As the 1820s dawned, the complexion of literary magazines began to shift decisively. As the marketplace for magazines and periodicals became ever more competitive, the need for them to clearly define themselves against their competitors became increasingly pressing. Arguably, as a result of this during the late Romantic period the lines between what might be called ‘conventional’ critical discourse, in other words, more formal critical discussions, and other types of writing and even speech, become blurred, leading to new kinds of self-referential, hybrid texts which operated in a variety of complex ways and through a multitude of relations. In this paper, I shall be considering how the London Magazine, a title which was revived in January 1820, after a thirty-five year hiatus, under the editorship of the Aberdonian John Scott. Under Scott, the London Magazine sought to explicitly define itself in response to popular tastes and pursuits, commonplace modes of discourse and a self-referential wit rooted in an assumed knowledge of the streets of the capital. In so-doing, the London Magazine was able to establish itself as a representative and avowedly metropolitan publication in stark contrast to its rivals in the periodical marketplace. This paper will consider aspects of one particular article by Thomas Hood, carried in the November 1821 issue of the London Magazine, and entitled ‘A Sentimental Journey from Islington to Waterloo Bridge in March 1821’. Hood’s article, connects the world of the literary periodical with London street-life, and employs distinctive modes of discussion and analysis, specifically the panorama and the conversation, which were becoming increasingly fashionable by the 1820s.

The factors responsible for the emergence of these newly fashionable modes of conducting critical discourse are complex; certainly, part of the reason lies in the multitude of possible methods of reading and constructing meaning that were presented by the Romantic periodical as a literary form. As Richard Cronin has noted, ‘the defining feature of the magazine is that
its contents are miscellaneous. The experience they offer their readers is desultory: readers jump from one article to another\(^1\). Although this may seem a slightly obvious point it is nevertheless worth highlighting, as many of the periodicals which emerged after the conclusion of the Napoleonic Wars exploited this feature of their composition. This idea is underscored by the fact that literary magazines and periodicals at the turn of the 1820s often seemed preoccupied with the means by which they operated, and by the diverse range of personalities involved in producing them (some of whom would gain varying degrees of infamy or celebrity. David Stewart has correctly identified the crucial role of \textit{Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine} in pioneering some of these developments, noting that:

contemporaries were quick to claim that magazine writing changed in the early nineteenth century, and that it did so in or about October 1817. Scholars of the field have tended to agree. This was the date when \textit{Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine} was launched, or rather relaunched following a failed first attempt as the \textit{Edinburgh Monthly Magazine}. There are earlier precedents – notably the periodicals of Leigh Hunt – but \textit{Blackwood’s} startled the public and encouraged other publishers to follow its lead.\(^2\)

Amongst the titles following the lead of \textit{Blackwood’s} was the relaunched \textit{London Magazine}, even though it would become the sworn arch-rival of \textit{Blackwood’s}, largely due to the controversy surrounding the infamous ‘Cockney School’ attacks of John Keats and Leigh Hunt.

An additional factor responsible for the increased dominance and vivacity of the periodical form in the 1820s can be identified in the economic and material factors influencing the literary marketplace. As Lee Erickson has noted in \textit{The Economy of Literary Form}, the so-called ‘poetry boom’ of the first twenty or so years of the nineteenth century came to an end when the price of paper decreased and advances in printing technology were made, enabling, as David Higgins suggests, ‘economies of scale’ which served as an ‘explanation for the large increase in the numbers of periodicals published after the end of the Napoleonic Wars, though as Higgins also notes, the peak of poetic publication was not actually reached until 1820.\(^3\)

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1 Richard Cronin, ‘Rattling on Exactly as They Talk: Romantic Conversations’, \textit{The European Legacy}, 2019, Vol. 24, Nos. 3–4, pp. 315–328 (315)


Between them, these economic and stylistic shifts enabled the relaunched *London Magazine* to attain its place in the front rank of magazines in the emerging marketplace.

