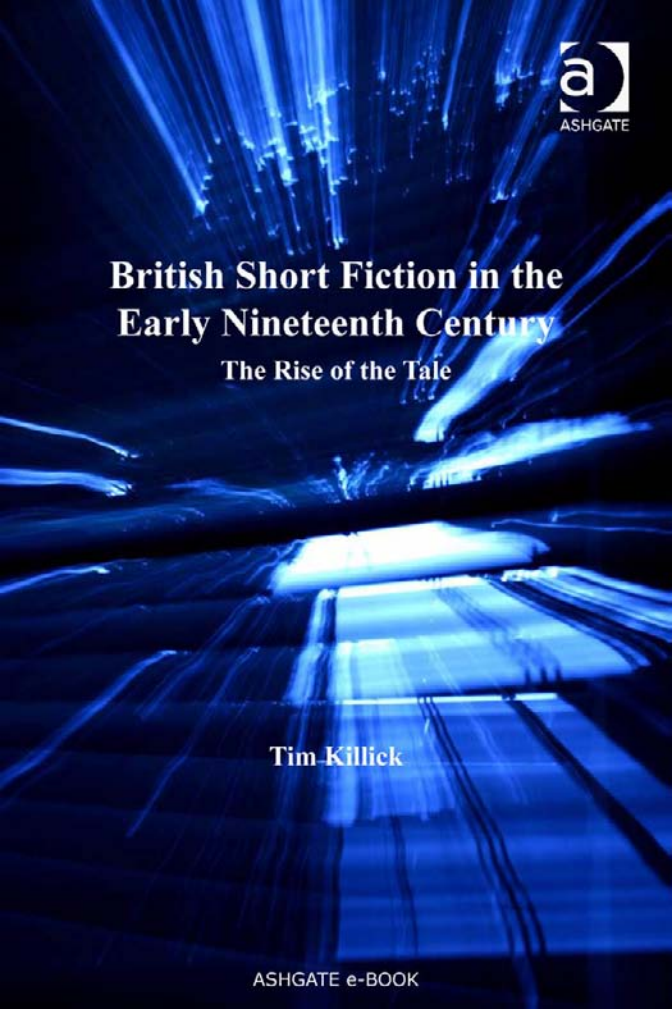
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British Short Fiction in the Early Nineteenth Century
The Rise of the Tale
Tim Killick
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BRITISH SHORT FICTION IN THE EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY

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British Short Fiction in the Early Nineteenth Century

The Rise of the Tale

TIM KILLICK
Cardiff University, UK

ASHGATE

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Introduction

My intention in this book is to present a more complete picture of the short fiction of the early nineteenth century than has previously been attempted. Relating stories and tales is as old as human culture, and the practice of putting them into print is as old as the publishing industry itself. The period covered here is no exception, and there is a wealth of stories, tales, and sketches that has never been coherently examined as part of Romantic literary history. This body of work is both ranged against and interwoven with the novels that dominate our understating of the fiction of the age. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries short fiction derived great benefit from an increase in novel publication and from new kinds of novel-writing. When this boom in fiction combined with a proliferation of new periodicals and magazines, short fiction was able to construct itself as a modern and distinct literary genre.

It has become a critical truism that the vast majority of the short fiction of the early nineteenth century is not worth reading. T.O. Beachcroft describes how 'the pages of the magazines and annuals of this period have endless examples of stories of an almost incredible degree of silliness, the lost snippets of the romantic imagination'. He further declares: 'If, however, we ask ourselves where are the short stories that correspond to a single incident, to a chapter of, say, Jane Austen, the answer is that they do not exist.'[1] Beachcroft wrote his history of the short story in the 1960s, but such attitudes have underpinned critical discussions of Romantic-era short fiction before and since. The 1830s are still the standard departure point for histories of the modern short story. Prior to the 1830s, the relative paucity of short fiction, especially in Britain, is regarded as a historical curiosity which is rarely challenged. Edgar Allan Poe and Nathaniel Hawthorne in America, and Charles Dickens in Britain, are held up as the forefathers of the genre, with a cursory nod to a few earlier writers, such as Washington Irving. As a consequence, the short fiction of the early decades of the nineteenth century remains a rich and varied area of publishing history which has historically been under-researched and undervalued. My intention here is not to try and radically reshape or expand the canon of short story writers. It is perhaps the case that many (though certainly not all) of the stories which come under discussion in the course of this book are not outstanding individual examples of the short story, as defined by modern literary criticism. Considered together, however, these stories have an aggregate cultural weight which makes them an important part of the history of Romantic literature.

Early-nineteenth-century short fiction does not fit into a single overarching intellectual agenda. Like all modes of cultural transmission, it is subject to a wide variety of influences and is practised by exponents with widely differing objectives. The only generalisation that can be made is that during this period the position and

1 T.O. Beachcroft, *The Modest Art: A Survey of the Short Story in English* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp. 94, 88.

credibility of short fiction was by no means established. Consequently, the boundaries of the genre had to be negotiated at every stage. This was the case not only for writers, but also for critics and publishers, all of whom had to adjust themselves quickly to the demands of a new kind of literature that was evolving at a rapid rate. The aim here is to chart the currents, trends, and means of publication which emerged during the early decades of the century. Some developments are derived from the popularity and influence of certain authors, and some from the new possibilities which stories and tales offered to writers. The period covered here is approximately 1800 to 1830: within this span the 1820s emerge as the dominant years, and most of the stories and collections examined here come from this decade. Of course, authors and their texts spill over the fixed borders of decades, and limiting a study of this kind strictly by years can often be unhelpful. I have therefore brought in works from outside of this date range when it has seemed appropriate.

This study consists of four main chapters. Chapter 1 operates as an overview of the short fiction of the early nineteenth century, and outlines my broad arguments. The first section of this chapter locates short fiction within several important contexts. Previous criticism in the field is surveyed and the problems raised by earlier scholarship are discussed. The thorny subject of definition is also broached, as are theories of genre in general. The overview goes on to give a brief history of short fiction prior to the nineteenth century, and to discuss the importance of the concept of the 'tale' in the Romantic period. The second part of this chapter focuses on new avenues for the publication of short fiction in the periodical press. The market for tales and stories carved out by magazines such as *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* and the *London Magazine* is analysed, and the often complex relationship between the short fiction which was published in periodicals and that which appeared in book form is also considered.

Chapter 2 focuses on the short fiction of Washington Irving and the influence of his tales on British literary history. Irving's contribution to American letters is well-documented. Less clearly defined is the impact of his work in Britain, in particular the three collections of short narrative fiction and sketches that he published while resident in England in the 1820s. *The Sketch Book* (1820), *Bracebridge Hall* (1822), and *Tales of a Traveller* (1824) attained widespread popular and critical recognition within the British Isles, and helped legitimise short fiction within critical discourse. This chapter also operates in part as a case study of short fiction writing in the period. Irving's critical reception and his influence on British contemporaries are examined, through readings of his three major story collections. His outsider's depictions of British culture and society helped shape the conception of the literary sketch, a prominent sub-genre in the early part of the century. Furthermore, by giving a new, American twist to folktales and mythology, this chapter also argues that Irving helped refresh and re-legitimise such material in the eyes of British writers (and, equally importantly, in the eyes of British publishers). Although an American writer, Irving set the stage for the publication of short fiction in Britain for the remainder of the nineteenth century.

Chapter 3 deals with the interconnections between short fiction and moral improvement. Many examples of explicitly didactic tales from the early nineteenth century are difficult for modern critics and readers to engage with enthusiastically.

