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David Groves

Four Unrecorded Book Reviews
by the Ettrick Shepherd, 1811-1812



In his autobiography of 1821, James Hogg recalls being "greatly taken" with John Wilson's book *The Isle of Palms*, when it was published in 1812. "I reviewed this poem," Hogg declares, "as well as many others, in a Scottish Review then going on in Edinburgh."¹ The present essay is an attempt to identify Hogg's review of Wilson, and to identify three other book reviews written by Hogg for the same periodical. I have also tried to use the four reviews—of John Wilson, Walter Scott, Anne Grant, and Mary Mitford—to shed light on Hogg's own writing during his early years.

The possibilities for this "Scottish Review" in 1812 are the "Scottish Review" section in the back pages of *The Scots Magazine*, and a little-known periodical called simply *Scottish Review*, which began in late 1812. Yet neither of these works carried any article on Wilson's *Isle of Palms*. However, the *Scottish Review* arose out of a previous journal called *The Edinburgh Quarterly Review*, which *had* carried a lengthy piece on Wilson's poem, in the issue immediately before it changed its title to the *Scottish Review*. Of all the other magazines in the Scottish capital, only *The Edinburgh Review* and *Edinburgh Christian Instructor* printed reviews of *The Isle*

¹Hogg, "Memoir of the Author's life," in *James Hogg: "Memoir of the Author's Life" and "Familiar Anecdotes of Sir Walter Scott"*, ed. Douglas S. Mack (Edinburgh and London, 1972), p. 29.

of *Palms*; these two other critiques, however, are either too Whiggish or too pious to have come from James Hogg, and they appeared in journals with which Hogg had no known connection. Considerable internal and external evidence can be brought to show that the article on Wilson in *The Edinburgh Quarterly* is almost certainly the one that Hogg wrote.

The periodical in question was published by the bookseller Peter Hill, and printed by D. Schaw and Son, Lawnmarket. It began its precarious life in March 1811 as *The Edinburgh Quarterly Magazine and Review*. In the subsequent issues of June, September, and December, the title was reversed to read *The Edinburgh Quarterly Review and Magazine*. The long number for March 1812 is entitled *The Edinburgh Quarterly Review*, and has "vol. II" on the title page. Evidently the next number appeared in September 1812, under the new banner of *Scotish Review*, and with "vol. II" on the title page.² The journal was never popular, and only one set is now known to exist, bound in two volumes at the National Library of Scotland. Unluckily, this set ends with the first issue of *Scotish Review*, and it seems that later copies of the magazine (which became *The Scottish Review* in 1814), have completely disappeared. The only evidence for its continued existence comes from the *Analectic Magazine* of Philadelphia, which regularly reprinted articles from the *Scotish Review* and then *The Scottish Review* until 1815.

James Hogg was probably a close friend of the anonymous editor of this chameleon journal; it is even possible that he was himself the editor. As early as March 1812, its readers were informed that "Mr. Hogg the 'Etterick Shepherd,' is preparing for publication a Legendary Tale called the 'Queen's Wake,' in ten cantos."³ By September the *Scotish Review* was telling its readers that "Mr. Hogg the Etterick Shepherd, has made considerable progress with his Queen's Wake, in ten cantos;—it will be published in the spring."⁴ No other author received such favored treatment in this periodical, nor did any other editor provide advance notices for Hogg's poem *The Queen's Wake* a full year before its publication in 1813. The editor's interest in the Ettrick Shepherd is especially unusual in view of the

²Despite these changes of title, the magazine retained the same publisher and printer. Other details such as layout, typeface, and size and quality of paper, also remained constant from March 1811 to September 1812.

³Anon., "Literary and Scientific Intelligence," *Edinburgh Quarterly Review*, March 1812, p. 279.

⁴Anon., "Literary Intelligence," *Scotish Review*, Sept. 1812, p. 278.

fact that, prior to 1813, Hogg had not enjoyed any major public success with his poetry or other writings.

I can find no mention of the magazine in question, in any of the books, diaries, or correspondence of other Scottish writers of the time. Both the editor and his contributors carefully guarded their anonymity. Perhaps their motives for secrecy were connected with James Hogg's dispiriting experience as the editor of his own journal *The Spy* in 1810-11. At the end of that earlier venture, Hogg felt that the Edinburgh reading public was dominated by snobbish prejudices, and that it was unlikely to countenance the literary ambitions of an unschooled shepherd like himself. The encouragement he received during his *Spy* days, Hogg complained, "has not been much to boast of: as his name became known the number of his subscribers diminished."⁵

Several passages in the review of Wilson's *Isle of Palms* are strongly reminiscent of the style and critical approach which the Shepherd had developed in his *Spy*. For example, the reviewer commends John Wilson for producing a poem without footnotes or prose commentary,

without either apology, preface, or commentary—without even a single note, however fashionable that unnatural hoop has become; unlike the rest of our modern bards, who, in order to make a book of sufficient size to entitle them to a good price, load the few pages of poetry . . . with innumerable legends, extracts, and all the lumber of a thousand volumes.⁶

This repeats, although in a more respectable tone, a joke which Hogg had first developed in *The Spy* about eighteen months earlier, when his fictional critic "Mr Shuffleton" passes judgment on the mistresses (the muses), of contemporary Scottish poets. On being asked to explain "the huge bunches of trumpery which these ladies wear upon their rumps," Mr Shuffleton replies that they "are worn merely for the sake of adding to their bulk";

Without these, Sir, they could never be put to bed, for they would not fill *one pair of sheets*; nor if put to bed could they ever rise again, as it would be a shame to appear without *stays* in public, and their slender bodies would be quite lost in

⁵The *Spy*'s Farewell to his Readers," in *The Spy: a Periodical Paper, of Literary Amusement and Instruction*, 17 Sept. 1811. The pagination of *The Spy* is irregular. In this excerpt, Hogg is writing of himself in the third person.

⁶Anon. rev., "Art. XI.—*The Isle of Palms, and other Poems*," *Edinburgh Quarterly Review*, March 1812, pp. 165-87 (187). Subsequent page references are included parenthetically in the text.

them. These things, Sir, the ladies call *notes*, and they are the very tip-top of the fashion.⁷

The *stays* of the 1810 *Spy* have become *hoops* in the 1812 *Edinburgh Quarterly*.

