

Stewart, David. *Romantic Magazines and Metropolitan Literary Culture*. Palgrave Studies in the Enlightenment, Romanticism and Cultures of Print. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011 (pp x + 248). ISBN 9780230251786.

In February 1821, John Scott, editor of the *London Magazine*, was shot in the abdomen and subsequently died of his wounds. The death was the result of a duel fought at Chalk Farm as the culmination of a literary quarrel between Scott and J. H. Christie, who wrote for a rival publication, *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*. Who says poetry makes nothing happen? While scholars have largely read the quarrel as a struggle over systems of literary production, literary aspirations, and pretenses of gentility, David Stewart shifts the epicenter of the dispute away from such political questions and towards literary style.

This emphasis on style is part of a larger argument that the sharp increase in magazine publication post-Waterloo is the most distinctive feature of the early-nineteenth-century literary field. The magazines launched in the years covered by Stewart's study—of which he focuses most closely on *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, the *New Monthly Magazine*, the *London Magazine* and their pre-Waterloo predecessor, *The Examiner* of John and Leigh Hunt—are marked by a new insistence on their literary status. Central here was the cultivation of distinct styles, which served to distinguish new magazines from each other, but, more importantly, from a mass market saturated with transient writing. Ephemeral and permanent, literary and extra-literary, the magazines of the post-Waterloo decade are self-conscious of their uncertain, in-between status and they serve, for Stewart, as the best barometer of the period's anxieties about the relationship between literature, mere writing, and material culture. Furthermore, according to Stewart, such anxieties of definition in response to rapid expansion, indeterminacy, and the juxtaposition of disparate elements is also what implicates magazines in a mirrored relationship with the larger metropolis that surrounds their composition.

Romantic Magazines and Metropolitan Literary Culture complements work by Clifford Siskin and Paul Keen on the relationship between literature and commerce and Gregory Dart on metropolitan art and literature. Stewart's particular interest in literary magazines builds on work by Mark Parker, John Strachan, David Higgins, Mark Schoenfield, and others and on the range of magazines, like *Blackwood's*, recently made widely available through new databases and edited modern editions. All of this work takes its cue from John Klancher's seminal study of Romantic reading audiences, but where Klancher argued for a counter-public sphere in which Romantic periodicals were increasingly defined by audiences that perceived themselves in opposition to the audiences of com-

peting periodicals, Stewart suggests instead that Romantic reading audiences were much more heterogeneous in their tastes and loyalties. “Magazine readerships,” he insists, “cannot be considered in isolated opposition to each other. Readers are compelled to see across differences, and to read not simply one magazine, but a magazine culture” (8). Or, as Hazlitt pithily claimed, “*periodical criticism is favorable—to periodical criticism*” (qtd. 63).

Stewart’s emphasis on magazine culture allows him to demonstrate convincingly how quarrels between magazines (with the obvious exception of John Scott) generally worked not only to the commercial benefit of all concerned, but also, through their particular combination of personality and invective, helped participants establish the distinct styles that enabled their aspirations to literary status. A particularly striking chapter on commerce and the category of literature argues that “literature was born in a crowd” (169). It shows with great verve how De Quincey’s presentation of self as failure (notably the opium eater essays) works as a branding strategy in which success in the literary market is achieved by denial of its very existence. *Blackwood’s* and William Fredrick Deacon’s *Warreniana*, in contrast, flaunt the proximity of the aesthetic and the commercial to turn commercialism into a distinct—and distinctly marketable—literary style. Whether rejecting or embracing commercialism, in other words, all three examples exploit their relationship to commercialism as a literary tactic and as a means to create a style.

As these and many other examples attest, Stewart is to be commended for his detailed and thoughtful reading of magazine prose. There are, however, a number of problems raised by his work that remain unaddressed. First, Stewart links the magazine and the metropolis because both experience an expansion that blurs boundaries and distinctions. But is this a necessary or merely a metaphorical link? What about the audience for metropolitan magazines outside the city, and how are the mixing and juxtapositions of the magazine necessarily different from other emergent cultural spaces like the gallery and the museum? Next, there is the question of timing. When Stewart argues for the magazine form as distinctive for its blurring of the boundaries between literature and commerce, and when he refers to “this period” or “this era” one wonders what is different about the post-1815 “age of the magazine.” Issues like this suggest that Stewart’s book might be read alongside Paul Keen’s *Literature, Commerce, and the Spectacle of Modernity* (Cambridge UP, 2012). Both works raise questions about the commercialization of literature and the effect on content and form when authors self-consciously perceive their work as part of a literary market, but they offer different accounts of both the timing and effect of this important development. Such queries aside, this work should be of considerable interest to scholars of British Romanticism, especially those readers of this issue interested in print culture and the Romantic magazine.

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