Nonetheless, the moral tale was one of the most significant literary modes of the period, and many of the best-known and best-selling authors of the early nineteenth century published improving stories. The power and influence of moral short fiction during the period is traced, as is the increasing sophistication and willingness to make use of popular literary modes for the purposes of social improvement. Moral tales are contextualised with reference to the three most important practitioners from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries: Hannah More, Maria Edgeworth, and Amelia Opie. The chapter then turns to writers of the 1810s and 1820s, many of whom rejected the pedagogic didacticism of earlier writers. The most notable of these later authors is perhaps Mary Russell Mitford, whose popular series, *Our Village* (1824–32), challenged earlier modes of didactic fiction by inextricably binding rural society to a set of communal ethics. Other writers whose contributions to the moral–domestic tale are discussed include Barbara Hofland, Mary Margaret Busk, and Marion and Margaret Corbett. This chapter also examines the particular importance of moral short fiction for women writers. Didactic and improving stories are examined in the context of recent critical work on Romantic women writers, and in relation to ideas of domesticity and the dichotomy between the public and private spheres.

Chapter 4 is concerned with those collections of short fiction in which a connection can be seen between regional concerns and the use of traditional or popular materials. By a process of re-engaging with material that could be considered as common cultural property and which pre-dated contemporary society, much early-nineteenth-century short fiction contested the assumption of the primacy of progressive, urban, and rationalist thought brought about by the arrival of the Scottian historical novel. Many collections with popular foundations also pertained to a specific location, and are connected to the Romantic desire to bring together land, history, and nationality. After briefly outlining the extent of regional short fiction through the early decades of the century, discussing tales from England, Ireland, and Wales, the chapter comes to focus on Scottish collections. James Hogg's *Winter Evening Tales* (1820) and *The Shepherd's Calendar* (1829) are the central texts, and these collections are analysed in relation to other Scottish works such as John Wilson's *Lights and Shadows of Scottish Life* and Allan Cunningham's *Traditional Tales of the English and Scottish Peasantry* (both 1822).

The conclusion to this book draws together the various historical strands examined in the course of the previous chapters by looking briefly ahead to the 1830s and the arrival of Dickens's *Sketches by Boz*. In this decade of transition between what we now term the Romantic and the early Victorian periods, print culture expanded at an increasingly rapid rate and the editors of the many new magazines looked to short fiction to provide more and more of their content. Over the course of the early nineteenth century, tales, stories, and sketches had begun to enjoy a much higher literary status, and the final part of the study looks at the ways in which this status became entrenched through the new vogue for compiling anthologies that emerged during the 1830s.

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Chapter 1

Overview: Short Fiction in the Early Nineteenth Century

Part I: Criticism, History, and Definitions

Literary Criticism and Short Fiction

While most studies of short fiction acknowledge the existence of the genre in the early nineteenth century, they nonetheless view this era as one of relative infertility. The Romantic period is often seen as the final part of a long trough in the history of the short story: an evolutionary lull initiated by the demise of Medieval and Renaissance romance cycles and not reversed until the arrival of the modern short story in Europe and America in the mid-nineteenth century. Successive critics have mourned this absence. Ian Reid, for example, despite arguing that 'the short story is in essence a Romantic form: *the* Romantic prose form', describes the output of short fiction by English writers during the entire nineteenth century as 'virtually negligible'.[1] T.O. Beachcroft's analysis of the Romantic period is limited to the merits of three female authors (Hannah More, Maria Edgeworth, and Mary Russell Mitford), and to sustained derision of the story-writing efforts of otherwise exceptional authors, such as Coleridge and Mary Shelley.[2] Wendell Harris, in his comprehensive survey of nineteenth-century short fiction in Britain, gives a far more sympathetic and measured examination of the period. He nonetheless argues that book-trade conditions acted as a deterrent to potential short-fiction writers in the early part of the century, and states that 'though economic and editorial conditions can be decisively altered by the author of genius, they are of considerable strength in determining what the average competent writer feels it worthwhile to work at. Short fiction having neither an apparent mission nor an attractive market, there was little incentive for the sharpening of tools'.[3] The title of Dean Baldwin's more recent essay, 'The Tardy Evolution of the British Short Story', indicates the widespread acceptance of this critical view, and shows how academics have begun seeking

1 Ian Reid, *The Short Story* (London: Methuen, 1977), pp. 28, 29.

2 See T.O. Beachcroft, *The Modest Art: A Survey of the Short Story in English* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), Chapter 8.

3 Wendell V. Harris, *British Short Fiction in the Nineteenth Century: A Literary and Bibliographic Guide* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1979), p. 21.

explanations for the mid-century surge rather than re-investigating the early part of the century.[4]

The nineteenth century, it is generally agreed, witnessed the birth of the modern short story, but critics are still far from unanimous when isolating the exact moment of flux. There is a broad academic consensus that sometime between 1800 and 1900 short fiction ceased to be a mode which was associated solely with sentimental romance, simplistic allegory, and explicit moral didacticism. At this point, short fiction began to share the novel's concerns with psychological and social realism, as well as its broader desire for artistic and historical credibility. This shift is usually described in terms of a synthesis of two older short prose narrative forms: an amalgamation of traditional, orally-derived short narratives (tale, *conte*, *Märchen*, *skazka*, etc.) with the more polished Renaissance form of the novella (or *nouvelle*, *Novelle*, *povest*, etc.)—a predominantly literary mode, which lacks the popular oral history of the tale and which tends towards social observation while adhering more fully to realist conventions.

There are several contending historical moments for this epoch in story-writing. Wendell Harris argues for the 'arrival of the true short story in the 1880s and 1890s' with the works of Robert Louis Stevenson, Rudyard Kipling, and H.G. Wells.[5] Robert Marler cites the 1850s as the crux of any new conception of the genre, differentiating between the terms 'tale' and 'short story' in order to signal the change. Marler focuses on developments in America that he claims were driven by a shift in critical attitudes towards fictional moralising: 'The ability to suggest, to evoke, without resorting to explanations was increasingly praised. Tacked-on moral tags became a sign of mediocrity.'[6] Charles May goes further back in time and argues that the expansive literary treatment of *Märchen* (wonder or fairy tales) by German writers provides one starting point for the modern short story. May aligns Marler's tale-versus-short story dynamic with another two terms—'fable' and 'exemplum'—and claims that under the influence of German Romanticism, short fiction became increasingly sophisticated: 'at a certain historical point (roughly the end of the eighteenth or the beginning of the nineteenth centuries), it became less easy to determine the meaning lying behind the events depicted in the story.'[7]

Other critics have pointed to American writers of the 1830s and 1840s as the point of origin for new thinking on short fiction, considering the emergent talents of Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Herman Melville as the decisive factors. Largely because of Poe's embryonic but highly influential theorising on the subject, these last two decades have come to be viewed as one of the most significant points at which short fiction began to emerge as a modern form. In April and May 1842, Poe wrote two reviews of Hawthorne's *Twice-Told Tales* for *Graham's Magazine*

4 This essay appears in *Studies in Short Fiction*, 30, 1 (Winter 1993): 23–33.

5 Harris, *British Short Fiction*, p. 12.

6 Robert F. Marler, 'From Tale to Short Story: The Emergence of a Genre in the 1850's', *American Literature*, 46 (1974–75): 153–69, pp. 159–60.

7 Charles E. May (ed.), *The New Short Story Theories* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1994), Introduction, p. xxiii. May's use of the terms 'fable' and 'exemplum' draws on an earlier essay by Karl-Heinz Stierle, 'Story as Exemplum: Exemplum as Story' (1979).

in which he argued that 'the *Tale*', as he termed short prose fiction, constituted the highest literary form available to an author—one, indeed, that was superior to the novel since a tale could be read in one sitting and thus hold complete sway over the reader for its duration. Furthermore, according to Poe, a tale should be written with its 'unity of effect' uppermost in the author's mind at all times. No word or sentence should be included that did not further this predetermined set of intentions, which were calculated to bring about certain responses in the reader. While subsequent critics of short fiction have seldom accepted Poe's theories in their entirety, certain aspects of his argument are embedded in twentieth-century thinking about the genre. The conception of short fiction as a highly-wrought literary mode (the prose equivalent of a lyric poem) and the argument that shorter tales should not be viewed as inhabiting a lower echelon of the literary hierarchy than the novel have proved extremely popular within criticism of a genre that often displays an inferiority complex and has struggled to legitimise its brevity.