In his Mr Shuffleton series in *The Spy*, the Ettrick Shepherd had worked out a unique style of literary criticism that was lively, opinionated, and above all metaphorical. Shuffleton evaluates the various modern poets by watching their muses as they dance in his "magic mirror." The muse of Walter Scott dances to a "wild irregular measure," in "such a hop-step-and-jump pace," that, according to Shuffleton's friend Mr Spy, "I could hardly believe the lady to be in her right senses." Shuffleton then stresses the wildness of Scott's poetry by contrasting Scott's muse with that of Thomas Campbell, a "noble and graceful" woman who, on closer inspection, "began to look paler, and somewhat enfeebled."⁸ Similarly, the review of Wilson's *Isle of Palms* in 1812 tries to uphold an ideal middle way between poetry that is too unrestrained and poetry that is too tame or dull; he maintains that Wilson's poem succeeds in "striking out . . . a new path between the extravagant ravings of Southey and the easy rapid simplicity of Scott" (p. 186). An analogous use of an extended illustration to defend a middle way in poetry, according to which the imagination should be strong but not extravagant, is found in the 1812 critic's claim that the best poetry is like the best whisky:

For the sake of illustration . . . we shall suppose that there is a certain standard in poetry, similar to that of hydrometer proof in spirits. We shall further suppose a poem whose medium quality is ten per cent. below this proof, and whose most brilliant expression and ideas never rise above it. We shall suppose another whose medium quality is ten per cent. above this proof, and which rises and sinks in proportion to the other; yet if the incidents and the associations of the former are managed by a skilful hand, and its brilliancies introduced at proper intervals, they will appear to equal advantage with those of the latter, though reaching no higher than its lowest parts. . . . This shows plainly how much is dependant upon judgment in the composition of poetry;—that it is not the number of grand allusions or splendid images which constitutes the intrinsic merits of a poem;—but the arrangement, and the suitability of each of these images to the incidents they illustrate. (pp. 167-8)

Like Hogg's earlier comparison of poetry to dancing, this passage implies that a poem should be imaginative, yet at the same time

⁷"Mr Shuffleton's Scottish Muses, continued," *The Spy*, 29 Sept. 1810.

⁸*Ibid.*, *Spy*, 8 Sept. 1810.

commonsensical, proportioned, and with some degree of restraint. The two extended comparisons, based on dancing and whisky, are distinctly unpretentious and un-literary. In tone and subject matter, they recall those other metaphorical arguments (one in *The Spy* and the other in the review of *Isle of Palms*), where footnotes to poetry are compared to women's underwear.

Horace was one of the strongest influences on James Hogg's early writing. Of the fifty-two issues of his *Spy*, thirteen begin with a quotation from the *Ars Poetica* or some other work by Horace. The Ettrick Shepherd was so famous for his veneration of Horace that one contemporary critic wondered why, in his tales, "he invariably breaks the commandment of 'his friend Horace,' and calls in the . . . supernatural."⁹ Indeed, as that comment suggests, Hogg's attitude towards Horace must have been quite ambivalent, since the Latin poet's restraint and sophistication would seem on the surface to be very unlike Hogg's own more emotional temperament. This unusual combination of respect for Horace with an underlying desire for "lively fancy," is exactly the note that is struck by the 1812 reviewer at the start of his second paragraph:

Horace says, 'Scribendi recte sapere est principium et fons.' Though this sentiment may seem to contradict one of our own, that a lively fancy is the germ from which the blossoms of poetry must spring, yet we at any rate approve of the old poet's maxim as *expedient*; because, without wisdom, or judgment rather, imagination only runs to waste. Her luxuriant blossoms may at first sight astonish the beholder, and, if at a distance, may delight his senses with a transient perfume; but, on approaching nearer, his senses are cloyed and disgusted by the fulsome exuberance. If wisdom direct not the pruning-knife, these blossoms must wither and fall in the dust, and the fruit that should succeed them will be searched for in vain. (p. 165)

The attitude expressed here is quite different from the still-prevalent image of James Hogg as a headstrong, uncritical composer of verse. It is certainly not incompatible with the real James Hogg, however; "there are many excrescences in a vivid imagination," he later wrote, "which the cold hand of criticism may help to rub away."¹⁰ The Ettrick Shepherd was fond of introducing Horace's injunctions in a fairly abrupt way near the begin-

⁹Anon., "Scotch Novels of the Second Class, No. II," *Scots Magazine*, N.S., XIII (Oct. 1823), 485.

¹⁰*A Series of Lay Sermons on Good Principles and Good Breeding, by the Ettrick Shepherd* (London, 1834), p. 275.

ning of his essays and stories; the second paragraph in one of his *Spy* articles contains the sudden interjection, "yes, as Horace says, '*Mutato nomine de te fabula narratur.*'"¹¹

The brief comment on *The Isle of Palms* in Hogg's autobiography is much less favorable than it may first seem. "I was so greatly taken with many of [Wilson's] fanciful and visionary scenes," Hogg continues, "that it had a tendency to divest me of all worldly feelings." Hogg's image as being unsophisticated may have helped him to get away with backhanded compliments like that one; the sentence gives a vague impression that Hogg liked Wilson's poem, but actually on closer inspection it shows him carefully avoiding any opinion about its value. Since Wilson had become a very influential critic by 1821,¹² it is not surprising that Hogg tried to avoid offending him in his autobiography of that year. Yet the acerbic and anonymous satires of John Wilson which the Shepherd wrote around 1815 for his *Poetic Mirror* show clearly that he held Wilson's poetry in much lower esteem than has often been supposed. In his parody "The Morning Star, or the Steam-Boat of Alloa," Hogg turns the graceful sailing-ship of Wilson's *Isle of Palms* into a dingy barge carrying coal across the Firth of Forth to Edinburgh. Wilson's original ship had seemed to be powered by divine agency, as it skimmed effortlessly across three oceans—

As if the beauteous ship enjoyed
The beauty of the sea,
She lifteth up her stately head,
And saileth joyfully;¹³

—whereas in Hogg's parody the ship is pointedly transformed into a slow, heavy barge powered by coal and by the labor of coal miners, those unfortunate "human things" who must

Toil in the central deep, intent,
To supply one sacred element,

¹¹[Hogg], "Misery of an Old Batchelor," *Spy*, 15 Dec. 1810. I have discussed Hogg's frequent use of Latin quotations from Horace and other Classical writers in "The Concept of Genre in James Hogg's *Scottish Pastorals*, *Basil Lee*, *Three Perils of Woman*, and the *Confessions*," in *Papers Delivered at the 1983 James Hogg Conference*, ed. G. H. Hughes (Stirling, 1984), pp. 6-14.

¹²Wilson became editor of *Blackwood's Magazine* in 1817.

¹³Wilson, *The Isle of Palms, and other Poems* (Edinburgh, 1812), p. 8.

Who in their hush'd and dim abode
For ever dwell upon their God!¹⁴

Far from delighting in Wilson's "visionary scenes," Hogg is using obvious sarcasm in this parody to imply that Wilson has overlooked the harsh realities of life. The satirist pretends to share his victim's comfortable, genteel illusions, but he shatters those illusions by applying them to an aspect of human life for which they are plainly inappropriate. In changing the stately sailing-ship into an industrial steam-boat, Hogg is also exposing Wilson's tendency to ignore working-class people and common, everyday reality.

These are essentially the complaints raised by *The Edinburgh Quarterly Review* in 1812. Wilson's "imagination not only takes the lead of his judgment," the critic declares, "but frequently escapes from that rightful sovereign altogether." Apparently *The Isle of Palms*

possesses great delicacy of sentiment, splendour of wild imagery, harmony, and pathos; but the language is often mellow to loathing—the allusions far-fetched, and sometimes ridiculous, and the narrative so involved in obscurity, and destitute of probability, that it bears a striking resemblance to a confused fairy dream in the slumbers of midnight. (p. 169)

Wilson's poem is "extremely wild and beautiful," says the reviewer, "but we have a good deal too much about the *moon and loveliness* in it" (p. 170). This statement recalls another of Hogg's parodies of Wilson, in which Wilson is lampooned as a moonstruck pedant talking to his "soft-brow'd sovereign of the sea and sky."¹⁵ Although a few later critics would sometimes accuse the Ettrick Shepherd himself of writing implausible poems and novels, he nonetheless maintained as early as 1805 that "whenever your author loses sight of probability, his subject loses a share of your interest."¹⁶

¹⁴"The Morning Star," in his *Poetic Mirror: or The Living Bards of Britain* (Edinburgh and London, 1816), p. 259.