However, there are specific aspects to the *London Magazine’s* evolving identity following its relaunch in 1820 that are worthy of comment. One of them is the magazine’s keen interest in popular sports, specifically boxing, which established an important connection with its intended readership, or at the very least, those whom it purported to represent. As John Whale has pointed out, the *London Magazine* displayed a keen interest in pugilism, most notably in articles by Pierce Egan and Bryan Waller Proctor (under the pseudonym Barry Cornwell). These articles appeared alongside literary reviews and essays, and served to highlight the broad scope of the Magazine. The apparent bridging of the gap between literary discussion and popular sport also tended to infuse the criticism itself with an irreverent, even pugilistic tone at times – another characteristic shared with *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, which also carried articles on boxing in its pages (Egan’s ‘Boxiana’ series). Indeed, aside from acquiring a distinctly masculine and rather quarrelsome identity, the presence of such articles testified to the *London Magazine’s* stated ambition to reflect the metropolitan pastimes of the city in which it resided. In the very first number of the relaunched *London Magazine* from January 1820, the Magazine’s editorial staff set out the character of the magazine in terms of its broadly democratic spirit and equally serious treatment of what might be called ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture: ‘We are inclined to connect together in this announcement, the two momentous topics of Public Manners and Politics: they are in their nature intimately connected, and circumstances peculiar to the present moment render it almost impossible to regard them separately.’ One of the chief effects of combining such disparate topics in this way was to highlight the Magazine’s critical freedom as well as the vivacity of its content, leading the editors to pronounce in the ‘Prospectus’ that ‘The London Magazine may already be fairly classed amongst the established Periodical Publications of the day; and this certainty, by allowing greater freedom to our efforts, is calculated to render them at once more strenuous and more effectual’. The editorial lines set out in the ‘Preface’ of the January 1820 issue of the magazine represent an embrace not only of popular pursuits and past-times, but also of the possibilities afforded by the miscellaneous nature of literary magazines. The editors go on to explicitly define the magazine as ‘A work intended to combine the Principles of sound Philosophy in Questions of Taste, Morals, and Politics, with the Entertainment and miscellaneous Information expected from a...

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Public Journal’. Moreover, they add that ‘We do not covet singularity of arrangement, or other peculiarity of this nature. Our object is to offer to the public a periodical work of the miscellaneous kind, entertaining by the variety of its contents, and conspicuous for its alertness in noticing matters of immediate interest’.

These were matters of interest mainly to a metropolitan reader, and such a readership could best be reached by providing what might be called a ‘panoramic’ exploration of urban life. Drawing upon the theorisation of Romantic metropolitan culture in James Chandler and Kevin Gilmartin’s study Romantic Metropolis, John Whale highlights the significance of the panorama during the late Romantic period, as the ‘form of representation which best defines the metropolis in this period and one which, as a result, challenges and redefines the elite cultural domain of Romanticism with its predilection for nature and the natural world’. Such a panoramic approach is evident in Thomas Hood’s article, as shall be seen, and the presence of panoramic explorations of urban life elsewhere in the magazine became an important part of the process by which it constructed its identity.

Another significant dimension of literary magazines and periodicals in the late Romantic period which has been highlighted by Richard Cronin is the idea of conversation. As he points out in his article ‘Rattling on Exactly as They Talk: Romantic Conversations’, the conversation was a particular mode that came to prominence in the 1820s and 1830s, and its effectiveness as a means of engaging readers with critical discourse lay in its intermediate status between more formal, abstract discussions of literature and culture and a more democratic, accessible means of exchange that might be more commonly associated with the street, the coffee-house or the Tavern (as in the case of the Hazlitt’s ‘Table-Talk’ essays, and the ‘Noctes Ambrosianae’ series of articles in Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine). In Richard Cronin’s account of the rendering of criticism as conversation in the ‘Noctes’, the ability of Romantic period conversation to reflect and engage with the latest fashions and tastes is precisely what makes it so compelling as a form, as he notes that the literary conversations of the Noctes were largely concerned with ‘the tumble of books as they issue from the press each month’.

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One particularly effective example from the pages of the relaunched *London Magazine* which encapsulates its spirit and editorial identity in Thomas Hood’s ‘A Sentimental Journey from Islington to Waterloo Bridge, in March 1821’. Taking its inspiration from Laurence Sterne’s whimsically humorous take on the travel narrative, Hood’s essay recounts a journey across London to test the boasts of a young Cockney encountered by the narrator, identified as the ‘Philosopher’, that all the variety that can be found in humanity can be encountered in London:

1. As for men,” replied the cockney “we may see them anywhere. I’ve seen Cribb, and Spring, and the best good ones that ever peeld; - and, as for manners, I learned them at the dancing school. I have not been all over England, to be sure, like my father’s riders; but I’ve been to Margate, Brighton, and Moulsey Hurst; so that what I have not seen by sack I have seen by sample. Besides, London is the very focus of England, and sure I am, that I know it from Wapping to Hyde Park corner, and have seen all that is instructive in it. I’ve been up the Monument, and down St. Paul's, over the bridges, and under the tunnel. I've seen the king and court - Mrs. Salmon's royal waxwork too, and the wild beasts at Exeter 'Change - I've seen Drury Lane and Covent Garden play-houses, besides the houses of Lords and Commons - the Soho Bazaar, - and both Bartlemy Fair, and the Brighton pavilion. I never missed a Lord Mayor's show, nor any thing that is worth seeing; and I know, by sight, Lord Castlereagh Jack Ketch, Sir William Curtis, Billy Waters, and many other public and distinguished characters.”10