By re-imagining the role and the potential of short fiction, Poe's work (both critical and literary) has come to be seen as marking a crucial juncture in the history of the genre. The short fiction of Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville, and the increased output and rapid development of the form in America in the mid-nineteenth century are often considered to dominate the formation of the modern concept of anglophone short fiction. There is without doubt a strong argument that substantial strides in the writing and appreciation of short fiction took place in the works of these American authors, as the limitations and strengths of short narratives were subjected to more deliberate experimentation. In addition, the British writers of the mid- and late-Victorian period who are given centrality by Wendell Harris were indebted to the progress of the Americans. Authors from the mid-century onward, therefore, not only ushered in a significant increase in output, but also accelerated progress in the understanding of the potential artistic capacity of short fiction and helped create a truly modern form.

In spite of the importance of the American short story boom and its Victorian heirs, my contention is that the focus on the mid-to-late century inevitably marginalises a large part of the history of the genre. Such an attitude is arguably a result of reading backwards—of criticising the short fiction of the earlier part of the century in light of both the Victorian short story and the theorisation of the genre that took place after the 1840s. The short fiction produced in Britain during the early nineteenth century deserves more critical attention than it has so far received, and the practice of mapping generic change should not simply be a case of tracing significant influences. The process of historical analysis should encompass not only the trends and qualities that came to define the later stages of a genre, but should also give attention to innovative modes and sub-genres that failed to germinate and remain peculiar to their own era. The rush to point to the first, best, and most significant can lead to quick assumptions and easy dismissals of texts and writers whose contributions, though quieter than others', were examples of widespread practice at the time of writing and which are still immensely valuable to critics when looking back at the literature of an earlier era.

The assumption of a relative lack of literary merit is one way in which modern criticism has limited readings of early-nineteenth-century short fiction, but it is not

the only way. A second somewhat pernicious critical supposition involves locating short fiction within the rather nebulous notion of an archetypal Romantic text. By situating early-nineteenth-century short fiction in comparison to an idealised external mode an unrealisable opposition is set up. The fiction of the early part of the century seldom conforms to the aesthetic values and concepts of art that literary critics have attributed to the poets and philosophers of the Romantic period. In spite of this, some studies of short fiction have sought to locate its early-nineteenth-century incarnation within a poetic Romantic tradition. Charles May, one of the most important and influential modern short story theorists, conflates the aesthetic concerns of Romantic-era short fiction with those of poetry, and attempts to imbue the genre with a peculiarly Wordsworthian sensibility and a history similar to that of the lyric poem—in effect giving short fiction a similar ideology to that expressed by Wordsworth in his 1802 Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*. I quote at length here, because May's argument encapsulates an entire way of thinking about early-nineteenth-century short fiction:

> The romantics attempted to demythologize folktales, to divest them of their external values, and to remythologize them by internalizing those values and self-consciously projecting them onto the external world. They wished to preserve the old religious values of the romance and the folktale without their religious dogma and supernatural trappings. Understanding that stories were based on psychic processes, they secularized the mythic by foregrounding their subjective and projective nature. The folktale, which previously had existed seemingly in vacuo as a received story not influenced by the teller, became infused with the subjectivity of the poet and projected onto the world as a new mythos. Value existed in the external world, but, as the romantics never forgot, only because it existed first within the imagination of the artist. Just as the uniting of folktale material with the voice of an individual perceiver in a concrete situation gave rise to the romantic lyric, as Robert Langbaum has shown, the positioning of a real speaker in a concrete situation, encountering a specific phenomenon that his own subjectivity transforms from the profane into the sacred, gave rise to the short story.[8]

To a large extent this account is wishful thinking, and it is certainly an over-generalisation which is not borne out when reading the vast majority of Romantic-era short fiction. The notion of a clear-cut and homogeneous *Romantic* tradition of the short story does not exist. The writers who placed short fiction in anything like the role that May here broadly attributes to 'the romantics' were few and far between, and there is often little sense of a collective ideology, even amongst those writers whose works are connected thematically, stylistically, or geographically.

To try and connect short fiction to a poetic Romantic tradition is a fraught process. There are few meaningful overlaps between the fiction and the poetry of the period, and while some writers, such as James Hogg, produced a variety of works in different genres that can all be connected to a notion of Romanticism, it does not follow that generic ideologies can be stitched together in this way to create a coherent historical view. The representations of oral narratives in Hogg's short fiction, for example, often strongly oppose those contained in *Lyrical Ballads*, and are part of a world

8 Charles E. May, *The Short Story: The Reality of Artifice* (New York: Twayne, 1995), p. 5.

in which the notion of Wordsworthian 'subjectivity' sublimely transforming 'the profane into the sacred' is treated with satirical derision. Moreover, much Romantic-era short fiction was rather conservative, in both its form and content, and discourses such as evangelicalism and moral–domestic fiction played important roles. All of the critics cited above have produced important scholarship and commentary on the theme of the short story, and many have pioneered the study of a relatively undervalued genre, yet when it comes to the early nineteenth century many of them fall back onto a series of assumptions, suppositions, and untested clichés about the short fiction of the period. Critics tread far more carefully when making broad-brush connections between Romantic ideologies and the novel, and short fiction deserves an equally nuanced approach.

Some Definitions

Since the 1960s there has been a resurgence in the study of genre, and theories of the short story have been well represented. Recent criticism builds on influential earlier texts such as Brander Matthews's essay 'The Philosophy of the Short Story' (1884) and H.E. Bates's influential study, *The Modern Short Story* (1941), both of which made advances on Poe's commentaries. As I have discussed, the majority of early criticism took Poe's basic premise—that short fiction was defined not only by its length, but also by stylistic and structural techniques, and by the ideological qualities of its writing—as a starting point. One consequence of this has been a theoretical approach that differentiates between the 'short story' (often prefixed by 'true' or 'modern', and occasionally hyphenated) and short fiction in general. Short stories are often defined not only in terms of magnitude, but also meritocratically, using stylistic, thematic and qualitative factors. From the point of view of many critics, the short story is a genre that differs in certain ways from the more diffuse form of short fiction. In Ian Reid's words, 'there may be certain formal properties which distinguish *the* short story […] from stories that just happen to be short'.[9] This conviction has become the major force shaping modern criticism of the genre. No other kind of literature has been subjected to as many attempts at definition as the short story, and this taxonomic criticism has given us to a relatively narrow canon of 'true' short stories, as critics continue to search for what Wendell Harris describes as 'narratives […] which fit perfectly well into the yet-to-be-recognized genre'.[10]

A bewildering variety of definitions and conventions have been proposed for the short story. Frank O'Connor, a short story writer himself, asserts that the genre is one that has 'never had a hero', and therefore lends itself to stories of outsiders and society's marginalia.[11] In her contribution to the useful essay collection *Short Story Theory at a Crossroads*, Mary Rohrberger argues that an intricate lyrical condition is the defining characteristic of the genre. The short story, she claims, demonstrates a movement away from the 'simple narrative', which accomplishes meaning through

9 Reid, *The Short Story*, p. 4.

10 Harris, *British Short Fiction*, p. 12.

11 Frank O'Connor, *The Lonely Voice: A Study of the Short Story* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1963), p. 18.

basic 'ironic reversals', and instead tends towards a final effect derived from complex and inconclusive narrative patterning: 'where patterning is defined by a principle of organization and where degrees of tensions or expectations and gratifications involve us in a steady rhythmic process toward a particular ending necessitated by the pattern involved.'[12] In the same essay collection Charles May offers a contrasting view of the short story, and argues that it has managed to avoid the elaborate realism of the novel and retain its connections to mythic, elemental story forms. For May, the genre operates through a poetic technique of 'metaphoric projection and hierophantic revelation', and in doing so retains strong links to its romance heritage.[13] Definitions and counter-definitions roll on and on: from Formalist methods of motif-charting, derived from Vladimir Propp's work on the folktale, to imposing the limits of genre by maximum word-count and number of pages, the delineation and classification of short fiction has engaged successive generations of literary critics.[14]

The point at which most of these attempts at stylistic definition converge is in the belief that short fiction from the mid-century onwards differs in some important way from earlier examples of the genre. It is the precise point of transition that remains contentious, and as such gives rise to problems when any definition of the short story is applied to works published before the 1840s. I would argue that the shift from short fiction to the short story was to a large extent critically led. That is to say, theoretical critiques of the short story began to appear around the mid-nineteenth century, and these efforts at definition invited stories which then endorsed the conventions established. The writers usually considered as instigators of the 'modern' British short story (Kipling and Stevenson, most prominently) wrote their tales with the benefit of a critical discourse which had begun to establish a poetics of the short story. By the early twentieth century, theory and practice were so thoroughly intertwined that they have been almost indissoluble ever since. It is therefore unhelpful to apply retrospectively the descriptor 'short story' to works published prior to the term's earliest critical identification in the 1880s. When scrutinised according to modern criteria, the vast majority of tales from the early nineteenth century fail any test for the 'true' short story, and are often dismissed from the history of the genre because they do not conform to what is often effectively a certain critic's ideal of a well-executed short narrative.

