Blackwood's Magazine, 1817–25

Selected Criticism, 1820-25

Edited by
John Strachan with Nicholas Mason, Tom Mole
and Charles Snodgrass

PROFESSOR WILSON.

(Drawn by Daniel Maclise, R.A.)

Artist: Daniel Maclise. Source: Andrew Lang (ed.), *The Life and Letters of John Gibson Lockhart*, 2 vols (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1897), vol. 1, p. 144.

BLACKWOOD'S MAGAZINE, 1817–25: SELECTIONS FROM MAGA'S INFANCY

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General Editor
Nicholas Mason

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Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2006 by Pickering & Chatto (Publishers) Limited

Published 2016 by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017, USA

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

BRITISH LIBRARY CATALOGUING IN PUBLICATION DATA

Blackwood's magazine, 1817–25 : selections from Maga's infancy
1. English literature – 19th century 2. English prose literature
I. Mason, Nicholas II. Jarrells, Anthony S., 1969–
III. Strachan, John (John R.)
828.7'08

ISBN-13: 978-1-85196-800-8 (set)

Typeset by
P&C

Contents

Acknowledgments

Nicholas Mason has been the very model of a general editor: scrupulous, scholarly and supportive, and it has been a pleasure acting as a consultant to a collection which boasts the magnificent labours of such a gifted editorial team. I would also like to thank Nick for his assistance in bringing this particular volume to swift and successful completion. Kimberly Jones of Brigham Young University provided invaluable editorial assistance. I am also indebted to the following: Jeffrey N. Cox, Kirstin Crabb, Anne Davies, Ian Duncan, Emily Fawcett, Dana Van Kooy, Alison Morgan, Sarah Schaff, Denise Todd and Duncan Wu.

I have profited over the years from both the friendship and the scholarly work of the participants in the John Wilson/'Christopher North' conference held at the University of Glasgow in May 2000: my co-organizer, Philip Dundas, and also J. H. Alexander, Richard Cronin, David Finkelstein, David Higgins, Douglas S. Mack, Dorothy Macmillan, Jane Moore, Robert Morrison, Seamus Perry and Nicola Trott. This volume is dedicated to them, with thanks.

John Strachan

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Introduction

This is the final volume of the first scholarly edition of the most brilliant, troubling, acerbic and imaginative periodical of the post-Napoleonic age, *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*. It surveys sixty-nine numbers published between early 1820 and late 1825, six years in which William Blackwood's journal consolidated its reputation, to quote Mary Russell Mitford, as a 'very libellous, naughty, wicked, scandalous, story-telling, entertaining work'.[1] This edition offers a representative selection of *Blackwood's* critical prose from the early 1820s, displaying the magazine in its principal tonal registers: judicious and scurrilous, sober and satirical, generous and unscrupulous, partisan and open-minded, reactionary and avant garde. Unsurprisingly, many of the critical positions articulated here continue the central themes evident in the previous volume of this edition: the satirical onslaught on Leigh Hunt, John Keats and the 'Cockney School' proceeds apace; Byron is simultaneously abused and lauded as the great poet of his generation; Shelley is rebuked for his radicalism and infidelity, praised for his poetry and cajoled to renounce his unfortunate Cockney affiliations; 'pimpled' Hazlitt remains beyond the pale; the 'Great Unknown', Walter Scott, is praised to the skies; and, throughout, sober literary-critical meditations on literature and aesthetics coexist with ferocious *ad hominem* satirical prose.

That said, the magazine did begin to develop new themes and preoccupations in the early 1820s, most notably in a new willingness to engage critically with women authors and with writing from overseas, notably American literature. This volume offers carefully edited and fully annotated versions of twenty-six of the magazine's key reviews from this period. This introduction to the volume offers a critical overview of the magazine in this era, focusing particularly on the selections that follow; second, it explores *Blackwood's* use of satirical critical prose and *ad hominem* polemic; and, finally, it examines the reasons behind the journal's combative, controversialist – and sometimes cruel – critical manner.

1. R. Brimley Johnson (ed.), *The Letters of Mary Russell Mitford* (London, John Lane, 1925), p. 148; quoted in Robert Morrison, '*Blackwood's* Berserker: John Wilson and the Language of Extremity', *Romanticism on the Net*, 20 (November 2000), http://users.ox.ac.uk/~scat0385/20morrison.html.

I.

The first years of the reign of George IV, a monarch whose accession had been lauded by *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* and whose visit to Edinburgh in 1822 had been celebrated so memorably in its pages, saw William Blackwood's journal continue in the manner established so successfully in and after its relaunch in October 1817.[1] The years between 1820 and 1825 mark the final epoch in which the leading lights of the magazine continued to be the great satirico-critical troika of John Wilson, John Gibson Lockhart and William Maginn.[2]

In general terms, the mix of the magazine's contents continues as before. A diverse range of poetry appears in its pages: lyrical verse and pungent satire, formal elegies and mock odes, national airs and supernatural ballads, incisive parody and rabble-rousing political songs. Tales couthy and tales macabre build *Blackwood's* reputation as a repository of both homely Scottish fiction and shocking Gothic stories. The Menippean pyrotechnics of 'The Tent' are rivalled by those of the '"Luctus" on the Death of Sir Daniel Donnelly', and a host of pseudonymous correspondents – scholars, medical men, pompous dolts and comic Hibernians – continue to rain down epistles on Christopher North: the Adjutant and Timothy Tickler are joined by Dr Olinthus Petre, Mr Shufflebottom, Dr Silky, Alexander Sidney Trott, Fogarty O'fogarty and Wrinkleton Fidgit. Successful series continue, and the Tickler letters, the 'Boxiana' and the 'Horae Germaniae' are joined by the 'Horae Hispanicae', 'Letter[s] from the Man in the Moon' and, triumphantly and most notably, the *Noctes Ambrosianae*, which begin in March 1822. The 'Cockney School' and 'Lake School' are joined by more fictitious seminaries: 'The Barrnly School of Criticism', 'The Pluckless School of Politics' and 'The Leg of Mutton School of Poetry'. The London and Edinburgh literary press – the *Monthly Review*, *Knight's*, the *Quarterly Review* and so on – is reviewed, summarized and often castigated, with most attention given to what the magazine somewhat optimistically called the 'Rise, Progress, Decline and Fall of the Edinburgh Review'.[3] The journal's serious side manifested itself in diverse articles on such subjects as European history, travel writing, cookery, musicology and metaphysics. The principal contributors rode their hobby horses: John Wilson continued to celebrate his favourite sports, notably pugilism and fly fishing, and John Gibson Lockhart proselytized on German literature and culture. And, throughout, a

1. For an account of the magazine's origins and early troubles, see Nicholas Mason's General Introduction to this series (Volume 1, pp. ix–xxiv).

2. Maginn's contributions peter out in 1826, partly because he had moved to London but also because his relationship with Blackwood had become increasingly fractious. Meanwhile Lockhart was consolidating himself as the editor of the *Quarterly Review*, a post which he assumed in December 1825.

3. *Blackwood's*, X (December 1821, Part II), pp. 668–79.

large cast of villains was hissed (Hunt and his coterie, the *Edinburgh Review*, Whigs in general, parliamentary radicals such as Joseph Hume, the phrenologists, those opposed to bloodsports, the eschatology of the Reverend Edward Irving, the Scottish educational system, the Marriage Act, teetotallers) and a not quite so extensive list of heroes saluted (the King, the Kirk, the 'Wizard of the North', Tories in general – with the possible exception of the *Quarterly* – Goethe, the anti-Catholicism of the Reverend Joseph Blanco White, wrestlers, six-bottle-men, the Champions of All England).

In terms of the subject of the present volume, the critical prose of the magazine, the early 1820s saw Lockhart, Maginn and Wilson still in full flow, abetted by those stalwarts of the later 1810s, George Croly, Thomas Doubleday, William Howison and David Macbeth Moir. The period also saw the magazine acquire several important new contributors, men who were able to attain the house tone in a seemingly effortless manner, the most notable of whom were Eyre Evans Crowe and the magazine's first major American contributor, John Neal. As noted above, there is much critical continuity between this period and the magazine's first years: P. B. Shelley is addressed more in sorrow than in anger, and the handling of Byron mixes admonition with admiration. However, the magazine's appreciation of both poets also changes subtly here. Nowhere are Byron's supposed excesses exculpated, but over this period praise outweighs condemnation. The magazine's admiration of Byron's *Don Juan* develops apace, to the point where in September 1823 John Gibson Lockhart hails it as a 'great' poem. With real critical foresight, Lockhart scoffs at those who dismiss *Don Juan* as a mere diversion from Byron's serious poetry or as a *jeu d'esprit*; the poem is 'without exception, the first of Lord Byron's works'. Though portions of the work are, regrettably, 'obscene' and 'blasphemous', Byron has fashioned a masterpiece. Lockhart's first August 1819 review of the opening cantos of *Juan* (see Volume 5, pp. 311–22), while acknowledging the magnificence of the performance, had offered a scathing condemnation of its immorality. In contrast, *Blackwood's* August 1821 review of Cantos III, IV and V concentrates on the quality of the verse rather than its licentiousness or profanity ('his Lordship has been so pretty and well behaved on the present occasion'), and Lockhart's September 1823 notice declares Cantos IX, X and XI 'the very best, in so far as talent is concerned, of all that have as yet come forth': 'Don Juan, say the canting world what it will, is destined to hold a permanent rank in the literature of our country'.[1] Lockhart was less enamoured of

1. These being the dialogic pages of *Blackwood's*, of course, the picture is not always stable. A related anonymous article of October 1821, 'Chaucer and Don Juan', declares itself 'disgusted by the charlatan exhibition of Byron in Don Juan' and attempts to prove that 'the serio-comic style' of his post-*Beppo* oeuvre, rather than being 'any thing wonderful or new', was actually ancient, dating back to Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* (see below, pp. 81–9).

