

Nicholas Mason and Tom Mole, eds., *Romantic Periodicals in the Twenty-First Century: Eleven Case Studies from Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020. Pp. 288. £80. ISBN 9781474448123.

Romanticists, in Nicholas Mason's and Tom Mole's view, have displayed a regrettable 'slowness [...] to develop their own distinctive approach to periodical studies' (4). We have been outmatched by 'industrious Victorianists' (4), who have muscled in on Romantic turf and produced century-spanning volumes like the *Routledge Handbook to Nineteenth-Century British Periodicals and Newspapers* (2016) without a single Romanticist contributor. Framed in this context, Mason and Mole's edited volume does not just serve as a waymarker, highlighting new trends and directions in twenty-first-century Romantic periodical research; more fundamentally, it is a wake-up call.

Taking *Blackwood's* as an 'Exceptional, but Representative' example of Romantic periodical output, they invite their contributors to help remedy this deficiency by illustrating how modern critical approaches and digital tools might allow researchers 'to ask questions we might never before have entertained' (7). Jon Klancher's opening essay on how research practices have changed since the 1980s argues that, while 'digital's great capacity for search' (18) has allowed for precise examinations of works like *Blackwood's*, it also 'seriously compromises our ability to browse' (26). Though this limitation to 'random access' may perhaps be overstated, Klancher's piece contains many astute and subtle observations on evolving research practices.

Where Klancher is open-ended and reflective, Megan Coyer's subsequent essay focuses specifically on the importance of rigorous search techniques in her attempts at 'identifying embedded medical content' – despite the tendency of database search results to prove 'difficult to navigate' (38). Illustrating how she has achieved this in her research, the piece neatly mirrors Klancher's analysis of pre-digital scholarship, fittingly dissecting modern critical approaches to *Blackwood's* own critical dissection. Just as Coyer explores the usefulness of modern search methods in making sense of the sprawling mass of *Blackwood's* content, so Christine Woody considers modern theoretical tools, particularly 'the speech act theory of J. L. Austin' (78), as a means of assessing the authenticity of the periodical's unstable personae. Nicholas Mason similarly reflects on modern critical developments, arguing that regular contributors like Caroline Bowles reveal that, whilst 'it would be a stretch to label the publisher or his magazine proto-feminist, both were considerably more forward-thinking on women's literature than most scholarly accounts would have it' (178). Like Coyer, Woody and Mason update and nuance *Blackwood's* image for the twenty-first century.

Each of these essays, to varying degrees, develop the collection's titular interest in *Romantic Periodicals in the Twenty-First Century*, but, as the volume progresses, this focus shifts elsewhere. Tom Mole's excellent essay on legal authority picks up and develops some of the questions of literary identity and linguistic control that Coyer and Woody explore, but it does not speak to the introduction's interest in twenty-first-century research practices and concerns. Similarly, Alexander Dick's essay on colonialism and the highland clearances, and Caroline McCracken-Flesher's on the former slave Mary Prince and her relationship with *Blackwood's*, both focus more on their material than their research methods. They do however add considerable depth to issues that are very much modern concerns, illustrating how, despite its bluster, *Blackwood's* was rarely straightforward or single-minded in its stances.

Mark Parker positions *Blackwood's* within the broader sweep of intellectual history, arguing that the brutality of the Cockney School attacks reflects the magazine's 'capacious programme of counter-Enlightenment resistance' – its rejection of excessive rationality (99).

Mark Schoenfield also takes up this broader view, reflecting on how its ‘blend of the secretive and the confident’ represents an important stage in the ‘development of the periodical industry from the era dominated by the polite essays crafted by Joseph Addison and Richard Steele’ (116-17), replacing their rhetoric with confessional intimacy. Kristin Flieger Samuelian’s penultimate essay echoes some of these ideas, considering how *Blackwood’s* approach to extracting medieval source material influenced subsequent publications. In taking these wider perspectives, Parker, Schoenfield and Samuelian begin to unravel the degree to which *Blackwood’s* is in fact ‘Exceptional, but Representative’, as suggested in the introduction (7).

Some of the inherent tensions in this positioning of *Blackwood’s* as ‘representative’ are however revealed in Joanne Shattock’s concluding essay, which explores its ‘longevity’ with a detailed account of its post-Romantic history up to 1980. The piece is thorough and wide-ranging, satisfyingly bookending our consideration of the magazine – but, by its nature, it has little to say on the volume’s defining interest in twenty-first-century research practices. Similarly, given the introduction’s criticism of century-spanning collections’ neglect for the Romantic period as a whole (a symptom of the ‘vogue for “long” literary periods’), it is noticeable that this volume on ‘Romantic Periodicals’ spends more time considering the 1890s than the 1790s (5).

However, the concentration on *Blackwood’s* and its characters does, of course, have advantages, giving focus and personal interest to what might have been an overly technical and theoretical volume. With its varied strands spreading out rather than intertwining, the volume captures the diversity of modern periodical research, achieving its goal of signposting these trends for future Romanticist scholarship.

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