¹⁵"Hymn to the Moon," in his *Poetic Mirror*, p. 267. In a novel of 1823, Hogg again used the central symbol of the moon to satirize the ethereal qualities of Wilson's writing, as has been shown by Douglas S. Mack, "Lights and Shadows of Scottish Life: James Hogg's *The Three Perils of Woman*," in *Studies in Scottish Fiction: Nineteenth Century*, ed. Horst W. Drescher and Joachim Schwend (Frankfort, 1985), pp. 15-27.

¹⁶"Letters on Poetry, by the Ettrick Shepherd," I, *Scots Magazine*, LXVII (May 1805), 354. I have corrected an obvious printer's error by changing "subjects" to "subject."

Its imagery gives further evidence that the 1812 critique was written by James Hogg. The critic compares highly-charged poetry to "A bolt of heaven blazing along the firmament in the midst of darkness" (p. 169); a similar expression occurs in Hogg's novella, *Love Adventures of Mr George Cochrane*, in which the hero looks back on his youthful love affairs as "meteors . . . gilding the prospects of youth . . . with rays of the warmest and most brilliant hues; but . . . l[eaving] the headlong follower . . . to pursue his devious course in darkness."¹⁷ Three of Hogg's favorite symbols were the flower, the path, and the comet, all of which can be found in the excerpts which have already been given in this essay from the review in question. In his *Pilgrims of the Sun*, written in 1814, the Ettrick Shepherd uses the central controlling metaphor of a journey towards the sun, so that his heroine, and in fact all of the human race, is constantly travelling "thro' regions of delight," "Along, along, thro' mind's unwearied range," towards the ultimate fountain of light and truth;¹⁸ a very similar image is strongly expressed by the 1812 reviewer, who tell us that

The bias of the human mind turns naturally into that path which appears to lead to truth, grasps at the smallest thread which directs to that delightful goal, and rejoices in the smallest ray which issues from the fountain of light and life to the moral world. (p. 176)

The article on Wilson's poem is written in the more reserved style which Hogg cultivated in his critical writings, from the early "Letters on Poetry" to his later *Series of Lay Sermons*. Another quality which suggests Hogg's influence in the essay on Wilson is the combination of newer, more "Romantic" images and ideas, with older, more "eighteenth-century" ones. On the more Romantic side, he applauds Wilson for his "masterly and pathetic manner" (p. 171), his "overflowings of a warm and benevolent heart" (p. 186), and his attempts to "delight every reader of sensibility" (p. 198). But on the more Augustan and more rationalistic side, the reviewer finds fault with modern poets for "overstepping the bounds which reason has marked out," and is "forced to regret" that Wilson so often "give[s] the reins to enthusiasm" (p. 171). Throughout his life as a poet and a critic, the Ettrick Shepherd tried to learn from both the Romantics and the Augustans. He was quite capable of declaring that he "admired many of

¹⁷Hogg, "Love Adventures of Mr. George Cochrane" (1820; rpt. in *James Hogg: Tales of Love and Mystery*, ed. D. Groves (Edinburgh, 1985)), pp. 137-38.

¹⁸Hogg, *Pilgrims of the Sun* (1815; rpt. in *James Hogg: Selected Poems and Songs*, ed. D. Groves (Edinburgh, 1986)), pp. 44, 67.

[Wordsworth's] pieces exceedingly,"¹⁹ or, in a very different vein, that he "cannot now think of a better rule . . . than that line of Mr Pope's, in which he describes true wit."²⁰

At the heart of the commentary on Wilson is the critic's conviction of the need for common sense, simplicity, and nature, in the style and subject matter of poetry. "Many a genius has been blasted in the bud," he warns, "by venturing to intrude, with too much precipitance, upon the public." Rather than giving way to "impatience, and that false idea that nature is capable of doing every thing," a poet's mind should be "matured by study, and mellowed by practice." "[T]he cultivation of judgment," he concludes, "is the first duty incumbent on every writer":

Nature, indeed, must supply the foundation, and she must likewise furnish the quarry out of which the materials for building may be hewn; but the hand of the skilful workman is necessary to raise the structure, as well as to adorn it. Impatience is the rock on which genius is in greatest danger of splitting its slender bark; judgment only can avert that danger, by lying still in the haven till certain of being visited by the gales of public approbation, and by keeping a watchful eye, during her course, that in no one instance her vessel carry more sail than ballast.²¹

The best parts of *The Isle of Palms*, then, are those in which "the author adorns nature in sublimity, and pathos in simplicity" (p. 180). If a writer is confident that he possesses the quality of genius, then apparently he should give most of his attention to lesser qualities such as judgment, arrangement, and naturalness:

every poet ought to be more careful and studious in *arranging* his ideas, than in either searching for or ornamenting them; ought rather to study nature, ease, and perspicuity, than the mere blandishments of sound, or the extravagant ravings of an enthusiastic fancy. In a word, let imagination be always kept so completely under the control of judgment as never once to be *distinctly* seen; her beauties, if laid open to every eye, will only astonish at first, and disgust for ever. (p. 167)

The review of Wilson in *The Edinburgh Quarterly* has enough affinities with Hogg's known works, that, especially in view of the evidence that

¹⁹Hogg, "Memoir of the Author's Life," p. 69.

²⁰"Letters on Poetry," p. 353.

²¹Page 166. The extended metaphor of the sailing ship in the second sentence of this quotation is typical of Hogg.

Hogg had *some* kind of connection with that journal, and his clear statement that he did indeed review Wilson's poem, it may reasonably be attributed to him. No other name has been proposed for the authorship of that review, nor is there another such article which might plausibly stand as the one that Hogg says he wrote around 1812.

In his first paragraph, the reviewer of Wilson's *Isle* implies that he had written at least two previous articles for the same journal:

There are a few maxims which we originally adopted, and by which, however we may err in judgment, we pledge ourselves ever to abide. We shall never applaud a vapid author, because his titles are high and his wine good, nor a vague authoress, because her tea-parties are frequent and agreeable. (p. 165)

That statement corresponds to the claim in Hogg's autobiography that he published "many" reviews in a single periodical around 1812. The mention of a "vapid author" whose "titles are high and his wine good," and a "vague authoress" whose "tea-parties are frequent and agreeable," is perhaps meant to be understood as an allusion to Walter Scott and Mrs Anne Grant,²² two fashionable writers whose works had come under fire, apparently by the same critic, in the September and December 1811 issues of *The Edinburgh Quarterly*. Of the previous reviews in this journal, the two on Scott's *Vision of Don Roderick* and Anne Grant's *Essays* are the first to show strong signs of Hogg's authorship.

In his assessment of *The Vision of Don Roderick*, the critic stresses Walter Scott's departures from common sense, nature, and simplicity. He declares that the poet has "swerved from the path of simplicity"²³ to produce a work that "is greatly laboured. We see too much art, and little of nature" (p. 416). "It is the visible prominence of art in both its versification and ideas," he announces, "that strikes the reader as the capital defect through the whole poem" (p. 421). Common sense "has been set aside" (p.