In an effort to avoid this type of technique-based definition, I will use 'short fiction' in preference to the more theoretically loaded term 'short story'. The term 'story', if used here without amplification, can be understood to have the same loose designation of a short prose narrative. There are no absolute criteria for the type of fiction that I am discussing—indeed, I am not particularly concerned here with

12 Mary Rohrberger, 'Between Shadow and Act: Where Do We Go From Here?', in Susan Lohafer and Jo Ellyn Clarey (eds), *Short Story Theory at a Crossroads* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), pp. 32–45, pp. 43, 40.

13 Charles E. May, 'Metaphoric Motivation in Short Fiction: "In the Beginning was the Story"', in Lohafer and Clarey (eds), *Short Story Theory at a Crossroads*, pp. 62–73, p. 65.

14 For a more detailed discussion of the problematic nature of definition, see Allan H. Pasco's essay 'On Defining Short Stories', in May (ed.), *New Short Story Theories*, pp. 114–30.

defining short fiction. It is not only examples of the genre that anticipate the realism, experimentation, and unity of subject and theme that characterise the 'modern' short story which come under scrutiny here. Short prose narratives that lean towards the descriptive sketch, or towards moralistic allegory, or the folktale, have all been included as part of the tapestry of interrelated types of literature that went to make up early-nineteenth-century short fiction.

Short Fiction before the Nineteenth Century

The early nineteenth century is not the starting point for a history of short fiction. The lifespan of the tale is as long as that of humanity and it is worth briefly examining its lineage before narrowing the focus. Tales and stories have always existed, in oral and, later, in written form, and critical attempts to pinpoint the 'first' short story inevitably invite the challenge of unearthing an even earlier point of origin. I do not wish here to attempt any comprehensive historical survey of short fiction, but instead to emphasise that the genre I am investigating has a long ancestry, stretching from ancient mythic tales, through Bible stories, folklore and wonder tales, animal fables, fairy stories, and moral exemplars. Framed story cycles, such as the *Arabian Nights*, have provided a way of disseminating narrative for hundreds of years. During the middle ages, the precursors of short fiction can be found in cycles of prose and verse, most famously Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*. In Europe, the Renaissance novella tradition provided a similar early framework for printed tales and stories: Boccaccio's *Decameron* (c.1348–53), Giovanni Francesco Straparola's *Le Piacevoli Notti* (1550–53), Marguerite de Navarre's *Heptaméron* (1558), Cervantes's *Novelas Ejemplares* (1613), and Giambattista Basile's *Pentameron* (1634–36). In Britain, closer to the nineteenth century, the history of short fiction intersects with that of 'merry' tale collections, chapbooks, Gothic bluebooks, broadsheets, and broadsides, and it is not only popular literature that nineteenth- and twentieth-century short fiction draws upon.[15]

Respectable early-eighteenth-century periodicals such as the *Tatler* and the *Spectator* published short narrative pieces as well as serialised longer prose, and self-contained stories were common within the pages of eighteenth-century novels. Later in the eighteenth century, short fiction appeared in the newer style miscellanies, most notably the *Gentleman's Magazine*, first published in 1731. Short fiction of the 1700s was, however, a far more diffuse proposition than that published during the next hundred years. Part of the achievement of the genre in the early nineteenth century was to consolidate and refine a multitude of disparate precursory influences: translations of European tales; the economy of style of the eighteenth-century essayists; the resurgence in interest in collecting and publishing oral traditions visible

15 Merry tale collections, or jest-books, contained humorous anecdotes and character sketches, and were popular in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. See Charles Mish (ed.), *Short Fiction of the Seventeenth Century* (New York: New York University Press, 1963), Introduction, pp. xiii–xiv. Barbara Korte also gives a very useful summary of critical work on the history of the short story, see *The Short Story in Britain: A Historical Sketch and Anthology* (Tübingen and Basel: Francke, 2003).

from the 1760s onwards; and a long tradition of short descriptive sketches—just a few amongst many antecedents that shaped the history of short fiction.[16]

Short Fiction in Europe

Another wider view that it is important to keep in mind is that short fiction is a genre by no means limited to the English language. European countries (in particular Germany, France, and Russia) have extremely strong traditions of short-fiction writing which have been highly influential on English-language stories. During the nineteenth century as a whole, short fiction occupied a relatively marginal position in Britain, but tales and stories were much more prominent on the Continent. The works of writers such as Ludwig Tieck, E.T.A. Hoffmann, Prosper Mérimée, Alexander Pushkin, Nikolai Gogol, Ivan Turgenev, Guy de Maupassant, and Anton Chekhov are as crucial to the formation of the twentieth-century short story as any written in English.

By the mid-nineteenth century, it has been argued, European writers were producing more (and perhaps better) short fiction than their British counterparts. Nonetheless, for the most part a similar chronology emerges, showing a transformation in the fortunes of short fiction from the 1820s and 1830s. In France, short fiction emerged as a significant genre earlier than in Britain: writers such as Voltaire, Marmontel, and Madame de Genlis found an audience for tales in the eighteenth century. Nonetheless, critics of French short fiction still propose a dramatic rise in production in the late 1820s, driven by the rapid expansion of the Parisian periodical press.[17] In histories of the Russian short story, the pivotal point is invariably taken to be Pushkin's move from poetry to prose with the publication of *Tales of the Late Ivan Petrovitch Belkin* (1831)—a work which Charles Moser claims 'both summed up the literary achievement that had preceded it and laid the groundwork for the subsequent development of the short story'.[18] In Spain, the record is broadly comparable: tales and stories in the early nineteenth century were diffuse and inconsequential, until the production of short fiction 'received its greatest impetus from the expanding periodical trade beginning in the thirties'.[19] In the case of Italy, the period of growth and change is even later. After emphasising the importance of the Renaissance

16 For details of the fiction of the magazines, and eighteenth-century short fiction in general, see Robert D. Mayo, *The English Novel in the Magazines, 1740–1815: With a Catalogue of 1375 Magazine Novels and Novelettes* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press; and Oxford University Press, London, 1962), and Benjamin Boyce, 'English Short Fiction in the Eighteenth Century: A Preliminary View', *Studies in Short Fiction*, 5 (1967–68): 95–112.

17 See Mayo, *The English Novel in the Magazines*, Chapter 4; Albert J. George, *Short Fiction in France, 1800–1850* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1964); and David Bryant, *Short Fiction and the Press in France, 1829–1841* (Lewiston, NY; Queenston, ON; and Lampeter: Edwin Mellen, 1995).

18 Charles A. Moser (ed.), *The Russian Short Story: A Critical History* (Boston: Twayne, 1986), Introduction, p. xi.

19 Lou Charnon-Deutsch, *The Nineteenth-Century Spanish Story: Textual Strategies of a Genre in Transition* (London: Tamesis, 1985), p. 18.

novella, histories of the Italian short story in the nineteenth century usually begin in the 1850s or 1860s.[20]

The critics and translators cited above have all produced nuanced histories of short fiction within particular countries, to which a few select quotations cannot do justice. When it comes to discussing European short fiction as a whole, however, there is perhaps a danger of making the same sweeping judgements that critics have historically made about the genre in Britain. It is tempting to create a narrative whereby a wasteland of derivative Gothic or sentimental tale-telling is liberated by the arrival of the literary masters (Mérimée, Balzac, Flaubert, Maupassant, Pushkin, Gogol, Turgenev, Tolstoy), in much the same way as short fiction in English was rescued by Poe, Melville, Stevenson, and Kipling. Throughout Europe, short fiction has a long and complex history, which deserves full disclosure. There is not space here to delve too deeply into the morass of Continental tales. The most that can be safely proposed is that in much of Europe short fiction grew to meet the demands of magazines, as it did in Britain and America, and its uneven history through the early decades of the nineteenth century was characterised by a range of modes and sub-genres.

