

**David Stewart, *Romantic Magazines and Metropolitan Literary Culture*. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. Pp. 248. £50. ISBN 9780230251786.**

**Kim Wheatley, *Romantic Feuds: Transcending the 'Age of Personality'*. Farnham and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2013. Pp. 204. £55. ISBN 9781409432739.**

David Stewart's clear and concise title is one of many good things about his book, suggesting three of its principal concerns: the development of the genre of the magazine, its symbiotic relationship with metropolitan culture and its surprising appropriations of emerging Romantic notions of the literary. A couple of key terms which the title does not contain are 'commercial', a descriptor which plays a major role in Stewart's characterisations of magazines' activities, and '1815-1825', a tightly-defined period during which he contends that 'the need for a new set of boundaries co-existed with an uncertainty as to where those boundaries would be drawn' (206). In examining this particular decade, Stewart seeks to complicate Jon Klancher's assertion that periodical audiences fragmented after the 1790s, suggesting that a major characteristic of the magazines published at this time was their 'relationship with a market which united all shades of opinion in mutual juxtaposition' (8).

Critical accounts often lump together magazines and Reviews and pay attention principally to what they have to say about the lives and works of poets and novelists. Stewart's book focuses specifically on magazines and takes pains to account for the variety of their forms and contents. In his first chapter, he traces a genealogy distinct from that of the Reviews, arguing that just as the *Edinburgh* outmoded the *Monthly* and the *Critical*, newer magazine forms pioneered by Leigh Hunt in the *Examiner* and developed in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* outmoded older models: 'Where the *Gentleman's* creates a miscellaneity based on the diversity of its readers' interests, the new magazines create a miscellaneity based on the diversity of their readers' (19). His second chapter develops this assertion by arguing that the various magazines were far from being polarised and inexorable opponents. He contends that 'Periodicals are not simply political entities: they are literary styles' (83) and goes on to demonstrate the ways in which these styles coexist with and enhance one another. Readers of the magazines were 'not invited to resolve all their different colours into white, but to enjoy these differences, much as a spectator enjoys the rapid succession of contrasting images in a busy street or in a firework display' (84). These insights allow Stewart to resituate the Cockney School attacks by showing how they had positive implications for Hunt as well as negative ones, serving to increase his profile and as acknowledgements of his work trailblazing new magazine manners.

During the years immediately after Waterloo, Stewart argues that magazine writers wrote into being and worked within a connected, referential periodical culture in which specific audiences were evoked, but in which readers were assumed to be omnivorous, mirroring 'the Cockney's glancing, active vision' in partaking of 'a social, aesthetic and cultural confusion that was as bewildering as it was enjoyable' (119). The difficulty – possibly an unsolvable one – with this contention is the dearth of accounts of readers' experiences, making it complicated to gauge the extent to which readers actually understood magazines in this way. Stewart is certainly correct, though, in arguing for the probability of this interpretation and in pointing out flaws in the contrary case; he writes that there 'is no persuasive evidence that the readerships of different magazines were mutually exclusive' and cites numerous examples of magazines depicting interconnected readerships that 'transcend audience demarcations' (59).

The book's arguments generally circle back to the Blackwoodsmen and their works, and the canonical Romantic essayists play a prominent supporting role, but Stewart pays considerable attention to less well-known writers, including John Hamilton Reynolds, Peter George Patmore, Thomas Griffiths Wainwright and William Frederick Deacon. He also draws examples from relatively obscure titles including *McPhun's Glasgow Magazine*, the *British Lady's Magazine* and *Knight's Quarterly Magazine*. His book innovates in its portrayals of the complex interconnections within the periodical marketplace and in its recovery of neglected magazine discourses. David Higgins has argued that the magazines played a key role in promoting Romantic genius; Stewart shows that they also played a major part in marketising it, contending that writers such as De Quincey and Coleridge were able to make themselves 'instantly recognisable, and hence saleable, by insisting on a literariness [...] defined by its separation from the market place' (184). As he demonstrates particularly effectively in his readings of advertisement-based parodies, whatever their aesthetic achievements might have been, the magazines were also 'unavoidably commercial' (185).