²²According to Robert Gillies, Hogg sometimes attended dinner parties at the home of Anne Grant in Edinburgh, during his years of residence in that city, from 1810 to 1815. Gillies describes one such party, at which another guest

must needs introduce, *en passant*, some sneers against religion, thereby exciting instantaneous wrath on the part of good old Mrs Grant, of Laggan, who gave battle immediately. . . . Evidently, the Shepherd was amazed and vexed at this. It argued a want of tact on both sides, not reconcilable to *his* notions of good breeding. (*Memoirs of a Literary veteran*, 3 vols. (London, 1851), II, 132)

²³Anon. rev., *Edinburgh Quarterly Review and Magazine* (Sept. 1811), p. 415.

419), and as a result "the facts are lost sight of, or are perverted amidst the flights of imagination" (p. 423).

A few of the statements in this review contradict oversimplified impressions of James Hogg which have unfortunately been common in the century and a half since his death. To some modern readers, it may seem that the following disparagement of "imaginary beings" could not possibly have come from the author of "Kilmeny" and the *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*:

We are not disposed to cramp the efforts of genius, or take away poetic licence. We would give free range to thought and fancy; but these may have full scope without the intervention of a host of imaginary beings, whose forms startle, whose voices grate our ear—puppet appearances, fitted only to be laughed at, and so to divert the free and unbiassed exercise of judgment and imagination. The pure sources of pleasure are thus polluted, and we become refined barbarians. No such subjects, no such models of poetry, are to be found among the ancients. This degeneracy of taste was reserved for modern times—yet it is but the rage of a day, and will probably vanish with the person or individuals who gave rise to it.²⁴

Yet a closer look at this passage will show that it is entirely compatible with the ideas and practice of James Hogg. The objection is not to supernatural beings in themselves, but only to the contrived, far-fetched, and unconvincing "puppet appearances" which the critic has noticed in *Don Roderick*, and in some other contemporary works. He goes on to contend that "local knowledge and popular superstitions" might have been used in Scott's poem "with a fine effect":

The language and objects of the vision would thus have been identified with the fancies of the age [in which the poem is set] and the effusions of the poet would have appeared with something of nature and simplicity. (p. 421)

Here the crucial distinction is between phoney supernaturalism or mere "visionary machinery" (p. 426), and the truer supernaturalism which is grounded in local traditions and beliefs. The reviewer stoutly maintains that only this latter kind can be reconciled with "nature and simplicity,"

²⁴Page 414. The mention of "The pure sources of pleasure" anticipates a passage in the *Lay Sermons* where Hogg counsels readers to "cultivate that philosophy of the mind which investigates the hidden springs and sources of pleasure in reading; there you will find from the productions of genius pleasures of a purer kind, . . . than by skimming over the lucubrations . . . of reviewers" (p. 285).

and he therefore advises Scott to return in his future poems to Scottish traditions and

to the home of his youth, the wilds of Yarrow and Etterick, or the soft and varied scenes on the banks of the Tweed. Thus only will the vigour of his genius be restored. . . . (p. 416)

All of the Ettrick Shepherd's supernatural tales, including "The Witch of Fife," "Kilmeny," *Pilgrims of the Sun*, and the *Confessions*, have their origin in folk traditions or local legends of brownies, ghosts, witches, bogles, and devils. As Douglas Gifford has pointed out, readers of Hogg should recognize the vast "difference between the traditional and folk treatment of things supernatural," as practiced by Hogg himself, and the artificial "neo-gothic treatment"²⁵ of similar themes by writers like "Monk" Lewis or Walter Scott. Although Hogg sometimes cultivated the image of himself as a naive believer in all kinds of mysterious beings, it is important to note that in his *critical* writings he is considerably less credulous: the following passage, written by Hogg in 1805, clearly expresses both his scepticism and his conception of the distinction between supernatural writing that is plausible and that which is implausible:

it is possible for an author to describe actions, manners, and scenery, infinitely above, and as far below, what was generally ever thought, acted, or seen before; and still never lose sight of Nature. Shakespeare . . . presented us with many characters and scenes that no fancy but Shakespeare's could ever have given birth to Yet to say that these flights are unnatural, would be the most palpable impropriety; for in fact they are the most natural of his works I shall only trouble you to read the *Midsummer night's Dream*, where you find a number of the most wild and extravagant ideas imaginable, delivered in a manner the most elegant, and withal so very natural. . . . I conclude then, that though [Shakespeare's] thoughts were not as our thoughts, still he must be ranked with the first of natural writers.²⁶

This statement by Hogg, like the 1811 reviewer's complaint against "puppet appearances" in Scott's poem, proceeds from a conviction that the supernatural can be invoked without "los[ing] sight of Nature."

One of the trumped-up supernatural beings to which the 1811 critic objects is the "voice of genius" which, according to the narrator of *The Vi-*

²⁵Gifford, Introduction to his edition of Hogg's *Three Perils of Man: War, Women, and Witchcraft* (Edinburgh and London, 1972), p. xvii.

²⁶Hogg, "Letters on Poetry," II, *Scots Magazine*, LXVIII (Jan. 1806), 17-18.

sion of *Don Roderick*, had appeared to him as he began to write his verses. The critic suggests that this was no proper spirit but rather

a lady called Vanity, a favourite deluding companion of some modern poets, who know nothing of necessity being the mother of invention, or that nature in all her varieties is an ample enough field for the exercise of imagination. We wonder if simplicity of narration will never be preferred to absurd unreasonable fancies; or if the minds of the rising generation will always be allowed to be contaminated with conceits and stories as disgusting and ridiculous as those to be found in *Mother Bunch*, or *Jack the Giant Killer*. Is it for such idle purposes that talents are to be prostituted, and even the records of antiquity, already too obscure, to be involved in the deeper mystery of modern romance? (pp. 413-4)

The continued emphasis on nature, the humorous personification of the "lady called Vanity," and the suspicion that egotism or vanity lie behind much poetry, are all highly reminiscent of James Hogg; we should recall his motto "*Naturae Donum*,"²⁷ his personifications in the Mr Shuffleton series, and his belief that "Vanity [is] the real stimulus to great exertion."²⁸ By turning away from nature and simplicity, it seems that Walter Scott has developed "some aperture in his upper story" (p. 413) through which vanity has gained a complete domination, at least for the duration of writing *The Vision of Don Roderick*: "we are afraid he has been spoiled by the flattery of his friends and the public, and that . . . he has overrated both his motives and his powers" (p. 412). Poets apparently have a choice then, between either adhering to nature (even when they write of supernatural events), or naively indulging in extravagant phantasies which ultimately reveal little more than their own vanity.

At the end of his review, the critic charitably expresses his hope that the poet's friends "will wean Mr Scott from an inordinate love of money and fame, and induce him to build his hopes of immortality upon more durable materials." He adds, "We wish Mr Scott would . . . leave something durable and useful to mankind—something that will render respectable his years of manhood" (p. 427). The implications of this sarcastic statement are quite unsettling, and few critics in 1811 would have been so bold in expressing their disagreement with prevailing literary fashion. But the Et-trick Shepherd had expressed exactly the same opinion regarding Scott's

²⁷*The Queen's Wake: A Legendary Poem* (Edinburgh and London, 1813), p. 108. The same motto appears on the title page of Hogg's *Border Garland* (Edinburgh, [c. 1819]).