Byron's work as a tragedian, and his January 1822 notice of *The Two Foscari*, *Cain and Sardanapalus* labels the collection 'a dullish volume': *Sardanapalus* is a 'failure' in dramatic terms, *Foscari* is 'lumbering, and lax, and highly *undramatic*', and *Cain*, though the best poem of the three, is 'a wicked and blasphemous performance'.

Despite its diehard Toryism, *Blackwood's* was ready to embrace great but politically disagreeable poetry in its handling of Byron and of the ultra-Radical Shelley. With the exception of the Reverend Croly's lashing of *Adonais* (see pp. 91–102 below), *Blackwood's* steered clear of the furiously antipathetic reaction of ultra-Tory organs such as *John Bull* to the 'drivel' and 'trash'[1] of Shelley's work. From its first review of Shelley, *Blackwood's* recognized both poetic genius and mephitic politics. The notice of *Prometheus Unbound* in these pages, like the earlier reviews of *The Revolt of Islam* and *Rosalind and Helen* (see Volume 5, pp. 243–54 and 287–99), sees *Blackwood's* writing 'not out of anger or scorn, but real sorrow, and sincere affection' (Volume 5, p. 298), and hoping that the poet can shake off his pernicious views on church and state. Once again, Lockhart urges Shelley to cast off his degrading association with Hunt and Keats. Indeed, the case is even more urgent, for to Lockhart *Prometheus Unbound* has seen Shelley join the immortals: 'the truth of the matter is this … Mr Shelley is destined to leave a great name behind him, and … we, as lovers of true genius, are most anxious that this name should ultimately be pure as well as great' (p. 21). Despite its incendiary politics, *Prometheus Unbound* sees Shelley reach poetic parity with his 'greatest contemporaries'.

The magazine did not have to hold its nose when considering the politics of the most famous novelist of the day, who, first as the 'Great Unknown' and then as Sir Walter Scott, the scholarly editor of *Ballantyne's Novelists' Library*, receives three flattering reviews in these pages. The January 1821 review of Scott's Elizabethan tragedy *Kenilworth* argues that the writer refuses to rest on his laurels, the novel being composed in 'a style almost entirely new' (p. 53). William Howison's review of *The Fortunes of Nigel*, published seventeen months later, sees the book as 'one of the most pleasing novels the Author of Waverley ever wrote, shew[ing] a power of imagination ever new and unfatigued' (p. 145). Lockhart took advantage of his anonymity to praise his father-in-law's critical insight and scholarship in his April 1824 review of the *Ballantyne's Novelists' Library* (the series was originally planned by Ballantyne, who had died in 1821, and Scott had generously provided a series of prefatory biographies for the benefit of the publisher's widow). The present volume also contains a measured but not ungenerous review of *Melmoth the Wanderer*, a novel by one of Scott's protégées, C. R. Maturin. The magazine, a powerful

1. *John Bull*, 12 July 1824.

force in the contemporary vogue for terror fiction, considers Maturin one of the 'genuine masters of the dark romance' (p. 37).

One new note struck in the early 1820s was a critical receptiveness to women's writing. Although occasional reviews of women's works had appeared during the magazine's first seven years, *Blackwood's* seems to have made a concerted effort beginning in the summer of 1824 to devote more attention to women writers. In June of that year, for instance, the magazine dedicated sixteen pages to Susan Ferrier's *The Inheritance*, praising its skilful blending of 'purity and moral elevation of mind' with 'caustic vigour of satire'.[1] Two months later, a large portion of the magazine was filled with commentary on women's literature. Perhaps the most significant piece in this issue is the Reverend William Harness's essay on Joanna Baillie, which celebrates the dramatist as the 'most distinguished [of] female authors' (p. 231) and goes on to make the remarkable claim that she is the single most important figure in the establishment of the new poetic school evident in late Georgian England. Harness singles out Baillie's 'Introductory Discourse' to *A Series of Plays on the Passions* (1798), dubbing it the founding document of modern literature. Later in the August 1824 number, William Maginn lavishes praise on Letitia Elizabeth Landon's *The Improvisatrice*. Maginn combines a rather arch chivalric tone with critical acuity, labelling Landon a poet of genuine promise who has it within her to make a significant contribution to the poetry of the age. In addition to the celebrations of Baillie and Landon, this issue also featured the third of Caroline Bowles's 'Chapters on Churchyards'[2] and a *Noctes* dialogue on the virtues of various female authors.[3] The magazine's summer of sustained attention to women's literature was capped off in the September 1824 issue with another of the 'Chapters on Churchyards' and John Neal's 'Men and Women; Brief Hypothesis concerning the Difference in their Genius', an essay which bluntly declares that 'If women were educated precisely as men are [and] had the same opportunities … they would be more fruitful in works of imagination – in poetry, musick, sculpture, painting, and eloquence, than men are' (p. 276).

Another new preoccupation of the magazine, in an important series of articles, was American literature. Joseph Green Cogswell's brace of essays on the subject of learning in the United States in 1819 was complemented by J. G. Lockhart's February 1820 article 'On the Writings of Charles Brockden Brown and Washington Irving'. For Lockhart, Irving's tales were 'entitled to be classed with the best English writings of our day'. He also builds a case for the late Brockden Brown, who, unlike Irving, was something of a neglected figure even

1. It merits pointing out, however, that vested interest may be at work here, given that Ferrier's novel was published by the house of Blackwood (see below, pp. 215–16).
2. *Blackwood's*, XVI (August 1824), pp. 215–21.
3. See Volume 4, pp. 63–84.

in his own country. Less complimentary was Eyre Evan Crowe's June 1822 account of American poetry. Though Irving writes with 'a taste and elegance …not often rivalled even in England', and though William Cullen Bryant might well 'assum[e] a high rank among English poets' (p. 133), in general the republic's poetry lags behind its prose in terms of literary quality. The magazine's most prolific contributor on American subjects was John Neal, who, like Poe after him, was an American who knew 'How to Write a Blackwood Article'. Upon his arrival in England in December 1823, Neal was keen to write for 'the cleverest, the sauciest, and the most unprincipled' of British journals. Borrowing the signature 'X.Y.Z',[1] Neal went on to pen five important essays on 'American Writers' between September 1824 and February 1825 (the first of which is included below).

While some of the magazine's most notable reviews are marked by acerbity and satirical wit, it should be acknowledged that William Blackwood also had a taste for more sober meditations on aesthetics, the arts and literature, and especially for philosophical engagements with the nature of poetry. Theoretical essays which he published in the early 1820s include 'On the Metaphysics of Music',[2] 'On Poetic Inspiration',[3] 'Why are Professional Men Indifferent Poets?',[4] 'On the Different Shades of Taste'[5] and 'On the Alleged Decline of Dramatic Writing'.[6] Many of *Blackwood's* essays were written by the indefatigable aesthetician (and Whig) Thomas Doubleday, and the present volume includes his 'How Far Is Poetry an Art?' and 'On the Sources of the Picturesque and Beautiful', alongside D. M. Moir's 'On Critics and Criticism'. Moir's essay catalogues the pettiness and spite of many literary men, particularly chiding the critics, as the stones are flung from the glass house: 'The whole tribe are notoriously addicted to gossiping, and are not very scrupulous either about vilifying a friend or creating a foe, provided they can raise the present laugh among their auditors' (p. 42). Doubleday's 'How Far is Poetry an Art?' (February 1822) is a meditation on whether or not poetry can be codified into rule and precept or taught as if it were an art such as painting or music. His September 1823 essay 'On the Sources of the Picturesque and Beautiful' muses on some of the key issues in late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century aesthetic philosophy, testimony to the magazine's interest in matters of high art.

1. The signature had been used by Lockhart and Wilson before him.
2. *Blackwood's*, XV (May 1824), pp. 587–92.
3. *Blackwood's*, X (January 1821), pp. 362–4.
4. *Blackwood's*, VIII (January 1821), pp. 415–18.
5. *Blackwood's*, XI (May 1822), pp. 585–91.
6. *Blackwood's*, IX (June 1821), pp. 279–84.

II.

