

**Institutional Periodical Identities?**

*British Periodicals and Romantic Identity: The “Literary Lower Empire”*. Mark Schoenfield. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. 296 pp.

Reviewed by **Christopher L. Reese**, University of Kentucky

<1> Most critical considerations of periodical literature have focused on early and mid-eighteenth-century works. These studies have generally considered either the “rise” of the periodical and/or newspaper or the various effects that the periodical had on the establishment of a “public sphere,” working within or against the theoretical paradigm established by Habermas, whose model takes the periodical and the coffeehouse as central to its construction. As we move into the later eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the periodical’s place in critical discourse shifts somewhat. It is not that the periodical becomes unimportant; however, instead of being central to the defining of social intercourse, it has generally been seen as a valuable secondary source. There certainly have been a few studies of the early nineteenth-century periodical, but not to the same degree as in the eighteenth. Thus Mark Schoenfield’s work offers a welcome rethinking of periodicals in the Romantic era as just as much, if differently construed, an influence on identity and social intercourse as the early eighteenth-century periodicals were.

<2> In his introduction, Schoenfield establishes that the central purpose of his work is to “explore how both periodicals and individuals developed, confronted, and inhabited competing models of identity” (3). This purpose immediately introduces the major terms of contention within his work: that is, the tension that exists between the periodical as a “corporate” or “institutional” body that absorbs the individual within its all-encompassing viewpoint and the individual who wishes to exist outside, if still in concert with, the social body. However, Schoenfield does not suggest that this tension is a simple one between the periodical on one side and the individual on the other. Instead, he sees this tension as embodied by periodicals themselves: “their incoherence, particularities, and maneuvers allowed and foreclosed possible self-representations for writers and celebrities” (4). In articulating this argument, Schoenfield breaks his discussion into two parts. The first deals largely with the establishment of the major early nineteenth-century periodicals (*The Edinburgh Review*, *The Quarterly Review*, *Blackwood’s*, etc.), and the ways in which they attempted, through different strategies, to establish their own individual identities and social and/or aesthetic authority as corporate bodies. The second section deals with a series of individuals who challenged the corporate power of the

reviews (Byron and Hogg being the main figures here) or who were incorporated themselves into the periodical's body.

<3> In the first chapter, Schoenfield establishes the main critical tools of his analysis through examining a series of "skirmishes" between authors and periodicals. These "skirmishes" involve Wordsworth's direct challenge to periodical shaping of his reputation as well as the satiric consideration of print technology in E. S. Barrett's *The Heroine* (1813). In examining these responses to the shaping influence of periodicals, Schoenfield introduces his controlling critical lens, institutional heteroglossia, indicating the importance of Bakhtin to Schoenfield's analysis. Thus, Schoenfield expands the Bakhtinian idea of heteroglossia as "the juncture for the meeting of different 'languages'" (25) within fiction to include the larger realm of the periodical's engagement and attempted control of aesthetic production and taste. "The periodical industry, by virtue of its internal competition and goal to inscribe the whole of society, institutionalized the principle of colliding social languages within its writing and production methods" (25). Schoenfield argues that this institutional heteroglossia within the periodical is also indicative of a larger incorporation of Romantic society: "The institutional heteroglossia that characterizes the Romantic periodicals evolves from earlier structures of magazine production, but also occurs alongside the modern corporation as an increasing prominent participant in British culture" (26). Thus the individual is placed in a position in which he or she must negotiate between the desire for an individual identity and the need to produce a social role that can be understood and workable within the world of the periodical.

<4> Before exploring this tension more fully, Schoenfield spends the next two chapters examining how the major periodicals came into existence and how they worked to define their similar yet still individual purposes within the larger publishing and/or social world. Devoting an entire chapter to the *Edinburgh Review*, the first of the big critical reviews of the period and arguably always the most powerful, Schoenfield argues that the *Edinburgh* was largely responsible for the incorporated singular voice as the primary model for the new review periodical of this era. Unlike the earlier periodical paper, such as *The Spectator* or *The Rambler*, which did share with Romantic periodicals a multiplicity of voices under one figure and a desire to shape taste within its culture, the new Romantic review more clearly represented an incorporated body that openly participated in the larger publishing world as a business as well as an aesthetic interest. In order to expand on this idea, Schoenfield offers an extended discussion of the Monetary Crisis of 1797, in which Great Britain first dropped the gold standard, leading to a deep anxiety over what constituted "value" and to what degree paper money could achieve this meaning. Through examining the way that the *Edinburgh* used this crisis to help forge its own identity, Schoenfield argues for the desire of the review to create its own meaning through the concept of intellectual economics: "The *Edinburgh* suggests that the debate regarding paper money is not about discovering an inevitable meaning but about manipulating how potential meanings will affect market behavior. Since paper money is not a fixed signifier, the cultural need for its continual definition entails a permeable boundary between the financial and intellectual marketplaces.... This dichotomy serves as the engine for the circulation of knowledge, and, as with money, the rate of that circulation determines the health of the economy" (69). Thus the *Edinburgh* sought to position itself as the major purveyor of this circulation of knowledge and thus the main arena for the intellectual market. But of course, if there really is going to be a market, then there must be competition within that market. Thus in