²⁸Hogg, in conversation with Robert Southey, cited by Washington Irving, diary entry for 23 Oct. 1824, printed in Irving's *Journals and Notebooks*, ed. Walter A. Reichart (Madison, 1970), III, 414.

poetry in his article "Walter Scott Tried Before the Bar of Posterity," only ten months earlier. In that essay, Hogg condemned Scott for his "low and flagging lines," his "absurdity" and "mighty parade," and his indebtedness to "your friend False-taste there, who has taken so decided a part in your favour."²⁹ That earlier article pictured Walter Scott being carried in triumph through the streets of Edinburgh on the shoulders of his jubilant admirers, until a sage judge interrupts the parade with the announcement that Scott's verse would cease to be read after two generations.

James Hogg was greatly piqued at Walter Scott in September 1811, as the last issue of *The Spy* amply demonstrates. One of the causes of his anger had been an anonymous article in the prestigious *Edinburgh Annual Register*, which Hogg was informed had been written by Scott, and which placed Scott himself among the highest, and the Shepherd among the lowest, of contemporary British poets.³⁰ Perhaps this explains why, in the critique of *Don Roderick*, the reviewer goes far out of his way to attack the *Annual Register* by casting doubt on Walter Scott's "benevolent design to appropriate the fruits of his labour 'for the relief of the Portugueze sufferers'";

Adhering to a rule general among mankind, we always suspect the motives of that charity of which we hear much, or which is trumpeted in the prints of the day—especially where the action ascribed to the individual is at variance with his general conduct. Not that we blame Mr Scott for want of benevolence, or for a wish to profit by his literary labours. But we do say, that the public have some apparent cause to complain that a splendid donation, for which they pay a most extravagant price, is exclusively in the hands of the proprietors of the *Edinburgh Annual Register*, and is actually intended to enhance the sale and profits of that work. Mr Scott, they will say, may in this or some other way come in for a share of the profits of a company concern, of which he is a reputed partner. . . . They will much suspect that, when the hot-press paper, printing, &c. are paid, little will remain for the poor Portugueze. (p. 411)

The only pretext for mentioning the *Annual Register* in this paragraph is the fact that both the *Register* and Scott's *Vision of Don Roderick* were published by the firm of James Ballantyne. Both the gratuitous attack on *The Edinburgh Annual Register*, and the imputation of self-interest to Walter Scott, are probably symptoms of the Etrick Shepherd's bitterness towards Scott in late 1811.

²⁹Hogg, "Mr Shuffleton's Scottish Muses, continued . . .—Mr Walter Scott tried at the Bar of Posterity," *Spy*, 3 Nov. 1810.

³⁰Hogg discusses his resentment over the *Annual Register* in his "Familiar Anecdotes of Sir Walter Scott," pp. 103-05.

The review of Scott's *Don Roderick* in *The Edinburgh Quarterly* can confidently be attributed to James Hogg. Near the end of the article, he apologizes for the harshness of his judgment with the following words:

Most gladly would we have been saved the painful task of finding fault, anxious as we are that the wild-flowers of our country should bud and blossom, rather than give place to the useless or noxious weeds of a far foreign land. (p. 425)

This sentence is so similar to something Hogg had published one year before that it quite possibly may have been deliberately inserted by him as a kind of hidden signature. The earlier passage appeared in his collection *The Forest Minstrel* of 1810; it had expressed the same sentiment about "the wild-flowers of our country," and contained a number of very similar images:

Far dearer to me is the humble ewe-gowan,
The sweet native violet, or bud of the broom,
Than fine foster'd flowers in the garden a-growing,
Though sweet be their savour and bonny their bloom.
Far dearer to me is the thrush or the linnet,
Than any fine bird from a far foreign tree³¹

It is also likely that the two reviews of Wilson and Scott were written by the same critic. They contain similar images, a similar attack on extravagant or improbable phantasies, and the same persistent stress on simplicity, common sense, and nature. The critic who declares that Walter Scott's phrases "are often pretty" "when taken by themselves," but when combined "are mere pompous, unmeaning description" (p. 414), is probably the same person who could say of Wilson's *Isle of Palms* that

When any single sentence is taken by itself, the description is florid and pleasing, but, by such an overflow of the soft and beautiful as we have here all at once, the mind is quite satiated. (p. 414)

Only a minority of the reviews in *The Edinburgh Quarterly* can be attributed to Hogg. Immediately after the article on Scott's *Don Roderick* comes an essay on R. H. Cromek's *Remains of Nithsdale and Galloway Song*. The author of this critique announces disdainfully that "upon the whole, to collect old *Scottish ballads* is but an idle task."³² "If Mr Cromek

³¹"How Foolish are Mankind," *Selected Poems and Songs*, p. 6.

³²Anon. rev., *Edinburgh Quarterly Review and Magazine*, Sept. 1811, p. 448. Subsequent page reference is in parenthesis.

duly appreciated the blessings of a Protestant succession," he declares, "he would not be such an enthusiast for these [Jacobite] productions" (p. 439). Hogg *did* write a review of Cromek's book, but it seems he was unable to find a publisher for it.³³

Mrs. Grant's *Essays on the Superstitions of the Highlanders of Scotland* came up for discussion in *The Edinburgh Quarterly* of December 1811. This review would have been an ideal topic for James Hogg, whose accounts of his own trips to the Highlands appeared in the *Scots Magazine* from 1802 to 1810. With their metaphorical tone, and their mention of "the walks of literature," the opening lines of this article are very characteristic of Hogg:

The fair author of these volumes is no stranger in the walks of literature. We have met her pretty often in our rambles, and recollect her well for a certain garish eccentricity of manner. Ever restless and flighty—breaking over all those fences and boundaries by which ordinary mortals are contented to be restrained—now bounding most nimbly, then fast belayed in mud—she seemed to our eyes a colt that had never know the curb, or felt the beneficial influence of training.³⁴

The basic outlook and argument of this critique are suggestive of the Ettrick Shepherd. There is, for example, the fascination with the question of an author's vanity:

The transition from having strong feelings, especially when they are seasoned with a little vanity, to the expression of them in writing, . . . is always rapid. (p. 571)

[Mrs Grant's] faults are the worse from being mixed up with more than a due portion of egotism and conceit. She is always a good deal more taken up with herself than her subject. She scarcely ventures upon any opinion, though after all, it may happen to be a very common one, without expressing infinite wonder at what the world will think and say of it. (p. 590)

³³Hogg recalls writing this article, and trying unsuccessfully to find a publisher for it, in his "Memoir of the Author's Life," pp. 73-4.

³⁴Anon. rev., *Edinburgh Quarterly Review and Magazine*, Dec. 1811, pp. 570-90 (570). Subsequent page references are included parenthetically in the text. Similar expressions occur in Hogg's "Memoir of the Author's Life." The image of a writer as "a colt" or some similar animal is one of Hogg's favorite metaphors. Throughout this review of Anne Grant, the critic disagrees with her work in ways that would be compatible with Hogg's attitude toward Mrs Grant, as recorded in note 22 above.