The above account of the magazine in the early 1820s, which stresses its critical insight, willingness to praise great, even if politically wrong-headed, poetry, occasional generosity of spirit, passion for aesthetics, openness to new literatures from the United States and elsewhere, and willingness to esteem and endorse women writers is, of course, not the entire story of *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* in the early 1820s. The magazine still had arms at its side. In these pages one will find critical spleen and ill-will, personal abuse, satirical polemic, a pleasure in vituperation and a badly concealed acknowledgment that the readers of *Blackwood's* took pleasure in merciless caricature and in literary demolition jobs. 'The Leg of Mutton School of Poetry' uses the metaphor of the magazine being a kind of literary restaurateur, offering both sweet liquors and hot sauces:

> A good article is like a bowl of Glasgow punch – sharp, sweet, and spirited. But partial as we confess ourselves to this delightful beverage, no man … would stick eternally to the same liquor. For our own part, we covet variety … we derive considerable enjoyment from a peppered spatch-cock, or a devil'd biscuit, which no one better than our own cook knows how to prepare. In perfect unison with our own physical taste is the literary taste of the public. Nothing delights our good-natured readers so much as a devil'd poet, or a peppered political œconomist; and verily, we are too skilful restaurateurs not to understand how to cater to their taste. (p. 57)

The skilful and witty hatchet job: this is what many of *Blackwood's* readers enjoyed in their 'naughty, wicked … entertaining' magazine. 'The Leg of Mutton School' gleefully acknowledges that there was more rejoicing in Princes Street over the arrival of one book deserving *Blackwood's* own brand of satirical correction than over that of ninety-nine righteous volumes: 'It is perfect balm to our souls [when] we chance to meet with a work so superlatively worthless and absurd, as to enable us to set all discrimination at defiance, and conscientiously to inflict the severest punishment admissible by the laws of our profession' (p. 57). Francis Jeffrey once jocularly admitted that every number of the *Edinburgh Review* should contain one 'tickler',[1] a stinging, ill-natured or lacerating review. *Blackwood's* learned from the *Edinburgh* that controversy is good for business, and borrowed its rival's manner. William Blackwood satisfied the public appetite for ritual humiliation to an even greater extent than the *Edinburgh Review*, garnishing his dishes with character assassination and the

1. Samuel Smiles, *A Publisher and His Friends: Memoir and Correspondence of John Murray; With an Account of the Origin and Progress of the House, 1768–1843*, ed. Thomas Mackay (London, John Murray, 1911), p. 87.

most mordantly effective Tory political satire since the days of Gillray or the *Anti-Jacobin*.

'The Leg of Mutton School of Poetry', perhaps *Blackwood's* most amusing review, quenches but a small candle, in its scornful dismissal of what it sees as the toad-eating doggerel of the Reverend N. J. Hollingsworth. However, it also utilizes satirical prose to weightier purpose and against targets of real substance. The *Blackwood's* crew knew that a witty and sardonic review or a satirico-critical prose caricature captured the attention of the public far better than fifty leaden jeremiads on the evils of Jacobinism, and satirical prose was an important weapon against the Whigs, the radicals and such liberal literary collectives as the Leigh Hunt circle. The principal whipping boys in this volume (as they were in Volume 5 of this collection) are Hunt and, to use Lockhart's unfair but effective label, his Cockney School.[1] From the first of the 'Z.' essays onwards, 'Maga' constructed an inspired caricature of Hunt, who was simultaneously effeminate aesthete and dangerous political subversive: the Hampstead-haunting, tea-drinking, piano-playing, yellow-breeches wearing, boxing-hating, washerwomen-loving, farmy-field-frolicing, sonnet-composing, hey-nonny-no-ing 'Liunto', the 'Emperor de Cockaigne', who despised his King, rejected his God, attacked the very 'name of a wife', delighted in incest and stomped on the classics with boots smeared with the loam of the Vale of Health. The attacks continue in the period under consideration here. Indeed, the final entry in this collection, the eighth of 'The Cockney School of Poetry' essays (August 1825), is devoted to Hunt. This jesting review of his translation of Francesco Redi, *Bacchus in Tuscany: A Dithyrambic Poem, from the Italian of Redi* (1825), expresses surprise that the tea-drinking one should have published a paean to Italian wine in the 'choicest language of Cockneydom' and in a style marked by 'consummate and unprovoked drivelling'. Hunt fares little better in 'On the Cockney School. No. VII', Lockhart's December 1822 lampoon of Hunt's story 'The Florentine Lovers', but the treatment he receives here is gentle when compared with the ferocious assault on Hazlitt in Eyre Evans Crowe's August 1822 review of the essayist's *Table-Talk: Essays On Men and Manners*. Crowe portrays Hazlitt as an embittered and misanthropic failure, raging in his 'wounded and festering vanity' at the 'stupidity of the world in not acknowledging his merits', and lamenting the pernicious influence of the Tory reviews, the *Quarterly* and *Blackwood's* most particularly, on his reputation and sales. Here *Blackwood's* glories in its supposed annihilation of Hazlitt, celebrating 'the perfection and consummate completion to which we have carried our work of destruction' upon him (p. 151).

1. See Jeffrey N. Cox's extended discussion in *Poetry and Politics in the Cockney School: Shelley, Keats, Hunt, and Their Circle* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998).

The death of 'the Muses' son of promise' (as the Cockney poet Cornelius Webb had dubbed Keats)[1] did not initially soften the magazine's treatment of Keats, as the magazine's review of Shelley's elegy to the poet in these pages demonstrates.[2] Once described by Charles E. Robinson as 'George Croly's insanely insensitive review of *Adonais*',[3] this article trivializes Keats's life, his poetry and even his death and derides Shelley's mawkish 'nonsense' in what Croly sees as a bejewelled and tawdry piece of post-Della-Cruscan histrionics. Finally, Keats's death is implicitly compared with that of an ill-bred feline in the interpolated parodies of *Adonais* ('Weep for my Tom cat! all ye Tabbies weep'). The other principal satirical victim in these pages is Sydney Owenson, Lady Morgan, the 'Granny' of *Blackwood's* imagination,[4] whose radical politics frequently called forth its ire. Lockhart, in his review of Byron's tragedies, quickly leaves off criticism of the dramas for the more entertaining game of baiting Morgan's *Italy* as 'a piece of flimsy Irish *slip-slop*, altogether unworthy of occupying for half an hour the attention of any man of the smallest pretensions to understanding' (p. 106). Here also, in an anonymous June 1822 review, scorn is poured upon *The Mohawks*, Morgan's satire on Tory pressmen and politicians, co-authored with her husband, Sir Charles.

III.

I want to conclude my discussion of the magazine's darker side by asking *why Blackwood's* so frequently used, to borrow a term coined by that most Wilsonian of all twentieth-century Tory satirists, Auberon Waugh, the 'vituperative arts'.[5]

1. Webb's description of Keats was included as an epigram to several of the 'Cockney School' essays:

> Our talk shall be (a theme we never tire on)
> Of Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, Byron,
> (Our England's Dante) – Wordsworth, Hunt, and Keats,
> The Muses' son of promise, and what feats
> He yet may do –

2. Maginn contrived to make sport of the demise of both Keats and Shelley: 'What a rash man Shelley was, to put to sea in a frail boat with Jack's poetry on board! … Why, man, it would sink a trireme … Seventeen tons of pig-iron would not be more fatal ballast … I lay a wager that it righted soon after it ejected Jack'. *Blackwood's*, XVI (September 1824), p. 288.

3. Charles E. Robinson, 'Percy Bysshe Shelley, Charles Ollier, and William Blackwood: the Contexts of Early Nineteenth-Century Publishing' in Kelvin Everest (ed.), *Shelley Revalued: Essays from the Gregynog Conference* (Leicester, Leicester University Press, 1983), p. 201. For Shelley and the magazine, see also Robert Morrison, '"Abuse Wickedness, but Acknowledge Wit": *Blackwood's Magazine* and the Shelley Circle', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 34:2 (2001), pp. 147–64.

4. Maginn's label in 'Don Juan Unread'; see Volume 1 of this edition, pp. 135–9.

5. Auberon Waugh, *Will This Do?* (London, Century, 1991), p. 212.

One conventional answer is unequivocal: malevolence. Antipathetic critics of *Blackwood's* have condemned its ferocity and venom as indicative of the worst and most splenetic kind of contemporary reaction ('convinced Tories' and 'inveterate bullies' as Ian Jack has it).[1] Sometimes the magazine is seen as the work of a gang of near-deranged malcontents: 'it is difficult to believe that Wilson was wholly sane' (Jack again);[2] Wilson's work is 'half-cracked' (John Gross);[3] J. G. Lockhart had 'a disgusting mind'[4] and so on. As Robert Morrison has demonstrated, *Blackwood's* both 'exploited and provoked a language of extremity'.[5] Morrison's notion of the splendid 'extremity' of the magazine might usefully be developed into a discussion of the reasons underlying its excesses. If we look beyond simple wickedness or mental imbalance, we might identify three possible reasons for *Blackwood's* provocations, each of which I will discuss in turn: the fiercely combative polemical and satirical spirit of the post-Napoleonic age, which is evident in rather more places than one Scottish magazine; second, the possibility that *Blackwood's* spleneticism has, to some extent, material antecedents and derives, in part, from a conscious need to rescue a failing magazine from oblivion by any means necessary; and, finally, the particularly Scottish rhetorical practice of flyting, which features ornate satirical displays of name-calling and personal abuse.