In *Romantic Feuds*, Kim Wheatley distinguishes her own work from Stewart's 'materialist approach to the aesthetic turn in periodicals', stating that she seeks to 'combine a historicist awareness of the circumstances of production and the vagaries of reception with careful attention to the formal strategies of the reviewers' surprisingly imaginative prose' (16). In keeping with this aim, *Romantic Feuds* combines case histories with close readings, locating 'an aesthetic element even in routinely antagonistic, politicized and gossipy exchanges between writers and reviewers' (1). Wheatley sees the clashes she examines as 'behaving like works of literature, ignited and kept alive by mixtures of political, commercial, psychological, and artistic motives, as well as by the exigencies of periodical form' (2). She chimes with Stewart's view of magazines' politics in seeing literary feuds as conflicts that induced further opportunities to write, for the benefit of all concerned: 'although the cycle of attacks and counterattacks may be rhetorically or politically ineffectual, with their proliferation, everyone wins in the sense that feuds take on lives of their own' (5).

Wheatley contends at the outset that the 'quintessentially Romantic quest for transcendence' can be located in the feuds she examines, with their literary and aesthetic qualities causing them to temporarily escape the 'age of personality', which Wheatley defines as a 'cultural preoccupation, frequently malicious, with the private lives of individuals in the public eye' (1). One thing that her book makes clear, though, is the ease with which the potentially transcendent can be pulled back down to earth. Southey's critics might pay tribute to his literary abilities through the 'artfulness' (53) of their responses and in representing him in 'sublime version[s]' (173), but this does not prevent them from dumping these versions unceremoniously into lakes. While the feuds touch on what Wheatley identifies as being the major themes of canonical Romanticism – 'the exploration of the "deep" self, the revitalising of the everyday, the experience of the sublime, and even the power of the supernatural' (2) – one of the joys of her book is that it also represents and analyses moments of folly and pettiness, such as Lady Morgan's catching 'a "glimpse of the long leg and *ci-devant* white stocking" of the fleeing Hazlitt' (10), the critic desperately seeking to avoid an encounter with a woman he had recently criticised in the *Edinburgh*.

The body of the book consists of four chapters, examining the Wat Tyler controversy; the *Edinburgh*-led attacks on Coleridge and his works in the late 1810s; the *Quarterly's* relationships with Hunt, Hazlitt and Lady Morgan; and, more unexpectedly, the feud between the Arctic explorer John Ross and John Barrow, the second secretary of the Admiralty and a prolific reviewer in the *Quarterly*. In her previous book, *Shelley and his Readers*, Wheatley pointed out something too often neglected in reading literary conflicts; to wit, 'persecution is fun' (4). In this book, she makes a strong case for the 'quarterlies' reputation for stodginess' (15) being an inaccurate one. *Romantic Feuds* excels in bringing out the comedy

and the contradictions in the battles which it examines. Wheatley's close readings are informed and subtle, employing detailed knowledge to revivify the pleasures of these clashes. There are a few minor points that could be quibbled; for example, when interpreting Southey's description of Parliament as a 'place that afforded [William Smith] protection' (41), Wheatley does not consider the possibility that the type of protection Southey was referring to was that provided by parliamentary privilege, thereby implying that Smith's words could have been successfully prosecuted as slander in another context. Generally, though, she interrogates her cases with exemplary skill and panache. Her examinations of Jeffrey's 'unprecedented signed rejoinder' (17) to Coleridge and of the subsequent writings which saw the identities of both writers 'transmuted into fictitious creations' (95) are particularly sharp and incisive. The final chapter's examination of the political and sublime representations of Arctic expeditions in the *Quarterly* serves in itself to 'extend the scope of Romantic literature' (16) and makes clear how other critics might break further new ground through following Wheatley's example. Despite the burgeoning of works on periodicals in recent years, both these books make it clear that well-executed new approaches still have the potential to recover a great deal that is interesting, pertinent and valuable.

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