Unlike the reviewer of Cromeek's *Remains*, this critic declares his support for "the splendid superstitions of the north" (p. 574), and for Jacobitical "national feelings—we would not call them prejudices" (p. 572). A spirited defence of historical ballads reminds us of the Shepherd's belief that poets should "step back to an early age" in order that they may "borrow the fire and vigour of an early period of society, when a nation is verging from barbarism into civilisation."³⁵ Primitive societies are essentially poetic, claims the critic in 1811:

A passion for treasuring up the deeds of their forefathers was singularly favoured by that poetical taste common to all nations in an infant state, but possessed by none in a greater degree than by the Highlanders. When invested with that sublime imagery which a wild and romantic country engendered, with that brilliancy of expression which irradiates from vigorous fancy and enthusiastic feeling, the records of past glory had a charm to the soul of the mountaineer which made them cling to his remembrance through every vicissitude of condition. On all occasions, they formed his favourite subjects of recitation—they so-laced him in his solitary pursuits—they cheered his domestic circle when the hills were shrouded with storms. (p. 580)

The last dozen words of the above quotation might be set beside many excerpts from Hogg's poem *The Queen's Wake*, which he was composing in 1811, and whose three main symbols are the storm, shroud, and circle:

Well knows he then the gathering cloud
Shall all his noontide glories shroud;

The storm had ceased to shroud the hill;
The morning's breath was pure and chill.³⁶

As in the reviews of Wilson and Scott, the critic emphasizes the importance of coherence and appropriateness, between the different aspects of a work of literature. Mrs. Grant, he says, "begins in absurdity, proceeds in disorder, and ends in railing" (p. 583):

the materials are extremely loose and indigested; so much so, that excepting the pages taken up in the narration of stories, there are scarcely two which hang together with any tolerable consistency. The author shifts about from one subject to another with a facility which some may consider (and, if wishing merely to compliment her, we would call) *lively*; but which, we seriously think, throws a

³⁵Hogg, *Lay Sermons*, pp. 281, 282.

³⁶Hogg, *Queen's Wake*, pp. 145, 195.

high degree of ridicule over a work that affects an air of system and philosophy. (p. 575)

In his later years James Hogg echoed these comments about aesthetic unity when he discussed the style of Allan Cunningham:

He is now uniformly lively, serious, descriptive, or pathetic, as he changes his subject; but formerly he jumbled all these together, as in a boiling cauldron.³⁷

The reviewer tries to find a middle way between Romantic and eighteenth-century attitudes, and applies to Mrs. Grant the same values of simplicity, common sense, and naturalness, which we have already noticed in the articles on Scott and Wilson. On the more Augustan side of things, he declares that Anne Grant "betrays rather more feeling than judgment," writes in a style too "airy, bold, and excursive" (p. 581), and "is rather an energetic than a correct writer—more gawdy than solid—too much given to figures, and too little to simplicity" (p. 590). On the more Romantic side he applauds her "glowing fancy" (p. 571), and states that poetry requires to be "kindled" from "fervour and elevation of feeling" (p. 583). The opposing aesthetics of "imagination" and "judgment" can be seen together quite clearly in the critic's closing remarks:

If we were to point out Mrs Grant's chief recommendations, we would select her fertility of imagination—felicity of description—and enthusiasm in the cause of virtue; but we would say, that these qualities lose impression from the absence of those requisites so essential to sound and valuable writing—strength of judgment, and discipline of thought. (p. 590)

The reviewer comes extremely close to the thesis of Hogg's poem "Superstition" (written in 1814), when he argues for a continuity between Christian and pre-Christian religious beliefs in the Highlands. Strongly disagreeing with Anne Grant's more orthodox interpretation, he maintains that the early Celts had been distinguished "above all" by the "mildness of their superstitions" (p. 583). Of course he concedes that "the introduction of the Christian religion" has given "the Highland superstitions"

a safer direction; though, indeed, they were originally of so beneficent a nature, and, upon the whole, so salutary in their effects, that we should have been far from censuring them, had they remained without any modification. (p. 587)

Early Celtic myths had a "dignity and refinement" (p. 587), therefore, which is sadly missing, according to this critic, in Mrs. Grant's "exaggerated

³⁷Hogg, "Memoir of the Author's Life," p. 74.

stories of evil spirits and apparitions" (p. 585). I would suggest that no one but James Hogg, among the small number of book critics practicing in Edinburgh in 1811, would have been capable of developing such an enlightened attitude towards pre-Christian literature.³⁸

"There are few who have not heard," declares the same reviewer in September 1812, "of the ship *Bounty* and the adventures of Captain Bligh."³⁹ The Ettrick Shepherd was certainly interested in the *Bounty* mutiny, and his narrative poem "Carry O'Kean," published in 1821, is loosely based on what was then known of the famous rebellion in the South Seas. Hogg's reading of Wilson's *Isle of Palms* might also have brought the mutiny of 1789 to his mind in 1812.

The *Scottish Review's* critic of September 1812 discusses the *Bounty* affair at the start of his article on Mary Russell Mitford's *Christina, the Maid of the South Seas*. In Mitford's poem he discovers a few passages of "true and genuine poetry, . . . the very language of the heart and soul," "where the struggles of passion, and feelings of love and duty . . . are well imagined and happily expressed" (p. 37). On the other hand he blames Mitford for her "uniformity both in diction and sentiment." Whether in her poetic reflections, or in her persistent use of "the short childish eight-syllable rhyme" with an unvarying masculine ending, the poet has utterly failed, declares the critic, to convey any sense of freedom or expansiveness of mind:

There is no ease nor freedom, no expansion of thought—but a constant twittering, tottering step, as if the limbs were bound together, or the person had become paralytic. (p. 38)

Hogg's own poem *The Queen's Wake*, by contrast, would seem to live up to this critical ideal in its use of a great variety of rhythms, verse structures, and poetic voices. In his *Pilgrims of the Sun*, Hogg tries to symbolize the sense of freedom, movement, and expansion, through the rapid, ecstatic flight of Mary and Cela across the universe:

³⁸The reviewer also sounds like James Hogg when he discusses the modern social history of the Highlands. He contends that "Sheep husbandry . . . was productive of incalculable evil, because it was introduced suddenly . . . and carried at once to its extremity," and that "extensive emigration . . . has been the great evil of the system of rural economy recently introduced into the Highlands" (p. 590). Hogg had recently maintained both these positions in his song "The Emigrant" in *The Forest Minstrel* (Edinburgh and London, 1810).

³⁹Anon. rev., *Scottish Review*, Sept. 1812, pp. 31-41 (31). Subsequent page references are included parenthetically in the text.