In Germany the story is a little different. German authors and critics began treating the tale as a serious form in the late eighteenth century—significantly earlier than in other countries. As such, German short fiction proved a particularly important influence on British writers of the early nineteenth century. Writers such as Wieland, Tieck, and Goethe drew heavily on folkloric and oriental storytelling traditions in their *Novellen*, and Hoffmann also incorporated folkloric elements in his unnerving stories of the fantastic. These German writers helped give British authors a new conception of the ways in which traditional oral tales could function when transferred to the unfamiliar medium of the printed page. The influence of Tieck and Hoffmann in Britain was not fully established until the 1820s, following the publication of translations of their tales by R.P. Gillies and Thomas Carlyle. Gillies, together with Lockhart, was responsible for the 'Horæ Germanicæ' series in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*.[21] Gillies published a collection of tales from this series as *German Stories* (1826), and he had previously produced a translation of Hoffmann's *The Devil's Elixir* in 1824. Carlyle's translations of tales by Tieck and Hoffmann were published in 1827, along with essays on the two writers. In the same year Walter Scott published his influential essay, 'On the Supernatural in Fictitious Compositions; and Particularly on the Works of Ernest Theodore William Hoffmann', in the *Foreign Quarterly Review*.

German critical thinking about short prose forms has also influenced the development of short fiction in Britain. Goethe and Tieck were astute critics, as well as authors, and produced their own theories on the structures of *Märchen* and *Novellen*.

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20 See *Italian Regional Tales of the Nineteenth Century*, introd. Archibald Colquhoun and Neville Rogers, trans. Bernard Wall, et al. (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1961).

21 For a detailed discussion of the role of *Blackwood's* in this German resurgence, see Peter Garside's introduction to James Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002), pp. xlvii–xlix.

Tieck argued for the centrality of the *wendepunkt* in his own *Kunstmärchen* (literary fairy tales). This term describes a turning point in the story, whereupon it becomes clear to the reader that the narrative inhabits both real and enchanted worlds. This concept has been influential for nineteenth- and twentieth-century critical appreciation of the way in which much folkloric short fiction is polarised between two discourses—one realist and prosaic, and one supernatural and poetic. Most of Tieck's own stories were collected in *Phantasus. Eine Sammlung von Märchen, Erzählungen, Schauspielen und Novellen* (1812–16), and many of these tales were in turn translated into English in the 1820s. Tieck has especially strong connections to many of the writers discussed in Chapter 4, whose use of folklore and tradition helped forge new ways of incorporating popular beliefs into a progressive view history, and produced new concepts of national and regional identity for many areas of Britain and Ireland.

Goethe's well-known aphorisms on the *Novelle* are equally useful to critics of the short story. He argued that *Novellen* present 'eine sich ereignete unerhörte Begebenheit' (a singular or unprecedented event which occurs as part of everyday reality).[22] The *Novelle*, according to Goethe and later theorists of the genre, depicts a particular incident in order to contextualise the tension between the actual and that which is 'novel'. In a similar way to folkloric stories, *Novellen* foreground questions of narratorial authority and reliability, and like the Anglo-American distinction between 'tale' and 'short story', the German critical tradition on the Novelle remains divided over where to draw the line between *Erzählungen* and *Novellen* (the former term is usually used to designate a longish tale or story). Goethe also presented theories of narrative within the pages of his own fiction. In *Unterhaltungen deutscher Ausgewanderten* (*Conversations of German Refugees*, 1794–95), the Baroness sets out her criteria for a good story:

> I think it is wrong to try to transform stories that ought to approach the unity of a poem into mystical riddles, and so to corrupt taste more and more […] Give us to begin with a story with few characters and events, imaginative and well-constructed, true-to-life, natural and not commonplace; with as much action as essential and as much sentiment as necessary.[23]

This is only a short extract from the Baroness's strict and lengthy list of requirements, and the storytellers in *Unterhaltungen* struggle to rise to her challenge. Nonetheless, Goethe's description of the ideal story provides an interesting precursor to later

22 This phrase appears in a letter of 1827, although Goethe had expressed similar ideas as early as 1809. For detailed critical discussions of the German *Novelle* see: Martin Swales, *The German Novelle* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977); Siegfried Weing, *The German Novella: Two Centuries of Criticism* (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1994); and Henry H.H. Remak, *Structural Elements of the German Novella from Goethe to Thomas Mann* (New York: Peter Lang, 1996). German *Novelle* criticism is also discussed in Chapter 4 of this study, p. 127.

23 Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Conversations of German Refugees*, trans. Jan van Heurck in cooperation with Jane K. Brown (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 42.

theories of short fiction, in particular, the proposal that stories should possess the 'unity of a poem' connects with Poe's anxieties over unity and form, nearly fifty years before Poe articulated his definition.

Continental Europe offers a wealthy counterpoint to Britain's shortcomings in short fiction, but even within the confines of the English language some critics have argued that American and Irish writers have been more successful in shorter forms than British authors. Sean O'Faolain, for one, contends that, in comparison to the British, 'the Americans and the Irish do seem to write better stories'.[24] This supposed dearth of good stories in Britain is difficult to explain. One reason commonly given is that the evolution of fiction in Britain during the nineteenth century centred on the development of the novel, to the detriment of peripheral forms. Somerset Maugham connected the preference for the novel to the English national character:

> English writers on the whole have not taken kindly to the art of the short story. They have felt the novel more congenial to their idiosyncrasy, for the English, though in conversation often tongue-tied, when they take a pen into their hands are inclined to prolixity.[25]

It is not necessary to admit Maugham's generalisations about 'the English' to accept that in all likelihood the novel did push short fiction aside. In America, the lack of international copyright regulations, and the consequent availability of cheap, pirated British novels, meant that magazine short fiction could offer a more solid foundation for a literary career than novel-writing. For the majority of British authors, the primary function of tales and stories was to provide a route into publication and a way of earning a living (something to 'keep the banes green', in James Hogg's words) without making up the primary, novelistic part of their fictional output. Nonetheless, while the three-decker novel undoubtedly holds a pre-eminent position in the history of nineteenth-century British fiction, the argument that short fiction grew alongside its larger relative, sometimes emulating and sometimes diverging from the paths taken by the novel, will be a major theme of this book.

The Romantic Period

The 1820s was a period of minor renaissance for the novel. Output in Britain had climbed steadily through the late eighteenth century to a peak in the 1800s, with over one hundred new novels published in 1808.[26] Nonetheless, by the first decade of the new century, fiction had come to be regarded by many readers and critics as a genre that had fallen from the heights of Samuel Richardson and Henry Fielding. Anti-Jacobin critics had formed a dim view of novels ever since they had been put

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24 Sean O'Faolain, *The Short Story* (London and Glasgow: Collins, 1948), p. 36.

25 W. Somerset Maugham (ed.), *Tellers of Tales: 100 Stories from the United States, England, France, Russia and Germany* (New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co., 1939), Introduction, p. xxxii.

26 These statistics on publishing output are taken from Peter Garside, 'The English Novel in the Romantic Era: Consolidation and Dispersal', in Peter Garside, et al. (eds), *The English Novel, 1770–1829: A Bibliographical Survey of Prose Fiction Published in the British Isles*, 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), II, 15–103, p. 38.

to use in the 1790s by Jacobin writers such as William Godwin, Thomas Holcroft, and Mary Wollstonecraft as a powerful tool for political argument. Conservative critics spoke out strongly against the pernicious qualities of fiction in their journals and pamphlets at the turn of the century. Other detrimental factors, most notably the rising cost of paper during the ongoing war with France, combined with this lack of critical favour to reduce novel output to a nadir of less than sixty new publications by the mid-1810s. This decline, however, was reversed in the late 1810s, and by the mid-1820s publication numbers of new titles had climbed back to around one hundred novels a year.