The reputation of *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* is inextricably linked to the reputation of three remarkable young men, fearless polemicists who used both poetic satire and savage *ad hominem* prose diatribe to fight their political and poetic battles. The first is a wealthy young man brought up in Scotland but educated at public school and one of the great English universities, who jeered at the lowly social position and wretched poetry of John Keats, a figure closely involved with the leading Tory publisher and editor of his day, a pugilist both literally and metaphorically who wrote mordantly effective squibs, including several on the death of a principal political opponent, a man who violently abused Wordsworth in print and yet both admired and imitated him. The second, the son of a clergyman, is a figure whose socio-political satirical verse was so ferocious that he never republished it in his lifetime, preferring to present himself as a respected editor, essayist and biographer. Before settling down to his later respectability, this man took advantage of his anonymity to pen attacks on his poetical and political enemies, whilst also being quite prepared to attack his friends in print, and gained a reputation as an author of

1. Ian Jack, *English Literature 1815–1832* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 18.
2. Ibid., p. 336.
3. John Gross, *The Rise and Fall of the Man of Letters* (London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1969), p. 10; also quoted in Morrison, '*Blackwood's* Berserker'.
4. A contemporary opinion quoted in Jack, *English Literature*, p. 239.
5. Morrison, '*Blackwood's* Berserker'.

stinging partisan journalism which utilized personal abuse and physical ridicule, in particular in mocking the diminutive stature, lowly background and humble youthful apprenticeship of his principal literary victim. The third is a man of Irish stock, a man whose personal life was the subject of much gossip, a man possessed of a brilliant but highly acerbic critical temper, a witty paradoxist who also joined in the contemporary jeering about Keats.

Though these descriptions of this trio of contentious magazinists might well suit the leading lights of *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, John Wilson, J. G. Lockhart and William Maginn, I refer in fact to Lord Byron, James Henry Leigh Hunt and William Hazlitt: Byron whose strictures on Johnny Keats, 'the tadpole of the lakes', are well known (and who was planning a public attack on the poet before withdrawing it on Keats's death), whose publisher John Murray founded the Tory *Quarterly*, who jeered at the suicide of Viscount Castlereagh and who both satirized and imitated William Wordsworth; Hunt the brilliant polemicist (his assault on the Prince Regent remains a masterpiece of invective), who suppressed his fire-breathing occasional satires in each of his successive *Poetical Works*,[1] who penned what he later acknowledged was an ignoble memoir of his friend Byron, and who attacked his poetical and political arch-enemy, the diminutive ex-cobbler's apprentice William Gifford, the editor of the *Quarterly*, in the most personal terms; and William Hazlitt, the great hater, of Irish extraction and of spotty personal life, if not complexion, who sneered at the effeminacy of John Keats, wrote highly effective partisan polemic and had a taste for character assassination.

These men, like their opponents in *Blackwood's* or the *Quarterly*, reflected the rancorous and satirical temper of the age. Leigh Hunt, for example, for all of his 'poetry of sociability', manifested in his younger days the same literary machismo as Byron, or, indeed, as his antagonists in Auld Reekie. Consider his demolition of Gifford in *Ultra-Crepidarius* (1824), where all is grist to Hunt's rhetorical mill, including Gifford's humble background, his dwarfish size and his supposed lack of personal hygiene. The central trope of this venomous melody, like that of J. G. Lockhart's assault on Keats, is scorn for the humble apprenticeship of the satirical victim: Gifford's former trade of cobbler, Keats's of apothecary. Both sets of strictures are personal and unfair, but satire is not required to be fair. Because Hunt and his cohorts were on the side of the angels, and because politically we are all Cockneys now, we should not forget that the weapons used in their holy war were not always saintly ones. Both *Blackwood*'s and the *Examiner* circles used the same *ad hominem* literary

1. For discussion of the implication of Hunt's refusal to republish his occasional satire, see my introduction to Hunt's *Poetical Works 1799–1821* in Robert Morrison and M. Eberle-Sinatra (gen. eds), *The Selected Writings of Leigh Hunt*, 6 vols (London, Pickering & Chatto, 2003), vol. 5, pp. xxxi–xxxiii.

weapons. As Leigh Hunt wrote, 'Public principles are sometimes incarnate in individual shapes',[1] and both he and *Blackwood's* operated on the same principle.

There are similar comparisons to be made between the Tory *Blackwood's* and the Whig *Edinburgh Review*. Though real political disagreement underlies the conflict between the two journals, their similarity should not be underestimated. The *Edinburgh*'s motto, 'Judex damnatur cum nocens absolvitur' ('The judge is condemned when the guilty is acquitted'), might just as easily be applied to *Blackwood's*. The temper of the two journals is close; for both the nineteenth-century and the modern reader the most readable, memorable and controversial portions of the *Edinburgh* are when it wields the assassin's knife, rather than in interminable essays on economics or anthropology. *Blackwood's* had the same literary DNA as the *Edinburgh*, and made itself, in part, by imitating the *Review*'s ferocity.

While the above rationale for the ferocity of the political invective in *Blackwood's* is a matter of conviction, it should also be recognized that some of its extremity was a matter of opportunism. It might be argued that the splendid extremity of *Blackwood's* has material antecedents, and derives from a conscious need to rescue a failing magazine from oblivion by any means necessary. Blackwood, Wilson and Lockhart's relaunch number of October 1817 was as deliberately provocative as could be imagined in early-nineteenth-century Edinburgh, a conscious decision to court controversy, to provoke discussion and, undeniably, thereby to boost sales. It is worth tarrying over the nature of the October 1817 number, which contained the 'Translation from an Ancient Chaldee Manuscript', the mock-Biblical allegorical attack on the Scottish Whig establishment, Archibald Constable and the *Edinburgh* reviewers most particularly; the first of Lockhart's animadversive onslaughts 'On the Cockney School of Poetry'; and the 'emptying of the critical slop-pail on Coleridge',[2] probably by Wilson, in a review of the *Biographia Literaria*, which led its author to consider a libel suit. While Coleridge refrained from litigation, the lawyer and naturalist John Graham Dalyell, recognizing himself in the 'Chaldee' as the beast whose face was 'like unto the face of an ape' did sue Blackwood in a case which 'Ebony' settled out of court. This of course provided even more publicity; Blackwood had his *succès de scandale* and the fortunes of his failing magazine were established.

Though the modern reader might see Z.'s entertaining, if spectacularly unfair, assault on the Cockney School as the most notable aspect of the Octo-

1. Morrison and Eberle-Sinatra (gen. eds), *The Selected Writings of Leigh Hunt*, vol. 6, p. 135.

2. Sidney Colvin, *John Keats: His Life and Poetry, His Friends, Critics and After-Fame* (London, Macmillan, 1917), p. 182.

ber 1817 number, it should not be forgotten that the *Edinburgh Review* is a principal target of the relaunch issue. It contains the 'Chaldee' with its *ad hominem* assaults on Constable, Jeffrey and their cohorts, and when Blackwood was forced to withdraw the satire in the reprinted number he remained on the attack, replacing it, in part, with the forthrightly titled 'Strictures on the Edinburgh Review'. The number sees *Blackwood's* taking on the *Edinburgh*, an upstart challenging orthodoxy. Modern critics who depict *Blackwood's* as the voice of the Tory establishment mistake British for Scottish politics. Scotland, then as now, was more liberal in its politics than England, and in challenging the *Edinburgh* and Whiggism *Blackwood's* saw itself as subverting the status quo rather than endorsing it. *Blackwood's*, in Scottish terms an oppositionalist journal, remade itself in Oedipal strife with the *Edinburgh Review*.

The new *Blackwood's* had a particular gift for appropriating the most memorable critical techniques of rival journals and journalists and then raising them to new heights (some would say lowering them to new depths, of course). Attacking the obscurantism of the Lake School? Jeffrey and the *Edinburgh* were famous for it. Lampooning the Cockney School? That was the job of the *Quarterly*, which, for Shelley and others, sent John Keats to his grave as a consequence of its ill-natured strictures. Cod-Biblical allegory? That was the province of William Hone, whose February 1817 anti-governmental liturgical parodies had caused so much controversy. As the October 1817 number demonstrates, William Blackwood's intention was to outdo his rivals: be nastier to Hunt, Keats and the Cockney School than the *Quarterly*, steal the parodic clothes of the radical Hone, and savage the Laker Coleridge in a way which would have made even Francis Jeffrey blush. All of this served to establish and develop his magazine, and set the tone for Maga's infancy, part of a wider drive to achieve dominance in the competitive world of late Georgian print journalism.