So swift and so untroubled was their flight,
 'Twas like the journey of a dream by night;

the stars and the moon fled west away,
 So swift o'er vaulted sky they shone:
 They seemed like fiery rainbows reared,
 In a moment seen, in a moment gone.⁴⁰

There is apparently a "want of animation and variety" (p. 38) in *Christina*. The critic attributes this failing to "the subject of the poem itself":

We cannot conceive why Miss Mitford should have gone so far out of her latitude as Pitcairn's island in quest of matter for poetical description and invention. It no longer remains a doubt with us, after what we have of late seen and read, that it is a very foolish project for a man, though possessed of the most brilliant imagination, to set out adventuring in search of foreign scenes and savage inhabitants, that he may produce something new and striking. (p. 39)

Here the reviewer's argument might well serve as a justification of the poetic practice to which Hogg himself adhered (with only a very few exceptions), in setting most of his poems in areas of Scotland where he had either lived or visited.⁴¹ His objection to "foreign scenes and savage inhabitants" recalls similar reservations by the same writer regarding the depiction of Spaniards and Highlanders by Walter Scott and Anne Grant. A poet, then, should mainly describe scenes he is familiar with; quite appropriately the critic adds, "as a query, whether this has not been the cause of failure in Mr Scott's late production" (p. 40). We also learn from this essay that

nature is every where the same, and that the sun rises with as much splendour, and the moon sheds as mellow a light on the bleak and uninhabited mountains of Lapland, as on the vine covered hills of France and Italy. It is true, that the principles which regulate the conduct of man, the motives that impel him to action, and the passions and feelings that hold dominion over his heart, are every where the same; and he that can paint the one, and trace the other in any *given* situation, should be equally capable of managing the same every where. But it is not painting to represent the sun's rays streaming over a distant mountain, and illuminating a spacious plain; nor is it poetry to talk of him rising in splendid

⁴⁰*Pilgrims of the Sun*, pp. 56, 36.

⁴¹Even Hogg's poems of celestial journeys, such as "The Witch of Fife," "Kilmeny," and *Pilgrims of the Sun*, always begin with realistic descriptions of specific areas of Scotland.

majesty. It is the scene he [i.e., the sun] illuminates, it is the objects brought into view, that show the hand of a master. The veriest shepherd who reposes on the brow of a hill, 'with all his flocks around him,' can look upon, enjoy, and even describe the one; but the others are far above his conception. Now, if Miss Mitford, Mr Wilson, Mr Scott, or even Mr Campbell himself, shall travel to America in imagination, endeavour to paint its scenery, and develop the character of its inhabitants, we doubt much if they can deal in more than general description, represent any thing but the mere common motives by which man is influenced to action, and the strongest and broadest outlines of human character.⁴²

Later in life Hogg would often repeat this argument that nature, including human nature, is always essentially the same, in spite of superficial differences. In a confessional poem published in 1820, he claims that by "draw[ing] only from myself" he will be able to capture in his verse

The feelings that congenial minds will love;
And to each other genial minds will cling
Long as this world has being . . .⁴³

A writer is unwise, then, to pursue exotic or far-fetched themes; "the most admired passages from the best authors" are simply "the natural expressions of men of good sense," "the things which have always been thought, but never so well expressed"; "the earth abideth for ever," Hogg adds in his *Lay Sermons*, "and all races of men admire the same objects."⁴⁴

As well as roving too far in her imagination, it seems that Mary Mitford has also tried to appear original by imitating contemporary models of poetry, rather than "trusting to the vigour of her own powers":

it grieves us to find her so deeply conversant in modern poetry. There is so much in all she thinks, and says, and does, just like what has so often been said, and thought, and done of late—so similar to what we have read in the *Isle of Palms*, and other productions—that we are fully persuaded she would have written a better and more original poem, had she never seen these. This censure we extend to all her writings. It is her great error to copy from others, not to paint from nature.

⁴²Page 39. The reviewer alludes in passing to Thomas Campbell's poem *Gertrude of Wyoming* (London, 1809). No review of that work, however, appears in any of the surviving numbers of this periodical.

⁴³"Halbert of Lyne" (1820; rpt. in *James Hogg: Selected Poems and Songs*), p. 129.

⁴⁴*Lay Sermons*, pp. 272-3.

Mitford should "try the strength of her own mind." She should cease her attempts at "holding 'high converse' with such refined and elegant spirits" "as Messrs Scott and Wilson" (p. 40). If only the poet would seek simplicity and nature, both in her own mind and in the settings of her poems, she might then succeed in "throwing aside a set of borrowed ornaments, and walking abroad amidst her native fields and fellow associates" (pp. 40-1). This advice is very similar to a passage in the Mr. Shuffleton series of Hogg's *Spy*, where the muse of the Ettrick Shepherd appears at first "dressed in a mantle, somewhat resembling that of [Walter Scott's muse], but finding that it rather incumbered her, she threw it off, and appeared in the guise of a native shepherdess."⁴⁵

Another failure in *Christina* is its "want of animation and variety." Mitford's desire to sound original, the critic argues, has produced a poem that is superficial, repetitive, and essentially static:

A paucity of ideas necessarily leads a writer, who would not wish to be perpetually ringing the same changes, to search for new expressions; but this very effort produces that similarity which he would wish to avoid. The invention is already exhausted, and has recourse to another faculty for that assistance which it can no longer afford to itself. The whole storehouse of language is turned out, and the writer himself, pleased with the apparent novelty, is not aware that he is only repeating what he had already expressed. He who reads Miss Mitford's *Maid of the South Seas* will find himself but little informed, instructed, or even delighted. She leaves his mind just where she finds it, or rather gives an impression in the first page which continues unvaried to the last. (p. 38)

This assessment of Mary Mitford looks ahead to Hogg's ridicule of the various *static* poets of his two *Poetic Mirrors*, where Wordsworth for instance is compared to a man slowly "boring"⁴⁶ a hole in a rock. The long poems of James Hogg, such as *The Pilgrims of the Sun*, "Connel of Dee," and "The p and the q," always contain a journey, a progression, and Hogg himself is very far from merely leaving his reader's "mind just where [he] finds it." In *The Queen's Wake*, there is a great difference between the poet at the beginning, as he tries to defy the "cold winds of adversity,"—and on the other hand the same poet at the conclusion, when he has learned to accept the wind, the storm, and the inspiring "western breeze's wing":

⁴⁵"Mr. Shuffleton's Allegorical Survey," *Spy*, 8 Sept. 1810.

⁴⁶Hogg, "James Rigg" (1816; rpt. in *James Hogg: Selected Poems and Songs*), p. 99.

Chill blows the blast around my head;
And louder yet that blast may blow,
When down this weary vale I've sped.⁴⁷

The reviewer's complaint that Mitford's poem lacks real movement and change, then, reflects a concern that is central to the poetry of the Ettrick Shepherd.

Throughout his remarks on *Christina*, the critic somehow maintains his fragile, fertile, and fascinating balance between the neo-classical aesthetic of "paint[ing] from nature," and the more Romantic aesthetic of "struggles," "feelings," and "the very language of the heart and soul." He sounds like an early eighteenth-century critic when he finds Mitford's versification "generally correct" (p. 37), her plot "not destitute of interest or probability" (p. 34), and her imagery woefully deficient in its failure to "assist us in forming any more distinct idea of the object it is intended to illustrate" (p. 38). Yet at other times the critic can almost sound like Shelley or Keats when he makes high claims for creativity and subjectivity:

It is indeed true that there are no rules to bind imagination; and, when she [i.e., imagination] travels beyond the realities of life and nature, we dare not blame, nor can we restrain, her ardent pursuits, or her daring flights. She can combine beauties which are scattered over all the widely extended dominions of nature, and are given to man to mark singly as he travels along, without doing violence to her [i.e., nature's] laws, or setting her regulations at defiance. (p. 41)

In other words, a poet who both observes and respects "the realities of life and nature" may at times free himself from those restraints and soar beyond into a world of pure imagination. The symbolism of "daring flights" recalls a poem by Hogg in which he praises Byron for his

bold and native energy;
Thy soul that dares each bound to overfly,
*Ranging thro' Nature on erratic wing*⁴⁸

One of the hallmarks of Hogg's longer works is precisely this brave and innovative attempt to capture what is best in both the Romantic and Augustan ideals of art. In his two *Poetic Mirrors*, Hogg not only laughs at the excesses of the Romantic poets, but also evinces a sincere degree of respect and admiration for those same poets through his frank imitations

⁴⁷*The Queen's Wake*, pp. 1, 324.

