key characters of the text, who had appeared in the original publication as 'Sir Ringan Redhough'. Intending to restore Hogg's personal intentions, this bold move certainly leaves the obvious resonances of the name to percolate through the narrative. Also included is an essay from Gillian Hughes on the newly recovered source manuscript, and extensive and well-informed notes, all indicative of a commendable desire to open the existing textual materials to a broader audience.

The second volume of Hogg's *Contributions to Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* deals with the latter end of his publishing career, reflecting the mature Hogg's on-going presence among the *Blackwood's* literati. This was a tense relationship, as James Hogg attempted to establish a literary persona in the shadow of the 'Ettrick Shepherd', as satirically projected in John Wilson's *Noctes Ambrosianae*. The difficulties of this position are neatly elucidated in Richardson's introduction to the volume, exploring the way in which Hogg's role as both clown and muse of the *Blackwood's* imagination could be simultaneously restrictive and lucrative.

The variety of the contributions provides an entertaining read, highlighting a core element of Hogg's practice, with the training imposed by writing for the periodical press reflected throughout his oeuvre. The editorial decisions taken here again reveal a desire to open up the sources, signalled by the inclusion for some pieces of both published and manuscript versions, alongside the familiar exhaustive notes. It is difficult to select one or two particular highlights from such a collection, with Hogg's versatility as a writer of both poetry and prose well represented. From discussions of pre-Darwinian evolutionary theory to playful self-mockery about balding, the limited role often assigned to him by his contemporaries at *Blackwood's* is thoroughly rubbished here.

In 'A Tale of the Martyrs', Hogg recounts a story of the violent persecution of the Covenanters in Lowland Scotland reminiscent of his excellent short novel, *The Brownie of Bodsbeck*. Exploiting the celebrated, miscellaneous form of *Blackwood's*, this flows seamlessly into a touching ballad lament. Elsewhere, readers may well find 'Strange Letter of a Lunatic' particularly striking, reflecting as it does some of the same preoccupations as Hogg's best-known work, *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*. Eerie character doubling is channelled through a discussion of schizophrenia here, nicely inflecting Hogg's penchant for unsettling psychological exploration.

The author's personal politics are also an interesting presence in the volume, with a number of pieces displaying the aggressive Tory ideology habitually propagated in the pages of *Maga*. In 'A Screech on Politics', however, a knowingly disingenuous claim to be unbiased leads into a fascinating moment of introspection. 'I'm a Tory', Hogg announces, though 'why or wherefore I should have been one is really more than I can tell you. People's principles seem to be born with them, for, God knows, I never had any interest in being a Tory'. Such moments of revelation are peppered throughout the volume, which despite its playfulness can also feel highly personal.

However, as 'The Mysterious Bride' indicates, issues of the supernatural remain the key recurring theme. Examples of sceptical dismissal sit alongside more stubborn assertions. Whether uncanny events are merely a feature of perception (phenomena of 'human nature', as the opening quote to this review allows for) or objective truths is never entirely settled. Yet

Hogg never tires of the question. This forms part of a broader conflict in both volumes, between residual cultural forms and the rapidly modernising landscape of Hogg's contemporary Scotland.

In 'Robin Roole', an intellectual discussion upon the existence of the soul leads into the potent conflict between 'improvement' and tradition in Hogg's world, with the issue characteristically explored by way of narrative anecdote. The faceoff between an improving laird and a pious, traditionally minded tenant ranges across 'every thing; religion, law, politics, agriculture, and sheep farming'. The conflict is finally brought to a head when the two men miraculously swap bodies. When the laird's 'extravagant speculations in improvement were laid aside at once', 'every virtuous person on the estate was cherished and rendered happy'. Hogg comes down on the side of tradition. Yet he does so through a trailblazing literary practice, one that has much more to say for Romanticism both in Scotland and further afield.

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