Finally, there is another neglected Scottish context to *Blackwood's* extremity. The contributors to the magazine, John Wilson and J. G. Lockhart in particular, were not averse to argument, and, in the pursuit of rhetorical triumph, they repeatedly and deliberately used public provocation, inflammatory rhetoric and personal abuse. However, one important, and particularly Scottish, context in which their excesses should be understood has been ignored. This is the Scots tradition of flyting, in the words of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, 'a kind of contest practised by the Scottish poets of the sixteenth century, in which two persons assailed each other alternately with tirades of abuse', the most notable example being William Dunbar's and William Kennedy's splendid catalogue of insults in 'The Flyting of Dunbar and Kennedy' (*c.* 1508). As the *OED* notes, flyting is 'also in extended use' to describe many vituperative rhetorical exchanges, from the Scottish school and university debating chamber to rancorous exchanges in the public prints. It has a long history in Scottish literature – Dunbar was echoing a late medieval practice – and

continued into the twentieth century. The great figure of Scottish modernism, Hugh MacDiarmid, opens his masterpiece, *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* (1926), by describing his work as 'flytin' and 'sclatrie'[1] (abusive raillery and scandal). The ever-contentious MacDiarmid was never happier than when conducting vitriolic literary quarrels in the public prints, famously in the 'folk-song flyting' of 1959–60 with Hamish Henderson and others.[2] From Dunbar to MacDiarmid via Robert Burns (whose 'The Brigs of Ayr' is a flyting in the original medieval dialogical manner) and the *Blackwood's* luminaries James Hogg, J. G. Lockhart and John Wilson, satirical, hyperbolic attacks on an opponent's personality and literary talents have been a constant thread throughout Scottish literature. *Blackwood's* created an inventive flyting language, satirical word pictures and literary caricatures which possess the exaggerated grotesquerie of contemporary graphic satire. Take, for instance, this excerpt from the first Cockney School essay:

> The extreme moral depravity of the Cockney School is another thing which is for ever thrusting itself upon the public attention, and convincing every man of sense who looks into their productions, that they who sport such sentiments can never be great poets. How could any man of high original genius ever stoop publicly, at the present day, to dip his fingers in the least of those glittering and rancid obscenities which float on the surface of Mr. Hunt's Hippocrene? His poetry is that of a man who has kept company with kept-mistresses. He talks indelicately like a tea-sipping milliner girl. Some excuse for him there might have been, had he been hurried away by imagination or passion. But with him indecency is a disease, and he speaks unclean things from perfect inanition. The very concubine of so impure a wretch as Leigh Hunt would be to be pitied, but alas! for the wife of such a husband! For him there is no charm in simple seduction; and he gloats over it only when accompanied with adultery and incest.[3]

Flyting can, of course, disguise real underlying affection, as with 'Christopher North's' 'good-humoured little bit of personality' in his remarkable rhetorical aria on the 'Ettrick Shepherd' in John Wilson's review of James Hogg's *The Three Perils of Women*.[4] Hogg had flyted Wilson in his *Memoirs of the Author's Life* (1821): 'All that I could learn of him was, that he was a man from the mountains … with hair like eagle's feathers, and nails like bird's claws; a red

1. Hugh MacDiarmid, *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle: An Annotated Edition*, ed. Kenneth Buthlay (Edinburgh, Scottish Academic Press, 1987), p. 2.

2. To complete the Blackwoodian analogy 'Hugh MacDiarmid' is itself a construct, an alter ego in the manner of Christopher North, the author's real name being Christopher Murray Grieve.

3. *Blackwood's*, II (October 1817), p. 40. See Volume 5, pp. 59–60

4. See below, pp. 193–203.

beard, and an uncommon degree of wildness in his looks'.[1] In the character of Kit North, Wilson stands up to pay him out:

> It is indeed this rare union of high imagination with homely truth that constitutes the peculiar character of the Shepherd's writings. In one page, we listen to the song of the nightingale, and in another, to the grunt of the boar. Now the wood is vocal with the feathered choir; and then the sty bubbles and squeaks with a farm-sow, and a litter of nineteen pigwiggins … Now enters bonny Kilmenie … preparing to flee into Fairy-land … and then, lo and behold, some huggered, red-armed, horny-fisted, glaur-nailed Girrzy, removing on the day before … Never was there such a bothering repast set down before the reading public by any other caterer … The flunkies are of all sexes, linsey-woolsey, kilts, and pantaloons. If you suffer your plate for a single moment to escape from the shelter of your own bosom, a hundred to one but you see one of the Tweeddale Yeomanry licking it up with a tongue half a yard long, and as rough as a bison's. (below, pp. 197–8)

However, it has to be admitted that, *Noctes Ambrosianae* apart, *Blackwood's* more often used the technique as an – undeniably effective – way of manifesting contempt, as later in the same article:

> Hazlitt, on the contrary, is coarse as canvass, but cannot hold the wind; hairy and hirsute he seemed to be in his late indecent exposure on the high-way, but spavined and with a string-galt; in panegyric, he is Sir Toby Belch; a dull deceiver, pluckless, but not unpimpled. Alas! for the domestic economy of the unsuccessful rival of Mr Tomkins for the favours of a tailor's daughter, dallying with the impotent ardour of an unprincipled adulterer, verging on threescore; for misquotations, misrepresentations, misbegettings, misbelievings, and mischief in general, see the ignominious ignoramus *passim*; and as for the relations and duties of private life, has he not, for the sake of puff and pudding, avowed himself, in one damning act, the shameless violator of them all; and with his own hand written fool and knave on his own brazen forehead, that the public as she runs may read? (below, p. 199)

Blackwood's built up a rich vocabulary of personal invective, as 'pimpled' Hazlitt, no mean purveyor of rhetorical scorn himself, knew well, fighting with words in the rancorous but compelling literary battlefields of post-Napoleonic Britain. One hundred years after the final review in this volume was published, William Blackwood & Sons published MacDiarmid's *A Drunk Man Looks at The Thistle*. That flyting poet's description of his own work might just as easily sum up the house's most notable achievement, *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*: 'It is a big thing. It is me in every way – satire, lyricism, and all the rest of

1. James Hogg, *Memoir of the Author's Life* and *Familiar Anecdotes of Sir Walter Scott*, ed. Douglas S. Mack (Edinburgh, Scottish Academic Press, 1972), p. 29.

it: beauty and fun and savagery and objectionable elements all mixed just as they are in me.'[1]

John Strachan

1. MacDiarmid, *A Drunk Man*, p. xiii.

John Gibson Lockhart
'On the Writings of Charles Brockden Brown and Washington Irving'[1]

(VI, February 1820, pp. 554–61)

If any aspect of *Blackwood's* early years should motivate a reassessment of the traditional, reductive view of the magazine as insular and close-minded, it is its attitude towards American literature and culture. Between 1817 and 1825, when most British periodicals – both Tory and Whig – considered 'American literature' oxymoronic,[2] *Blackwood's* published over twenty essays contemplating the state of the American arts scene and the potential for literary greatness across the Atlantic. While still harbouring residual anti-American grudges over the American Revolution and the War of 1812, and not wholly free of traditional Tory scepticism toward democracy, the *Blackwood's* circle showed a remarkably cosmopolitan spirit in its willingness to devote a major portion of the magazine to the intellectual scene in the United States.

The avid *Blackwood's* reader would have recognized in the extensive coverage of American books a new branch of the magazine's ongoing project of exposing British readers to the best of world literature. As J. H. Alexander has pointed out, when it came to foreign books, Scotland's two major periodicals exchanged roles, with the typically liberal *Edinburgh Review* having little patience for non-British literature and the often chauvinistic *Blackwood's* spanning the globe in search of hidden literary treasures. During its early years, Maga not only published extensive surveys of German, Danish and Spanish literature, but lengthy remarks on Arabian romances and Chinese fiction as well.[3] Remarking on this, the *Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals* notes,

1. Edited by Nicholas Mason.

2. The most notorious instance of British snobbery towards American literature came in the *Edinburgh Review* for January 1820, when Sydney Smith asked, 'In the four quarters of the globe, who reads an American book?'. Review of *Statistical Annals of the United States of America*, *Edinburgh Review*, 33 (January 1820), p. 79.

3. J. H. Alexander, 'Learning from Europe: Continental Literature in the *Edinburgh Review* and *Blackwood's Magazine* 1802–1825', *The Wordsworth Circle*, 21 (1990), pp. 118–20.

'*Blackwood's* performed a lasting service to English letters by the introduction of foreign literature to its audience'.[1]

Blackwood's first extended foray into American literature and culture came in early 1819 with the publication of Joseph Green Cogswell's two-part series on the state of learning in the United States.[2] Himself an American, Cogswell strives for objectivity, dismissing the 'absurd opinion [that] has arisen of the inferiority of the American intellect',[3] but ultimately admitting that a nation still in its developmental stages has less time and fewer resources for intellectual and artistic endeavours.

A year later, *Blackwood's* returned to the subject of American letters in John Gibson Lockhart's groundbreaking essay 'On the Writings of Charles Brockden Brown and Washington Irving'. Although Irving (1783–1859) had begun attracting attention in Britain with his pseudonymous *Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.*, both he and Brown (1771–1810) remained relatively unknown among British readers in 1820, a situation Lockhart aims to redress. Lockhart's championing of Brown is particularly noteworthy, given that the novelist had been dead for a decade and was still generally unheralded even in America. In Lockhart's estimation, Brown possessed 'a very masterly hand' and 'much, very much, of the same dark, mysterious power of imagination which is displayed in [William Godwin's] Caleb Williams, St Leon, and Mandeville'. Lockhart is even more enthusiastic about Irving, making the rather startling assertion – at least for an early-nineteenth-century Briton – that the American's works are 'well entitled to be classed with the best English writings of our day'. Five months later, in a review of Irving's *A History of New York*, Lockhart would reaffirm this conviction, declaring, 'Mr. Washington Irving is one of our first favourites among the English writers of this age – and he is not a bit the less for having been born in America'.[4]

1. Walter E. Houghton (ed.), *The Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals, 1824–1900*, 5 vols (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1966–89), vol. 1, p. 8.