⁴⁸Dedication "To the Right Hon. Lord Byron" (1815), *Selected Poems and Songs*, p. 31.

of Byron, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Campbell, Moore, and others. Perhaps the best example is Hogg's *Confessions*, with its central contrast between the Deistic "editor" (a man of eighteenth-century ideals about "nature, utility, and common sense") and the proto-Romantic Robert Wringhim (who claims to be driven by an "exaltation of spirit" and feels at one point "as if I could have flown in the air").⁴⁹ Hogg is similarly ambivalent in his *Lay Sermons*, telling us on one page that "The fire and rapidity of true genius will always overstep the cold restraints of art," while on other pages extolling "the language of nature," "plain common sense," "a correct taste," and "the modest drapery with which men of true genius always adorn" the "simple guise of Nature."⁵⁰ It could be argued that Hogg's best writing grew out of his desire to achieve this difficult synthesis of Augustan and Romantic notions.

The four articles on Scott, Wilson, Anne Grant, and Mary Mitford are the only ones in the surviving issues of *The Edinburgh Quarterly* and *Scottish Review* which can reasonably be attributed to James Hogg. Other reviews in this periodical are too puritanical or too rationalistic to have been written by the Ettrick Shepherd. Perhaps other critiques of Hogg's will come to light, however, if the later issues of the *Scottish* and *Scottish Review* can be found.

Considered individually, the four articles show very strong evidence that Hogg was probably their author. But each one also contains echoes or direct allusions which link it to others in the series. As we have seen, the review of John Wilson begins with what seems to be a reference to the same reviewer's earlier articles on Walter Scott and Anne Grant. Similarly, the piece on Mary Mitford refers back to "Mr Wilson, Mr Scott," and to "what we have seen in the Isle of Palms, and other productions." The highly unusual attempt to reconcile eighteenth-century and Romantic ideals of art is a common and prominent feature of all four articles.

Another common feature of two of these reviews is the fleeting creation of an ironic *persona* to give a slightly fictional framework to the critical commentary. In his introductory remarks on *The Isle of Palms*, the critic amusingly paints himself as well-intentioned but self-satisfied and self-deceived:

With all these good resolutions in our hearts—with freedom placed before our eyes as a motto, and with all the dignity of assumed and puny prerogative, it is

⁴⁹Hogg, *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, ed. John Carey (Oxford, 1969), pp. 12, 116.

⁵⁰*Lay Sermons*, pp. 274, 292, 285, 289.

with heart-felt satisfaction, and a high degree of national pride, that we introduce to our readers Mr John Wilson . . . (p. 164-5)

The critic briefly assumes the same ironic mask of seeming objectivity mixed with imperiousness, pomposity, and some degree of benevolence, when he turns to Mitford's *Christina*:

Hard and unfeeling as are our natures, and unaccustomed to bend to any rules but those of stern and unrelenting justice, our deficiency in politeness is not so great but we will stretch out our hands to lift from a supplicating posture a female so young and gentle. High and mighty as we think ourselves when seated in the chair of criticism, and weighing, with a hand as steady as we can command, the merits and defects of all who are dragged to our bar, or throw themselves in our way, it is with no small exertion that we shut our ears to the cry of mercy. (p. 40)

These transparent and very brief interludes should be seen in relation to Hogg's use of ironic narrators (such as "Mr Shuffleton") as a frame for his critical comments in *The Spy*. They also undermine the supposed objectivity of the reviewer, and hint at the possibility of pride, vanity, or self-interest, as motives for criticism. The Ettrick Shepherd was habitually distrustful of the very notion of objective criticism. "First impressions are always most permanent," he argued in 1810:

This, the inherent principle of self-esteem, will ever secure to us: for when once we have formed an opinion of any thing in our own minds, we have too high a sense of our own judgments again to retract, . . . even though reason should remonstrate, both from our own breasts and the mouths of other men.⁵¹

Two decades later, Hogg would again voice his characteristic skepticism of pretensions to objectivity:

the lash of criticism is any thing but favourable to genius. It . . . has marred the mental journey of many an ardent and promising genius, and brought many of them to an untimely grave. If there were such a thing as an impartial critic in the world, which I rather doubt, . . . I would regard him as a treasure to the realm; but the writings of such a man I have never contemplated.⁵²

⁵¹"The Spy's Account of Himself," *Spy*, 1 Sept. 1810.

⁵²*Lay Sermons*, p. 281. Hogg's concern over the despair "of many an ardent and promising genius," in this paragraph, resembles a passage already cited from the review of *Isle of Palms*, where the critic regrets that "Many a genius has been blasted in the bud by venturing to intrude, with too much precipitance, upon the public." In that 1812 article the phrase "untimely grave" is also used in a similar sense, where the poet Tannahill (who

One way in which James Hogg enforced his conviction of the subjective basis of criticism was through his cultivation of ironic *personae* in several of his critical writings.

In his last years the Ettrick Shepherd advised young writers to "despise the cold rules of criticism" and "never to read a work of criticism, ancient or modern." Readers, also, should apparently forget about the reviewers and approach literature with a more open mind:

Every man . . . should be his own critic, and strive rather to judge for himself than to impose his dogmas on others. I wish particularly to inculcate the advantages of this on a young man beginning to relish and admire the beauties of fine composition,—that he disregard all the absurd rules of reviewers; for he will never obtain a standard for his taste by any precept which another man is pleased to give him

It is crucial to realize, however, that Hogg does not in these passages reject the idea of criticism entirely, but only the notion or habit of regarding critics as objective, impartial, or final arbiters of taste. Instead, James Hogg wanted each reader to become "his own critic," to develop and shape his own imagination by responding to literature in a more independent and more truly critical spirit. "I adjure you all, then," he wrote in 1834,

that when you find the inspiration and power of the author carrying you along with him, take a polite leave of the reviewers in as easy a manner as you can. You have learned the mystery of the art, so far as it respects yourself, to much greater advantage than ever you will learn it from them. I believe, too, that every attempt to judge correctly will improve your taste, in the same secret manner in which frequent repetition improves the memory. The only difficulty is, to decide what books you should read; but in this listen to the general voice of mankind, but never to a critic by profession.⁵³

Readers who accept this advice will be trying to work out their own aesthetic criteria, as Hogg himself did in his early years as a poet, when he wrote essays on Wilson's poem "as well as many others, in a Scottish Review then going on in Edinburgh."

Edinburgh

committed suicide in 1811) is described as having "sought in an untimely grave a refuge for the shafts of unmerited reproach" (p. 167). Both the review of 1812, and Hogg's *Lay Sermons*, discuss the same topic in similar terms and from the same perspective.

⁵³*Lay Sermons*, pp. 282, 281, 278, 284-5.