The resurgence in fortunes for fiction was due in no small part to the new authority with which the novel had been invested by two key writers: Maria Edgeworth and Walter Scott. Edgeworth's credentials as a writer of moralistic stories for young people at the end of the eighteenth century lent weight to the witty and astute negotiation of Irish politics in *Castle Rackrent* (1800), and the more polite social commentary of her subsequent novels. Edgeworth produced works which critics felt comfortable recommending to their readers, and she also helped initiate a new route of historical and national fiction for the novel that other authors were not slow to follow. The most successful of these, by some margin, was Walter Scott, and the sheer popularity, both critical and public, of the Waverley novels gave a fillip to British fiction as a whole that it is difficult to overestimate.[27] The influence of the fiction of Edgeworth and Scott also filtered down to writers of short fiction, and the more specific impacts of these two authors on the genre will be discussed in later chapters.

Bestselling novels were not the only factors acting on the production of fiction. The book trade in the 1810s and 1820s went through what Peter Garside calls a period 'of consolidation rather than outright expansion'.[28] Although publishing costs were slowly coming down, they remained relatively high and would do so until the 1830s. The price of fiction rose during the period as Scott's popularity allowed booksellers to increase the cost of a three-decker novel to a guinea and a half by the early 1820s. The dramatic peaks and troughs that the trade had seen in the 1800s and 1810s had, however, begun to even out, as the scandal fictions and Gothic novels that had provided many of the fluctuations were superseded by the increasingly popular evangelical and historical modes. What was good for the book trade in general was also good for short fiction. The arrival of *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* in 1817, with its strong focus on short fiction, spawned many imitators, and more and more periodicals began to include short fiction within their pages—helping to provide a source of material that could be easily assembled into a book. This increase in magazine fiction, coupled with the popular successes of book-length collections of short fiction, in particular those of Washington Irving, meant that by the early 1820s a strong market was taking shape.

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27 For a detailed discussion of Scott's influence on the book trade, see Richard D. Altick, *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public, 1800–1900* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), Chapter 12.

28 Garside, 'The English Novel in the Romantic Era', in *The English Novel, 1770–1829*, II, 40.

'A Round Unvarnish'd Tale'

Although the majority of the works of Scott and Edgeworth fall easily within the category of fiction which we now call 'the novel', the term was still under negotiation at the time of writing. As late as the 1820s, negative connotations still dogged the novel, and such undertones worked in the favour of works which designated themselves as 'tales'. Peter Garside's statistics show that by the 1820s the use of the title 'tale' or 'tales' had overtaken 'novel' or 'romance' for the first time, making up over 34 percent of fiction titles.[29] In the early nineteenth century using the word 'tale' meant more than simply denoting a shorter piece of prose fiction, and the term was applied to many longer works that would be categorised by a modern reader as novels. As Garside points out, the increase is a further indication of the power that Scott wielded over the market. His series of *Tales of my Landlord* (the first of which appeared in 1816, and which in fact comprised two novel-length works) no doubt contributed to the dramatic upsurge from the late 1810s in other authors' willingness to use the epithet.

The title 'tale' or 'tales' implicitly acknowledges a certain set of associations. Garside cites Elizabeth Appleton's preliminaries to *Edgar: A National Tale* (1816), where the author explains how '"tale" rather than "novel" had been used in the title, as more appropriate for "moral fiction"'.[30] A decade later, the *Literary Gazette*, reviewing Mary Margaret Busk's *Tales of Fault and Feeling* (1825), enthused about 'tales', saying:

> Tales are in the first place facts, which, from being in some degree out of the common course of things, attract attention, are remembered, and handed down from father to son, with all that incorrectness which must attend what relies on memory only. […] from the Arab who sits by his tent, forgetting the progress of the night in that of the narration, to our own highly-polished circles of literature, every one likes tales; and the volumes whose light pages hold up the glass to folly, or the pocket handkerchief to pity, are sure of a favourable reception.[31]

In his discussion of Charles Lamb's *A Tale of Rosamund Gray* (1798), Gary Kelly also explores the connotations that the title 'tale' held, arguing that 'to readers of the time this designation would suggest a short narrative, probably dealing with rustic or provincial life and with daily and domestic reality, celebrating values of simplicity, naturalness, and candour, and perhaps featuring an eccentric storyteller as mediator of the simple matter'.[32] Kelly's emphasis on simplicity echoes the more patronising eighteenth-century definition of a 'tale' in Dr Johnson's Dictionary: 'A narrative; a story. Commonly a slight or petty account of some trifling or fabulous incident.' By the early nineteenth century, the word had distanced itself from the 'trifling' tag, largely through a strong association with didactic moralising. The

29 Ibid., 'Table 2. Keywords in Titles, 1800–1829', II, 50.

30 Ibid., II, 51.

31 *Literary Gazette*, 427 (26 March 1825): 196–99, p. 196.

32 Gary Kelly, *English Fiction of the Romantic Period, 1789–1830* (London and New York: Longman, 1989), pp. 64–65.

sketches to the *New Monthly Magazine* and published collected miscellanies in the 1810s and 1820s. The titles of other works, such as anonymously published *The Humourist: A Collection of Entertaining Tales, Anecdotes, Repartees, Witty Sayings, Epigrams, Bon Mots, Jeu d'esprits, &c.* (published 1819–22, and, like *Life in London*, illustrated by Cruikshank), point both to the popularity of witty ensembles, and also the vogue for using such writing as filler when producing book-length collections of shorter material.

Another important form that intersects with short fiction is the single-volume tale, perhaps the most well-known example from this period being John Polidori's *The Vampyre* (1819). Medium-length narratives such as Polidori's stand at one end of the spectrum of short fiction, and many story collections of the period follow a pattern of one or two longer pieces followed by several shorter ones. Nonetheless, as I have discussed above with regard to the German *Novelle*, the medium-length tale (or novella, or novelle, or novelette) is a genre with a history of its own. Originating with Boccaccio's *Decameron*, this predominantly European form developed through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and beyond, anticipating twentieth-century works such as Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*. This type of intermediate-length tale operates in the hinterland between short fiction and the novel, fulfilling the criteria of neither and establishing its own identity.

The narrative essay is yet another interrelated genre: one whose path intersects with that of short fiction from the mid-eighteenth century. Strongly influenced by the writing of Addison, Steele, and Johnson, the most striking essays of the early nineteenth century are those by Charles Lamb and William Hazlitt. Lamb's Elia series for the *London Magazine* softened the hard edge of the discursive, moralistic essay-writing of the eighteenth century by interweaving digressions of associative memory and dream-like fragments into anecdotal narratives which celebrated peaceful contemplation.[35] Mark Parker describes the Elia essays as 'soothing displacements' of an 'intolerable political present', and argues ingeniously that in the context of 1820s party politics Lamb served an important function by being resolutely apolitical and drawing the reader away from the friction of the present into a nostalgic past.[36] In essays such as 'Dream Children' and 'The Old and New Schoolmaster' Lamb constructed fledgling stories which promote the supposed simplicity and clear-cut values of a sentimentalised past. These meditations evoke touching and human incidents, but they never take the storyline beyond reminiscence, and Elia always manages to avoid all but the gentlest attempts at conclusion or argument.

Hazlitt's essays often mined a similarly personal and anecdotal vein to Lamb's, but his writing was always far more steely and political. His contributions to Leigh Hunt's *Examiner* in the 1810s were collected as *The Round Table* (1817), and when, like Lamb, he became a contributor to the *London Magazine* in the early 1820s the results formed the two series of *Table-Talk* (1821 and 1822). The radicalism

35 These essays appeared in the *London Magazine* between 1820 and 1822, and were subsequently collected in 1823, with a second series in 1833.