2. See 'On the Means of Education, and the State of Learning, in the United States of America', *Blackwood's*, IV (February 1819), pp. 546–53; and 'On the State of Learning in the United States of America', *Blackwood's*, IV (March 1819), pp. 641–9.

3. Cogswell, 'On the State of Learning', p. 641.

4. Lockhart, 'Diedrich Knickerbocker's History of New York', *Blackwood's*, VII (July 1820), p. 361.

On the Writings of Charles Brockden Brown and Washington Irving

IF we may judge from an article in the twenty-fifth Number of the North American Review,[1] which has just come into our hands, a great deal of wrath has been very needlessly and absurdly excited among our readers on the other side of the Atlantic, by two articles "on the state of Education and Learning in the United States,"* which appeared some time ago in this Miscellany. The critic who has honoured us so far as to make these papers the subject of a very elaborate review, has not, we think, succeeded in pointing out any very important inaccuracies in the facts we mentioned; and if the conclusions at which he has arrived be rather more favourable than ours, we can only say, that we most heartily hope he is in the right, and we in the wrong. To prevent mistakes, however, we must inform him, that his suspicions concerning "British Manufacture" are entirely unfounded. The papers on which he has commented were altogether written by a countryman of his own[2] – a young gentleman of very extraordinary talents, whose attainments, when he first reached Europe, did great honour to the transatlantic seminaries in which he had received his education – and who has now, we believe, returned to America, improved by several well-spent years of travel and of study, in a condition to render important services to the common literature of his own country, and of ours.

Our American critic complains, that the productions of American genius are never received as they ought to be by the people of England, – that a certain strange mixture of haughtiness, jealousy, and indifference, is manifested on every occasion when any American author forms the subject of professional criticism in Britain, – while, to our reading public at large, even the names of some men whose writings do the highest honour to the language in which they are written, remain at this moment entirely unknown. In so far, we are free to confess, that we think our countrymen do lie open to this last reproach. The great names of which we are ignorant, cannot indeed be numerous, for few American writers are ever talked of, even by Mr Walsh[3] or the North American Review itself, with whom we think people on this side of the water are less acquainted than they ought to be. In truth, so far as we know, there are two American authors only whose genius has reason to complain of British neglect – and with a very great deal of reason both unquestionably may do so – namely, CHARLES BROCKDEN BROWN and WASHINGTON IRVING.

The first of these has been dead for several years; and the periodical works, by his contributions to which he was best known in America during his lifetime, have long since followed him: but his name yet lives, although not as it

* See Nos XXIII. and XXIV. of this Magazine.

ought to do, in his novels. The earliest and the best of them, Wieland, Ormond, Arthur Mervyn, and Edgar Huntly,[4] are to be found in every circulating library, both in America and England; but notwithstanding the numbers who must thus have read them, and the commendations they have received from some judges of the highest authority, (above all from Godwin,[5] whose manner their author imitated in a noble style of imitation) – they are never mentioned among the classical or standard works of that species of composition. It is wonderful how much of thought, power, invention, and genius, are for ever travelling their cold unworthy rounds between the shelves of circulating libraries, and the tables or pillows of habitual novel-readers. The works of Brown, and of many other writers, scarcely his inferiors, are perused day after day, and year after year, by boys and girls, and persons of all ages, whose minds are incapable of discriminating the nature or merits of the food they devour, without being read once in many years by any one who has either judgment or imagination to understand while he is reading them, or memory to retain the smallest impression of their contents after he has laid them aside; while some fortunate accident not unfrequently elevates, for a considerable length of time, into every thing but the highest order of celebrity and favour, writings of the same species, entirely their inferiors in every quality that ought to command the public approbation. We earnestly recommend these novels of Brown to the attention of our readers. In all of them, but especially in Wieland, they will discern the traces of a very masterly hand. Brown was not indeed a Godwin; but he possessed much, very much, of the same dark, mysterious power of imagination which is displayed in Caleb Williams, St Leon, and Mandeville; much also of the same great author's deep and pathetic knowledge of the human heart; and much of his bold sweeping flood of impassioned eloquence. There are scenes in Wieland which he that has read them and understood them once, can never forget – touches which enter into the very core of the spirit, and leave their glowing traces there for ever behind them. Wild and visionary in his general views of human society, and reasoning and declaiming like a madman whenever the abuses of human power are the subjects on which he enlarges – in his perceptions of the beauty and fitness of all domestic virtues – in his fine sense of the delicacies of love, friendship, and all the tenderness, and all the heroism of individual souls, – he exhibits a strange example of the inconsistency of the human mind, and a signal lesson how easily persons naturally virtuous may, if they indulge in vague bottomless dreamings about things they neither know nor understand, become blind to many of the true interests of their species, and be the enemies of social peace and happiness, under the mask of universal reformers. The life of this strange man was a restless and unhappy one. The thoughts in which he delighted were all dark and gloomy; and in reading his works, we cannot help pausing every now and then, amidst the stirring and kindling excitements they afford, to reflect of what sleepless

midnights of voluntary misery the impression is borne by pages, which few ever turn over, except for the purpose of amusing a few hours of listless or vicious indolence. It is thus that one of his own countrymen has lately spoken of his works: [6] –

> "A writer so engrossed with the character of men, and the ways in which they may be influenced; chiefly occupied with the mind, turning every thing into thought, and refining upon it till it almost vanishes; might not be expected to give much time to descriptions of outward objects. But in all his tales, he shews great closeness and minuteness of observation. He describes as if he told only what he had seen, in a highly excited state of feeling, and in connection with the events and characters. He discovers every where a strong sense of the presence of the objects. Most of his descriptions are simple, and many might appear bald. He knew, perhaps, that some minds could be "awakened by the mere mention of a waterfall, or of full orchards and cornfields," or of the peculiar sound of the wind among the pines. We have alluded to the distinctiveness and particularity with which he describes the city visited with pestilence: – the dwelling-house, the hospital, the dying, the healed, all appear before our eyes – The imagination has nothing to do but perceive, though it never fails to multiply and enlarge circumstances of horror, and to fasten us to the picture more strongly, by increasing terror and sympathy till mere disgust ceases.
>
> The most formal and protracted description is in Edgar Huntly, of a scene in our western wilderness. We become acquainted with it by following the hero night and day, in a cold, drenching, rain storm, or under the clear sky – through its dark caverns, recesses and woods – along its ridges and the river side. It produces throughout the liveliest sense of danger, and oppresses the spirits with an almost inexplicable sadness. Connected with it are incidents of savage warfare; the disturbed life of the frontier settler; the attack of the half-famished panther; the hero's lonely pursuit of a sleep-walker; and his own adventures when suffering under the same calamity. The question is not, how much of this has happened, or is likely to happen; but, is it felt? Are we, for the time, at the disposal of the writer, and can we never lose the impression that he leaves? Does it appear in its first freshness, when any thing occurs which is a busy fancy can associate with it? Does it go with us into other deserts, and quicken our feelings and observation, till a familiar air is given to strange prospects? If so, the author is satisfied. To object that he is wild and improbable in his story is not enough, unless we can shew that his intention failed, or was a bad one.
>
> Brown delights in solitude of all kinds. He loves to represent the heart as desolate – to impress you with the self-dependence of characters, plotting, loving, suspecting evil, devising good, in perfect secrecy. Sometimes, when he would exhibit strength of mind and purpose to most advantage, he takes away all external succour, even the presence of a friend, who might offer at

least the support of his notice and sympathy. He surrounds a person with circumstances precisely fitted to weaken resolution, by raising vague apprehensions of danger, but incapable of producing so strong an excitement as to inspire desperate and inflexible energy. The mind must then fortify itself, calmly estimate the evil that seems to be approaching, and contemplate it in its worst forms and consequences, in order to counteract it effectually. He is peculiarly successful in describing a deserted house, silent and dark in the day time, while a faint ray streams through the crevices of the closed doors and shutters, discovering, in a peculiar twilight, that it had been once occupied, and that every thing remained undisturbed since its sudden desertion. The sentiment of fear and melancholy is perhaps never more lively, nor the disturbed fancy more active, than in such a place, even when we are strangers to it; but how much more if we have passed there through happiness and suffering, if the robber has alarmed our security, or if a friend has died there, and been carried over its threshold to the grave. The solemnity of our minds is not unlike that which we feel when walking alone on the sea shore at night, or through dark forests by day; for here there is no decay, nothing that man has created, and which seems to mourn in his absence; there is rapture as well as awe in our contemplations, and more of devotion than alarm in our fear."