The premise of this journey relates directly to the stated aim of the Magazine in the ‘Preface’ of its January 1820 issue, in that it brings the abstract world of intellectual debate into contact with a supposedly ‘ordinary’ Londoner. In resolving to undertake the journey, which in true Sternean style is suitably interrupted and digressive, the narrator collapses the boundary between street conversation and literary and philosophical debate; along the way, the problems of society are debated with a diverse cast of characters, and a bookshop is visited. At one point in the journey, when engaging a husband and wife in debate over the role of men and women in public as well as domestic life, a quarrel between them ensues, and a much larger street fight threatens to break out, which requires the mediation of the ‘Philosopher’, in spite of his self-professed ‘meekness’. At this point it seems that the pugilism endorsed by the London Magazine threatens to disrupt and even eclipse the intellectual discussion instigated by the narrator.

A key aspect of the narrative is its self-referentiality, even at one point making reference to its own possible publication in the Magazine. Underpinning the entire article are debates regarding metropolitan life, civic and national identity, as well as contemplation of London’s,

and Britain’s colonial connections. In these respects, Hood’s essay can be said so pre-empt aspects of DeQuincey’s *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* (which appeared in the previous month’s issue of the *London Magazine*), as well as the tone of some of Dickens’ street sketches from the 1830s.

Hood’s humorous and easily distracted style is reflective of a significant trend in his writings, and can also be seen in his collections *Whims & Oddities* (1827) and *Whimsicalities* (1844). The whimsical tone of ‘A Sentimental Journey from Islington to Waterloo Bridge, in March 1821’ is complemented by the shifts that occur frequently in the narrator’s style. Hood’s essay opens, as John Drew has observed, with what he describes as ‘a typically Augustan dialogue […]’ but quickly assumes a less didactic tone as the narrator begins to recount his journey by foot southwards from Islington to the Thames, via Chancery Lane. Drew also notes how the “Sentimental” expectations created by the title are continually raised and disappointed by the actual turn of events; this is compounded by the realisation that any notion that the journey will shed any light upon and of the topics of discussion raised during it is dashed when the narrator arrives at his destination in a fog so thick that the bridge cannot be seen, and the paper ends abruptly.¹¹ Fang’s point once again highlights the ironic self-awareness running throughout Hood’s essay. At one point the narrator remarks that:

2). A traveller, said I, should have all his wits about him, and so will I. He should let nothing escape him, no more will I - he should extract reflections out of a cabbage stump, like sun-beams squeezed out of cucumbers; so will I, if I can — and he should converse with every and any-one, even a fish-woman. Perhaps I will, and perhaps I will not, said I. Who knows but I may make a sentimental journey, as good as Sterne’s; but, at any rate, I can write it, and send it to the LONDON MAGAZINE.¹²

Moreover, the essay’s movement through what Drew describes as ‘contemporary London rather than in an idealized cityscape’ which illustrates ‘what may be considered as an intermediate stage in the evolution of investigative urban travel-writing from the artificially-constructed itineraries of the "Spectator" tradition’,¹³ draws attention to the significance of the

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¹³ John M. Drew, p.39
essay’s abrupt conclusion in the fog on Waterloo Bridge. Karen Fang has usefully pointed out that: ‘Waterloo Bridge was a contemporary icon the London Magazine particularly favored. The magazine began operations in a house in Waterloo Place; it appeared on the cover of the journal at least once (June 1822, No. 30), and in contributions was a frequent emblem of the metropolitan core’.¹⁴ Hood’s narrator may have traversed London in a panoramic sweep, and he may have engaged in conversation with the characters he has encountered on the streets, but ultimately the narrative which he proposes to deliver to the London Magazine when he arrives at its steps at the end of his journey has yielded not clarity, but a sense of foggy uncertainty. In this respect, Hood’s essay can be viewed as a satire upon some of the trends in late Romantic periodical discourse, including some of the characteristics favoured by the London Magazine itself. Even more perplexing for Hood’s narrator, and potentially for the magazine, is the possibility that engaging members of the public in heavyweight intellectual discourse might lead to violent unrest on the streets, as the fracas the narrator attempts to defuse seems to suggest. Amid the uncertainty which arises from the conclusion of the essay, Hood’s narrator is left with only an apologia for the editor of the London Magazine, and for the reader:

3). I must request, Mr. Editor, your utmost indulgence towards one so inexperienced as a traveller, and if you should find that the style of my narration is rugged and uneven, and that then incidents and reflections are abrupt and unconnected, I beg that you will attribute it to the unpleasant jolting of the stage, and the frequent interruptions and stoppages that it is met with.¹⁵

2,683 words

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