36 Mark Parker, *Literary Magazines and British Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 42.

of Hazlitt's literary criticism spills over into his narrative essay writing and as a consequence he avoids the hazy anecdotalism that characterises Lamb's work. There is a journalistic integrity coupled with a *joie de vivre* that gives much of his writing—for example the mock-epic description of travelling to watch a boxing match in 'The Fight'—a degree of narrative drive and power which pushes it towards the borders of short fiction.

The places of Lamb and Hazlitt in the Romantic canon are well-established, but both are usually discussed as critics or commentators: 'men of letters' in the Carlylean sense. It is certainly not the case that all of the essays of these two writers, or indeed those of other nineteenth-century essayists, tended towards short fiction, but their type of highly personalised commentary proved extremely influential. Mary Russell Mitford, whose *Our Village* series is discussed in Chapter 3, was clear about the impact of the intimate style of Lamb and Hazlitt on writers of short fiction:

> We are free and easy in these days, and talk to the public as a friend. Read 'Elia,' or the 'Sketch Book,' or Hazlitt's 'Table Talk,' or any popular book of the new school, and you will find that we have turned over the Johnsonian periods and the Blair-ian formality to keep company with the wigs and hoops, the stiff curtseys and low bows of our ancestors. […] the public—the reading public—is, as I said before, the correspondent and confidant of everybody.[37]

The author of *The Sketch Book*, Washington Irving, was himself indebted to Lamb's earlier essays and articles for the many reveries and musings that appear in his short fiction. Similarly, many later authors drew on the grubby realism of Hazlitt's reportage. A similar tone—first-hand yet detached, factual yet involved—was invoked by writers such as Samuel Warren, whose medical mysteries in *Passages from the Diary of a Late Physician* were in turn a strong influence on the detective fiction and the ghost and mystery stories that grew in popularity through the second half of the century.[38] The short fiction of the twentieth century also owes a great deal to the Romantic essayists. The purposeful stasis of many of Ernest Hemingway's best stories evokes Elia, while some of Hazlitt's essays would not be out of place amongst the 'non-fiction' stories and novels championed by Truman Capote in the 1960s.

The narrative essay is connected to another sub-genre: the narrative sketch. Richard Sha's critical study of the sketch places it in a role central to Romantic thinking. Sha describes the sketch in both art and literature as a genre which implicitly claims that 'less finish, less labor, and less fastidiousness to form is more aesthetic, more truthful'.[39] The sketch, according to this definition, is a mode that seeks to avoid strong rhetorical claims, and which situates itself as a non-judgemental first impression.

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37 Letter to Sir William Elford, 22 June, 1824; A.G. L'Estrange (ed.), *The Life of Mary Russell Mitford: Related in a Selection from her Letters to her Friends*, 3 vols (London: Bentley, 1870), II, 179–80. Henceforth cited parenthetically as *AGL*.

38 Warren's stories were published in episodes in *Blackwood's Magazine* between 1830 and 1837, and the earlier articles were collected as a book in 1832.

39 Richard C. Sha, *The Visual and Verbal Sketch in British Romanticism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), p. 1.

The short fiction of Washington Irving and Mary Russell Mitford certainly leans towards this conception of Romantic art, drawing upon painterly attitudes and a trust in imaginative instinct in the depiction of characters or scenery. A true sketch is arguably without narrative, yet many of the genre's tropes proved enticing for writers of short fiction. The titles of works such as Mary Ann Grant's *Sketches of Life and Manners* (1810), Lady Blessington's *Sketches and Fragments* (1822) and Mrs S.C. Hall's *Sketches of Irish Character* (1829), as well as many other examples—most notably Irving's *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.* (1819–20) and the full title of Mitford's series, *Our Village: Sketches of Rural Characters and Scenery* (1824–32)—indicate the pull of the sketch as an aesthetic and literary device.

It is worth re-iterating here that terms such as 'sketch', 'scene', 'tale', and 'story' were often used interchangeably, and while modern criticism finds it useful to distinguish between them, the boundaries were not so clear at the time of writing. The modes and genres I have listed present some of the clearest points of generic crossover for historians of the short story, but fiction in general was a particularly porous mode during the Romantic period. Non-fiction narrative forms such as journalism, travel writing, memoirs, and historical writing also fed into all kinds of novels and tales, and short fiction was increasingly well placed to take part in this fecund cross-fertilisation. Writers of short fiction found more and more freedom to blend genres and to use short narratives to experiment with a variety of techniques and approaches. To no small degree, this was due to the increasing willingness of the periodical press to publish short fiction and the multitude of related literary forms. Editors were beginning to see a new value in printing tales: not only were they a means of attracting and retaining readers, but they also helped set a strong intellectual and literary tone for their magazines.

Part II: Short Fiction in the Periodical Press

Magazine Romanticism

The publication of short fiction in the periodical press is central to the history of the genre in the Romantic period. Most of the stories examined in this study come from book-length collections, but many first appeared in periodicals: either in magazines or in the gift-books and annuals that flourished from the 1820s onwards. Collected stories and magazine fiction were inextricably linked, and this study will trace the relationships between the two wherever appropriate. Some preliminary analysis of the place of short fiction in the magazines is helpful, however, if we are to appreciate fully the relationship between the two modes of production.

Walter Graham's comprehensive study of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century periodical press describes the broad changes which took place at the turn of the century:

> There is a very good reason for distinguishing between the magazines before 1800 and those which were begun later. […] Poems, essays, fiction, and drama, had, since 1692, been used to some extent; yet the modern magazine—that is, a miscellany of original

> works of the imagination, like the *New Monthly Magazine* of the 1840's and the *Cornhill Magazine* of 1860—was not conceived before the beginning of the nineteenth century.[40]

The Romantic period represents an extremely important juncture in the history of the magazines, but the full extent of the contribution made by the periodical press to early-nineteenth-century print culture is still in the process of being established. Since the 1960s, scholars have attempted to build up a much more nuanced picture of the magazine trade, and to present its complex political interrelations in more detail.

In his study of the serialised novel in the Georgian magazine trade, Robert Mayo claims that prior to the early nineteenth century short prose narratives were only financially viable in Britain as contributions to the periodical press. Mayo suggests that unlike in France, where eighteenth-century writers had 'found it profitable both to write short narratives, and to collect them in volumes of *contes* and *nouvelles*', Britain had no real tradition of story collections, and he cites Leigh Hunt's *Classic Tales* (1806–07) as an example.[41] Hunt's work had been intended as an anthology of the best short fiction from the previous century, but in the end it comprised short novels, extracts from novels and romances, and essays—implying that though the magazines were the best place to publish short fiction in the eighteenth century, they still offered an extremely limited market. The template for magazine fiction through the mid- and late eighteenth century had been established in 1731 by the *Gentleman's Magazine*, and most imaginative prose contributions to the eighteenth-century magazines adhered to the predominantly essayistic style which the *Gentleman's* favoured. By the 1790s, however, the periodical press was starting to recognise the potential market for stand-alone short fiction—to the extent that such a market could even be satirised. In William Godwin's novel *Caleb Williams* (1794) a magazine editor snobbishly dismisses the eponymous hero's hopeful submission of verse, saying 'it was their constant rule to give nothing for poetical compositions, the letter-box being always full of writings of that sort; but, if the gentleman would try his hand in prose, a short essay or a tale, he would see what he could do for him'.[42]

More recent studies have built on Mayo's foundations to emphasise the fact that the magazines of the early nineteenth century are themselves a Romantic literary form. As such, periodicals require study as complete and integrated texts, where the editorial matter, criticism, essays, and literary content constitute a dialogue both inside and outside the pages of magazines. Jon Klancher's groundbreaking study of audience and readership in the Romantic period has debunked the idea that magazines were simply passive vehicles of distribution for an enlarged literary marketplace. Klancher argues instead that magazines were the embodiment of the early nineteenth century's increasingly pro-active relations between readers and markets. In what he terms a 'paradigm of audience-making', he claims that 'periodical texts and their myriad writers give us a new way to see how "making audiences" meant evolving

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40 Walter Graham, *English Literary Periodicals* (1930; New York: Octagon Books, 1966), p. 271.