WASHINGTON IRVING, as yet a young man, and who is at this moment in London – is a man of a much more happy and genial order of mind than Brown; and his works are much greater favourites among his own countrymen, than the best of Brown's ever were. He is the sole author of the SKETCH BOOK[7] – a periodical work, now in the course of publication at New York; from which numerous extracts have appeared in the Literary Gazette, and in many of the Magazines; none of which, however, seem to have known from whose genius they were borrowing so largely. We are greatly at a loss to comprehend for what reason Mr Irving has judged fit to publish his Sketch Book in America earlier than in Britain; but at all events he is doing himself great injustice, by not having an edition printed here, of every Number, after it has appeared at New York. Nothing has been written for a long time, for which it would be more safe to promise great and eager acceptance. The story of "Rip Van Winkle," – the "Country Life in England," – the account of his voyage across the Atlantic – and "the Broken Heart," – are all, in their several ways, very exquisite and classical pieces of writing, alike honourable to the intellect and the heart of their author. Another sketch of the same class, we shall venture to quote from a later Number of this work, as we have not yet seen it extracted by any of our contemporaries.

[Excerpts 'The Royal Poet' in its entirety.]

The style in which this is written may be taken as a fair specimen of Irving's more serious manner – it is, we think, very graceful – infinitely more so than any piece of American writing that ever came from any other hand, and well entitled to be classed with the best English writings of our day. There is a rich spirit of pensive elegance about the commencement, and every sentence that follows increases the effect. In some of the pieces of pure imaginative writing we have named above, the author strikes a deeper note, and with a no less masterly hand. He, too, has a strange power of mingling feelings of natural and visionary terror with those of a light and ludicrous kind – and the mode in which he uses this power is calculated to produce a very striking effect upon all that read with enthusiasm. He is one of the few whose privilege it is to make us "join trembling with our mirth."[8]

As a specimen of his talent for writing in a more familiar style, and on more ordinary topics, we give the following passage from the same Number of the same work.

[Excerpts 'The Country Church' in its entirety.]

Our limits prevent us from entering at present at greater length on the merits of Mr Irving; but in our next Number we propose returning to him, and giving our readers some account of his largest and most masterly work, the History of New York by Diedrick Knickerbocker,[9] a singular production of genius, the existence of which is, we believe, almost entirely unknown on this side of the Atlantic.

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John Gibson Lockhart
'Prometheus Unbound'[1]
(VII, September 1820, pp. 679–87)

From its first notice of Shelley, the magazine was torn between admiration for his poetic genius and detestation of his political convictions. The unfortunate fact was that the great scourge of the Cockneys, J. G. Lockhart, realized that one of that loathed fraternity was set to attain literary greatness. His January 1819 notice of *The Revolt of Islam* encapsulates this dichotomy, declaring that 'Mr Shelly [sic] is devoting his mind to the same pernicious purposes as … the "COCKNEY SCHOOL" so far as his opinions are concerned; but the base opinions of the sect have not been able entirely to obscure in him the character, or take away the privileges of the genius born within him'.[2] Similarly, *Blackwood's* June 1819 review of *Rosalind and Helen*, again by Lockhart, is written 'not out of anger or scorn, but real sorrow, and sincere affection',[3] and expresses the hope that Shelley can 'shake himself free' of the animus against church and state which only deforms his 'masterly genius'. Later in the same year, Lockhart reviewed *Alastor*, some three years after its publication, as the production of a 'gifted but wayward young man' who was, nonetheless, 'destined in our opinion, under due discipline and self-management to achieve great things in poetry'.[4]

One of the principal aims of the belated review of *Alastor* was to 'see what advances [Shelley's] intellect had made within [the] three years' from the poem's publication in 1816. Now, five years after *Alastor*, Shelley's poetic genius continues to advance apace, but, unfortunately for the magazine, his radical opinions inconveniently refuse to mellow. Lockhart, too good a critic of poetry to miss the excellence of *Prometheus Unbound*, but too devoted a Tory not to wince at the republicanism and anticlericalism evident in the poem's allegory, is

1. Edited by John Strachan.
2. *Blackwood's*, IV (January 1819), pp. 475–6. See the present edition, Volume 5, pp. 243–54; p. 247.
3. *Blackwood's*, V (June 1819), p. 274. See the present edition, Volume 5, pp. 287–9; p. 298.
4. *Blackwood's*, VI (November 1819), p. 149. See the present edition, Volume 5, pp. 351–8; p. 353.

forced to repeat the mantra: Shelley's poem is a 'pestiferous mixture of blasphemy, sedition, sensuality [and] poetical beauties of the highest order'. Again he entreats Shelley to leave Hunt's poetic caravan; the poet debases himself by the connection: 'Mr Shelley, as a man of genius, is not merely superior, either to Mr Hunt, or to Mr Keats, but altogether out of their sphere, and totally incapable of ever being brought into the most distant comparison with either of them'. Again Lockhart wants Shelley's greatness to be pressed in the service of better causes than republicanism, atheism and radicalism: 'the truth of the matter is this … Mr Shelley is destined to leave a great name behind him, and that we, as lovers of true genius, are most anxious that this name should ultimately be pure as well as great'. Again the 'audacious spleen and ill-veiled abomination' of his supposedly licentious verse cannot blind Lockhart to the excellences of Shelley's poetry and to the fact that this is the poet's 'best' work. Not for him the purblind Toryism of Theodore Hook dismissing Shelley's poetry as 'trash' in *John Bull*;[1] Lockhart, holding his nose at its political principles, acknowledges that *Prometheus Unbound* sees Shelley reach poetic parity with his 'greatest contemporaries'.

1. *John Bull*, 12 July 1824.

Prometheus Unbound.

WHATEVER may be the difference of men's opinions concerning the measure of Mr Shelley's poetical power, there is one point in regard to which all must be agreed, and that is his Audacity. In the old days of the exulting genius of Greece, Æschylus[1] dared two things which astonished all men, and which still astonish them – to exalt contemporary men into the personages of majestic tragedies – and to call down and embody into tragedy, without degradation, the elemental spirits of nature and the deeper essences of Divinity. We scarcely know whether to consider the *Persians* or the *Prometheus Bound*[2] as the most extraordinary display of what has always been esteemed the most audacious spirit that ever expressed its workings in poetry. But what shall we say of the young English poet who has now attempted, not only a flight as high as the highest of Æschylus, but the very flight of that father of tragedy – who has dared once more to dramatise Prometheus – and, most wonderful of all, to dramatise the *deliverance* of Prometheus – which is known to have formed the subject of a lost tragedy of Æschylus, no ways inferior in mystic elevation to that of the Δεσμωτης.[3]

Although a fragment of that perished master-piece be still extant in the Latin version of Attius[4] – it is quite impossible to conjecture what were the personages introduced in the tragedy of Æschylus, or by what train of passions and events he was able to sustain himself on the height of that awful scene with which his surviving *Prometheus* terminates. It is impossible, however, after reading what is left of that famous trilogy,*[5] to suspect that the Greek poet symbolized any thing whatever by the person of Prometheus, except the native strength of human intellect itself – its strength of endurance above all others – its sublime power of patience. STRENGTH and FORCE are the two agents who appear on this darkened theatre to bind the too benevolent Titan – *Wit* and *Treachery*, under the forms of Mercury and Oceanus,[6] endeavour to prevail upon him to make himself free by giving up his dreadful secret; – but *Strength* and *Force*, and *Wit* and *Treason*, are all alike powerless to overcome the resolution of that suffering divinity, or to win from him any acknowledgment of the new tyrant of the skies. Such was this simple and sublime allegory in the hands of Æschylus. As to what had been the original purpose of the framers of the allegory, that is a very different question, and would carry us back into the most hidden places of the history and mythology. No one, however, who

* There was another and an earlier play of Æschylus, Prometheus the Fire-Stealer, which is commonly supposed to have made part of the series; but the best critics, we think, are of opinion, that that was entirely a satirical piece.

compares the mythological systems of different races and countries, can fail to observe the frequent occurrence of certain great leading Ideas and leading Symbolisations of ideas too – which Christians are taught to contemplate with a knowledge that is the knowledge of reverence. Such, among others, are unquestionably the ideas of an Incarnate Divinity suffering on account of mankind – conferring benefits on mankind at the expense of his own suffering; – the general idea of vicarious atonement itself – and the idea of the dignity of suffering as an exertion of intellectual might – all of which may be found, more or less obscurely shadowed forth, in the original Μυθοσ[7] of Prometheus the Titan, the enemy of the successful rebel and usurper Jove. We might have also mentioned the idea of a *deliverer*, waited for patiently through ages of darkness, and at last arriving in the person of the child Io – but, in truth, there is no pleasure, and would be little propriety, in seeking to explain all this at greater length, considering, what we cannot consider without deepest pain, the very different views which have been taken of the original allegory by Mr Percy Bysshe Shelley.