the next chapter, Schoenfield further elaborates the development of the review by examining how the *Quarterly Review* and *Blackwood's* each figured its own identity in response to the *Edinburgh*. The *Quarterly* most straightforwardly set itself up as a competitor: “the *Quarterly* and the *Edinburgh* were committed to a continual dialogue, an ‘alert and keen’ antagonism ... the new order was not seeking obliteration of one another, but staging an ongoing debate that would capture the public imagination and display the boundaries and contours of the imagination” (94). Therefore, Schoenfield illustrates how each of these reviews became both antagonistic to and dependent on each other for the intellectual marketplace to continue running. *Blackwood's*, on the other hand, set itself up against this “debate” by locating itself as a review that more clearly embraced historicity as a part of its own special identity. “From its outset, *Blackwood's* was championing and reproducing a notion of the historical ... [it] acknowledges ... the partiality of all history, yet represents itself as the adjudicator of those partial positions — clung to by the *Edinburgh* and *Quarterly*” (106). Thus, where the two major reviews argued with each other over issues of aesthetics, knowledge, and taste, *Blackwood's* attempted to question both of them by articulating the larger historical context in which the other two operated. Schoenfield concludes this discussion of the three major periodicals by arguing, “Each of these journals projects different conceptions of the heteroglossic periodical, of the Scottish incorporation into Great Britain, and of the identities, artificial and natural, of the author. Yet each draws upon the others — in opposition, even in anger, but also, as the publishers’ letters behind the scenes demonstrate, with cautious respect and professional admiration — to stake out its own identity and to structure that of the literary lower empire” (108). Having established the stakes that are raised by these journals both for their own identity and the larger social identity, Schoenfield then moves on to his second section, which further explores these questions by examining how individual writers challenged and/or were incorporated by the periodical endeavor.

<5> In opening the second section of his book, Schoenfield steps away from the historical specifics of periodicals and individual reactions to them in order to reconsider the question of identity itself in terms of the kinds of corporate identity that the periodicals worked to establish. Through examining the works of Hume and Hazlitt, Schoenfield establishes the growing sense of repetition as the basis for identity. “To have an identity entails the ability to repeat oneself; to be assigned an identity requires an institutional capacity to extend that identity.... This link between repetition and identity had concerned major enlightenment thinkers in its relation to the epistemological problem of the self” (112). The periodical industry was therefore instrumental in the establishment of this public, repeated self as a means of establishing a public identity for the individual writer. “The relation of identity to repetition for periodical writers was institutionally based. Professionals working at a per-sheet wage required continual reappearance; the colloquy of writing, review, and response entailed the production and reproduction of one’s names” (122). At the same time, the periodicals themselves, as corporate identities, worked to suppress the individual’s identity or absorb it into the corporate identity. While this argument is good as far as it goes, Schoenfield seems to suggest at several points in this chapter aspects of identity formation that could be said to lead to our current understanding of identity politics. However, he never clarifies whether he sees this process as something that was unique to this period and the idea of Romantic identity, or if indeed it was the first formation of the constructs of identity as performance that we see in the work of theorists like Judith Butler. But in establishing this problematic relationship between individual identity as necessarily repetitive and the incorporating identity of the periodicals, he does create the context for the subsequent chapters,

which examine three variations on the tension between the individual writer and the periodicals' power to control or shape identity.

<6> These final chapters, then, offer three particular examples of the shaping of identity and the resistance to it between individuals and the periodical press. The first of these discusses Byron's well-known dislike, if not hatred, of the periodical press and his satirical response to it in an attempt both to create his own public persona and to discredit the periodicals' power to create an identity for anyone. Byron construed this as a war or a battle: his "formulation of the intellectual terrain depended for its satirical effect on the recognition that battles, duels, wars, and other violent encounters characterized the metaphors of literary debate ... to remain alive within this embattled space depended on asserting one's identity against competing versions of one's self — including one's own publisher, and, always, those reviewers that Byron first imagined even before publication, and, over the course of his career, whom he trained into obedience" (178-9). Schoenfield sees Byron as a figure who successfully used the periodicals as a means of shaping his own identity in ways that he could ultimately control. On the other end of the spectrum is Abraham Goldsmid, a financier, who became a kind of institutional symbol of "the financial Jew" through the manipulative control of the periodicals' reporting of his activities. Indeed, Schoenfield argues that Goldsmid's activities in the financial world became known and shaped only after Goldsmid himself had died; this allowed writers and periodicals to shape his actions and persona in any way they saw fit, and thus contributed to the evolution of economic power (and especially the transition from the gold standard to paper money mentioned earlier) as well as reinforcing their own control over the power of "paper" as the source of knowledge. Schoenfield's final case study considers James Hogg. Working between the two ends of the spectrum as represented by Byron and Goldsmid, Hogg seemed to understand better the need to negotiate between the two extremes of using the periodicals to shape one's own identity and completely losing that power to the periodicals. "For Hogg, the literary marketplace was not a place for the expression of Romantic identity. It was, rather, the site of contention that revealed the self as a product of, and mediation between, personal agency and institutional power" (238).

<7> It is with this statement of the need for mediation that Schoenfield ends his study. He offers no concluding remarks, thus suggesting that in Hogg's ideas of contention and mediation lies the balance between individual identity and the institutional power that the periodicals claimed in this period. Schoenfield thus gives us a compelling lens through which to begin re-examining the notion of Romantic identity itself. While many writers may have attempted to reach for an idealized notion of the Romantic individual, the press — the organ that allowed such an identity even to be publicly expressed in the first place — always mediated the process of establishing such an identity. Therefore, any notion of Romantic identity must always be qualified by the institutional powers that made it possible.