

**Robert Morrison and Daniel S. Roberts, eds., *Romanticism and Blackwood's Magazine: 'An Unprecedented Phenomenon'*. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. Pp. 310. £63. ISBN 9780230304413.**

This brilliant collection of essays is stimulating and useful for anyone with an interest in Romantic print culture. Such is the clarity and insight of each essay that scholars of all stages will find thought-provoking readings of many aspects of *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*. In their introduction, Robert Morrison and Daniel Sanjiv Roberts explain what made *Blackwood's* a unique and dynamic player in the literary marketplace. By collapsing generic categories and 'mixing together fiction, reviews, correspondence, and essays', William Blackwood created a new model for magazines (2). He also fostered a distinctive character for his miscellany, which 'bristled always with confidence and contradiction' (1). The introduction sets the tone for the lively style and high calibre of the discussions which follow. Picking up Coleridge's admiration for the 'unprecedented Phenomenon' of *Blackwood's* as 'the only – remaining link between the Periodical Press and the enduring literature of Great Britain' (qtd. 14), the collection examines the important role *Blackwood's* played in shaping post-Waterloo literary culture and debates.

While the twenty chapters are arranged under five broad headings, situating *Blackwood's* in relation to 'the Periodical Press', 'Culture and Criticism', 'Fictions', 'at Home' and 'Abroad', the editors and contributors also invite other ways of exploring shared currents of interest. The use of cross-referencing, with contributors often responding to one another's work, creates both a strong sense of critical dialogue and shared intellectual enterprise. Overall, readers are given the impression of being encouraged to join an exciting critical conversation.

Philip Flynn's chapter on the first issue of the rebranded *Blackwood's* of October 1817 perfectly captures the provocative way in which the magazine ('Maga' to its friends) exploded onto the literary scene. It contained John Wilson's savage review of Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*; J. G. Lockhart's vitriolic attack on 'the Cockney School'; and the scandalous 'Ancient Chaldee Manuscript', a parody of Edinburgh literary politics in biblical style, co-authored by Hogg, Lockhart and Wilson. Thomas Richardson counters the prevalent idea of Lockhart's venom by shedding light on his intelligence as a critic and his contributions of poetry and translations of classical literature. Several essays focus on Wilson, starting with Morrison's illuminating comparison of him with De Quincey. Richard Cronin gives a compelling account of his career and placing as a Regency author, while John Strachan draws out the importance of sports to Wilson's brand of masculinity and national vigour.

Gillian Hughes's excellent essay has a vital role in emphasising *Blackwood's* as a Scottish national project, as well as elucidating James Hogg's importance as both a contributor of short stories and poems and a fictional character in the magazine. Tim Killick's chapter, one of the best in the volume, demonstrates how, within a few months of its inception, *Blackwood's* began to create the modern short story. Conversely, William Christie attends to its pioneering scientific culture through the work of Robert Jameson and David Brewster, who went on to shape nineteenth-century science.

Conflicts of identity, politics, class, and canonicity were fought in and out of Maga's pages. In keeping with the blurring of fiction and non-fiction explored by Killick, David Higgins analyses how confessional writing addresses the broader magazine culture of authorial duplicity, and Tom Mole elucidates the complexities of 'personalities'. As Mark Schoenfield shows, identities were fundamentally unstable in periodicals and their ownership was fraught; the *Blackwood's* taste for violence spilt out into the duel which killed John Scott. More playfully, David Stewart argues that the contrary impulses of a 'culture of

miscellaneity' and the separation of 'high' and 'low' literatures, which were defining features of *Blackwood's*, were expressed in 'a peculiarly Blackwoodian mode of cultural allusion' (116). Jason Camlot similarly explores the interplay of the canonical and ephemeral in the competitive attempts of critics to elevate themselves to equal status with poets.

The stand-out essay for me was Nicholas Mason's fascinating take on 'communal Romanticism' and the *Blackwood's* 'school of criticism' through the reception of Mary Shelley. He reveals how Shelley's work was 'read and mis-read through an ever-changing set of pre-assumptions about her authorial identity and the literary communities in which she was imagined to be participating' (104). Nanora Sweet provides a welcome analysis of Felicia Hemans's successful career in the male-dominated magazine, and of the 'disciplining' of her ambitions through the *Noctes Ambrosianae* (242).

The final chapters consider *Blackwood's* and the wider world, with Daniel Sanjiv Roberts looking at the mediation of Indian literature, and Anthony Jarrells exploring tales of the colonies. But a stronger re-positioning of *Blackwood's* at home would also have been useful. Attention to Maga's national identity is largely lacking, and it is not at all clear how this collection situates itself in relation to 'four nations' Romanticism. It might have been interesting to conclude the reassessment of *Blackwood's* and 'Romanticism' with some discussion of its reception by young readers who became Victorian writers (the Brontës, Dickens, and Robert Browning) or its transatlantic influence on readers such as Edgar Allan Poe. Nevertheless, this is an informative and engaging book which prompts our own re-thinking.

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