It would be highly absurd to deny, that this gentleman has manifested very extraordinary powers of language and imagination in his treatment of the allegory, however grossly and miserably he may have tried to pervert its purpose and meaning. But of this more anon. In the meantime, what can be more deserving of reprobation than the course which he is allowing his intellect to take, and that too at the very time when he ought to be laying the foundations of a lasting and honourable name. There is no occasion for going round about the bush to hint what the poet himself has so unblushingly and sinfully blazoned forth in every part of his production. With him, it is quite evident that the Jupiter whose downfall has been predicted by Prometheus, means nothing more than Religion in general, that is, every human system of religious belief; and that, with the fall of this, he considers it perfectly necessary (as indeed we also believe, though with far different feelings) that every system of human government also should give way and perish. The patience of the contemplative spirit in Prometheus is to be followed by the daring of the active Demagorgon, at whose touch all "old thrones" are at once and for ever to be cast down into the dust.[8] It appears too plainly, from the luscious pictures with which his play terminates, that Mr Shelly[9] looks forward to an unusual relaxation of all moral *rules* – or rather, indeed, to the extinction of all moral feelings, except that of a certain mysterious indefinable *kindliness*, as the natural and necessary result of the overthrow of all civil government and religious belief. It appears, still more wonderfully, that he contemplates this state of things as the ideal SUMMUM BONUM.[10] In short, it is quite impossible that there should exist a more pestiferous mixture of blasphemy, sedition, and sensuality, than is visible in the whole structure and strain of this poem – which, nevertheless, and notwithstanding all the detestation its principles excite, must and will be

considered by all that read it attentively, as abounding in poetical beauties of the highest order – as presenting many specimens not easily to be surpassed, of the moral sublime of eloquence – as overflowing with pathos, and most magnificent in description. Where can be found a spectacle more worthy of sorrow than such a man performing and glorying in the performance of such things? His evil ambition, – from all he has yet written, but most of all, from what he has last and best written, his *Prometheus*, – appears to be no other, than that of attaining the highest place among those poets, – enemies, not friends of their species, – who, as a great and virtuous poet has well said (putting evil consequence close after evil cause).

"Profane the God-given strength, and *mar the lofty line*."[11]

We should hold ourselves very ill employed, however, were we to enter at any length into the reprehensible parts of this remarkable production. It is sufficient to shew, that we have not been misrepresenting the purpose of the poet's mind, when we mention, that the whole tragedy ends with a mysterious sort of dance, and chorus of elemental spirits, and other indefinable beings, and that the SPIRIT OF THE HOUR, one of the most singular of these choral personages, tells us:

> I wandering went
> Among the haunts and dwellings of mankind,
> And first was disappointed not to see
> Such mighty change as I had felt within
> Expressed in other things; but soon I looked,
> And behold! THRONES WERE KINGLESS, and men walked
> One with the other, even as spirits do, &c.[12]

Again –

> Thrones, altars, judgement-seats, and prisons; wherein,
> And beside which, by wretched men were borne
> Sceptres, tiaras, swords, and chains, and tomes
> Of reasoned wrong, glozed on by ignorance,
> Were like those monstrous and barbaric shapes,
> The ghosts of a no more remembered fame,
> Which, from their unworn obelisks, look forth
> In triumph o'er the palaces and tombs
> Of those who were their conquerors: mouldering round
> Those imaged to the pride of kings and priests,
> A dark yet mighty faith, a power as wide
> As is the world it wasted, and are now
> But an astonishment; even so the tools
> And emblems of its last captivity,
> Amid the dwellings of the peopled earth,

> Stand, not o'erthrown, but unregarded now.
> And those foul shapes, abhorred by god and man,
> Which, under many a name and many a form
> Strange, savage, ghastly, dark, and execrable,
> Were Jupiter, the tyrant of the world;
> And which the nations, panic-stricken, served
> With blood, the hearts broken by long hope, and love
> Dragged to his altars soiled and garlandless,
> And slain among men's unreclaiming tears,
> Flattering the thing they feared, which fear was hate,
> Frown, mouldering fast, o'er their abandoned shrines:
> The painted veil, by those who were, called life,
> Which mimicked, as with colours idly spread,
> All men believed and hoped, is torn aside;
> The loathsome mask has fallen, the man remains
> Sceptreless, free, uncircumscribed, but man
> Equal, unclassed, tribeless, and nationless,
> Exempt from awe, worship, degree, the king
> Over himself.[13]

Last of all, and to complete the picture: –

> And women, too, *frank*, *beautiful*, and *kind*
> As the free heaven which rains fresh light and dew
> On the wide earth, past; gentle radiant forms,
> From CUSTOM'S evil taint exempt and pure;
> Speaking the wisdom once they dared not think,
> Looking emotions once they dared not feel,
> And *changed to all which once they dared not be*,
> *Yet being now*, *made earth like heaven; nor pride*,
> *Nor jealousy*, *nor envy*, *nor ill shame*,
> *The bitterest of those drops of treasured gall*,
> *Spoilt the sweet taste of the Nepenthe*, *Love!*[14]

It is delightful to turn from the audacious spleen and ill-veiled abomination of such passages as these, to those parts of the production, in which it is possible to separate the poet from the allegorist – where the modern is content to write in the spirit of the ancient – and one might almost fancy that we had recovered some of the lost sublimities of Æschylus. Such is the magnificent opening scene, which represents a ravine of icy rocks in the Indian Caucasus – Prometheus bound to the precipice – Panthea and Ione seated at his feet. The time is night; but, during the scene, morning slowly breaks upon the bleak and desolate majesty of the region.

> [Quotes *Prometheus Unbound*, I.1–120 (there are no scenes in the first act), in which Prometheus grieves over the pain he has gone through. His cries are

met with voices from the mountains, springs, air, whirlwinds and earth, each of which describes the pain and suffering they have silently beheld.]

Or the following beautiful chorus, which has all the soft and tender gracefulness of Euripides,[15] and breathes, at the same time, the very spirit of one of the grandest odes of Pindar.[16]

[Quotes *Prometheus Unbound*, II.ii.1–40, in which we hear the two Semichoruses of Spirits. Semichorus I (ll. 1–23) describes how only a dewdrop can get through a thicket of trees, and how a single star rises in the heavens and bursts forth in light that is lost just as quickly as it is produced. Semichorus II (ll. 24–40) concerns nightingales, love, music, death and the renewal of love.]

We could easily select from the Prometheus Unbound, many pages of as fine poetry as this; but we are sure our readers will be better pleased with a few specimens of Mr Shelly's style, in his miscellaneous pieces, several of which are comprised in the volume. The following is the commencement of a magnificent "VISION OF THE SEA."

'Tis the terror of tempest. The rags of the sail
Are flickering in ribbons within the fierce gale:
From the stark night of vapours the dim rain is driven,
And when lightning is loosed, like a deluge from heaven,
She sees the black trunks of the waterspouts spin,
And bend, as if heaven was raining in,
Which they seem'd to sustain with their terrible mass
As if ocean had sank from beneath them: they pass
To their graves in the deep with an earthquake of sound,
And the waves and the thunders made silent around
Leave the wind to its echo. The vessel, now toss'd
Through the low-trailing rack of the tempest, is lost
In the skirts of the thunder-cloud: now down the sweep
Of the wind-cloven wave to the chasm of the deep
It sinks, and the walls of the watery vale
Whose depths of dread calm are unmoved by the gale,
Dim mirrors of ruin hang gleaming about;
While the surf, like a chaos of stars, like a rout
Of death-flames, like whirlpools of fire-flowing iron
With splendour and terror the black ship environ,
Or like sulphur-flakes hurl'd from a mine of pale fire
In fountains spout o'er it. In many a spire
The pyramid-billows with white points of brine
In the cope of the lightning inconstantly shine,
As piercing the sky from the floor of the sea.
The great ship seems splitting! it cracks as a tree,

While an earthquake is splintering its root, ere the blast
Of the whirlwind that stripped it of branches has past.
The intense thunder-balls which are raining from heaven
Have shatter'd its mast, and it stands black and riven.
The chinks suck destruction. The heavy dead hulk
On the living sea rolls an inanimate bulk,
Like a corpse on the clay which is hung'ring to fold
Its corruption around it. Meanwhile, from the hold,
One deck is burst up from the waters below,
And it splits like the ice when the thaw-breezes blow
O'er the lakes of the desart! Who sit on the other?
Is that all the crew that lie burying each other,
Like the dead in a breach, round the foremast? Are those
Twin tygers, who burst, when the waters arose,
In the agony of terror, their chains in the hold;
(What now makes them tame, is what then made them bold;)
Who crouch, side by side, and have driven, like a crank,
The deep grip of their claws through the vibrating plank.
Are these all? Nine weeks the tall vessel had lain
On the windless expanse of the watery plain,
Where the death-darting sun cast no shadow at noon,
And there seem'd to be fire in the beams of the moon,
Till a lead-colour'd fog gather'd up from the deep
Whose breath was quick pestilence; then, the cold sleep
Crept, like blight through the ears of a thick field of corn,
O'er the populous vessel. And even and morn,
With their hammock for coffins the seamen aghast
Like dead men the dead limbs of their comrades cast
Down the deep, which closed on them above and around,
And the sharks and the dog-fish their grave-clothes unbound,
And were glutted like Jews with this manna rain'd down
From God on their wilderness.[17]

All are dead except a woman and a child; nothing can be more exquisite than that picture.

At the helm sits a woman more fair
Than heaven, when, unbinding its star-braided hair,
It sinks with the sun on the earth and the sea.
She clasps a bright child on her upgather'd knee,
It laughs at the lightning, it mocks the mixed thunder
Of the air and the sea, with desire and with wonder
It is beckoning the tygers to rise and come near,
It would play with those eyes where the radiance of fear
Is outshining the meteors; its bosom beats high,