41 Mayo, *The English Novel in the Magazines*, p. 256.

42 William Godwin, *Things as They Are; or, Caleb Williams*, ed. David McCracken (1794; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 258–59.

readers' interpretive frameworks and shaping their ideological awareness'.[43] The periodical press sought to *create* readerships as much as tap into them, and many of the literary periodicals found that the short fiction which they carried could play an extremely valuable role in their definitions of self and of their audience. As Mark Parker persuasively argues, 'the periodical does not simply stand in secondary relation to the literary work it contains; a dynamic relation among contributions informs and creates meaning'.[44]

The strong political affiliations of the magazines frequently leaked between their editorials, reviews, and imaginative literary material, and it is impossible to separate the fiction and poetry that they carried from their broader desire to pass comment on society. Hazlitt felt that this tendency to politicise was bad manners, but he also recognised that it served an important function in an era which retained 'a bias to miscellaneous discussion and criticism' even though 'the war of political pamphlets, of virulent pasquinades, has ceased'.[45] Stories and sketches served to reinforce editorial commentary, to enhance the relationship between a periodical and its readers, and on occasions to challenge and subvert aspects of the periodical in which they appeared. The magazines were perfectly capable of praising a writer like Washington Irving in an editorial, publishing a stinging review of one of Irving's works, and incorporating stories which owed a debt to Irving's own writing: all within the space of a few numbers.

Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine

Although Graham and Mayo both give prominence to the turn of the century, the early decades saw only a slow increase in periodical short fiction, and the essay remained the staple type of contribution. It was not until October 1817, when William Blackwood's *Edinburgh Monthly Magazine* became *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* in a blaze of scandal, that a major upheaval took place. The impact of *Blackwood's* on many aspects of Romantic-era literature is well-documented, but even before the overhaul and the joint editorship of John Wilson and J.G. Lockhart as 'Christopher North', the magazine's commitment to short fiction was apparent. James Hogg's series of 'Tales and Anecdotes of the Pastoral Life' appeared in the first three issues, and the early months of the magazine established the various kinds of stories that the reading public could expect it to publish throughout the nineteenth century. These included sentimental romances, pious morality tales, and jaunty adventure stories, as well as the first examples of *Blackwood's Magazine*'s house style, now known as the 'Tale of Terror'. This loose designation describes a long-running series of Gothic-influenced

43 Jon P. Klancher, *The Making of English Reading Audiences, 1790–1832* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), p. 4.

44 Parker, *Literary Magazines*, p. 3. For other critical examinations of magazines as Romantic texts see J.H. Alexander, '*Blackwood's*: Magazine as Romantic Form', *Wordsworth Circle*, 15, 2 (Spring 1984): 57–68, Peter T. Murphy, 'Impersonation and Authorship in Romantic Britain', *ELH*, 59, 3 (Fall 1992): 625–49, and Kim Wheatley (ed.), *Romantic Periodicals and Print Culture* (London and Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 2003).

45 William Hazlitt, 'The Periodical Press', *Edinburgh Review*, 38 (May 1823): 349–78, p. 359.

narratives associated with extremes of emotion and sensation on the parts of their protagonists, anticipating the Sensation novels of the 1860s. The many contributors included John Wilson, William Maginn, John Galt, Walter Scott, and James Hogg. Edgar Allan Poe famously satirised the distinctive *Blackwood's*-style tale in 'How to Write a *Blackwood's* Article' (1838), and the terror stories, which were collected in several Victorian editions, were arguably the single greatest contribution of the Romantic periodicals to the history of short fiction.[46]

Tales of Terror thrived in the hothouse environment of *Blackwood's*. The magazine was essentially a boys' club, and the fraternal atmosphere fostered a competitive zeal amongst the writers. When read chronologically through the numbers of 'Maga' (the nickname for *Blackwood's*), each tale seems to strive to outdo the last in brio and sensation, and each ludicrously macabre situation ('The Buried Alive', 'The Man in the Bell') serves as a spur to the next writer in line. *Blackwood's* employed a dense and fluid network of pseudonym and anonymity, which helped to build on these ideas of succession and progression within its short fiction. The consequent elision of personality lends a strangeness to the atmosphere which allows such curious stories to flourish. From its inception, and throughout most of the 1820s, the prevailing tone of *Blackwood's* was one of iconoclastic playfulness, and its stories complemented other long-running sections of the magazine, most notably the tavern sketches of 'Noctes Ambrosianae', which appeared from 1822 to 1835. Such unity was facilitated by the tight coterie of Blackwoodians, who set the tone and maintained the magazine's tempo. Occasional contributors orbited around the core clique, and some of the best tales were the products of one-off submissions. However, the cohesive sense of identity was maintained through the 1820s and 1830s, and the importance of a sense of shared purpose was something that the many rivals and imitators of *Blackwood's* would seek for themselves.

Uncanny and Gothic tales were not the only kinds of stories published in *Blackwood's*, and most issues carried prose fiction in one form or another. Notable serial contributions of short fiction included Hogg's *The Shepherd's Calendar* (serialised 1819–28, collected in 1829), Galt's *The Steam-Boat* (serialised 1821, collected 1822), and three stories from Wilson's sentimental *Lights and Shadows of Scottish Life* (serialised 1820, collected 1822). The magazine's tenacious commitment to short fiction is one of its hallmarks, and in this respect its influence is discernible not only in British periodicals of the Victorian period, but also in the American magazines that Robert Marler argues were so influential in creating a new kind of short fiction in the 1850s. Even twentieth-century magazines, such as the *New Yorker*, which define themselves to a large extent by the short stories they publish, owe a significant debt to the innovations of *Blackwood's Magazine* during the 1820s.

Magazines are a literary mode which it is difficult to idealise. They are too clearly stamped with the politics and pragmatics of Grub Street to conjure up the same sort of fantasies of inspired composition which poetry and the novel can sometimes engender. Nonetheless, magazines were often spaces in which writers and editors

46 For further details of this series see Robert Morrison and Chris Baldick (eds), *Tales of Terror from Blackwood's Magazine* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

could live out imaginary existences. John Scott, the editor of the *London Magazine*, was famously killed in a duel which grew out of an argument with the *Blackwood's* editors and was conducted within the pages of periodicals. Mark Parker's account of the affair concludes with the claim that it was not the honour of literature which was at stake, but 'the aspirations and idealized selves of the litigants'.[47] *Blackwood's*, with its shared editorship and numerous authorial masks and voices, was the best example of a Romantic magazine which facilitated the construction of an authorial self, but most of the literary periodicals used pseudonyms to a greater or lesser extent—stretching all the way back to the 1730s and Mr. Sylvanus Urban, Gent., editor of the *Gentleman's Magazine*.

Writers risked getting lost in these myriad representations. James Hogg frequently complained about his boorish misrepresentation by Wilson in the 'Noctes Ambrosianae', but was himself adept at manipulating the editorial and narrative voices of periodical publications. He mingled the identities of multiple and often contradictory narrators not only in *Blackwood's*, but also in his own magazine of the 1810s, the *Spy*, which included numerous fictitious 'letters' to the editor.[48] Hogg became an expert at using letter-writing to create complex narrative webs. The appearance at the conclusion of *Confessions of a Justified Sinner* of 'an authentic letter, published in *Blackwood's Magazine for August*, 1823', which is signed 'James Hogg', is perhaps the best-known example of magazine intertextuality from the period.[49] The letter gives an account of the alleged suicide of the sinner and the digging up of his grave: a meta-narrative which has provided academics with a wealth of fertile material, much of which is still being sifted. This kind of narrative game-playing would not be possible without the intimate interconnections between literature, personae, and publishing that the *Blackwood's* contributors spent so much of their time and effort constructing.

The London Magazine

Its successful shake up of the periodical trade placed *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* at the head of the new wave of literary magazines, but others were not slow to follow. A new series of the *London Magazine*, originally the title of an eighteenth-century periodical, began in 1820. More urbane and sedate than its tempestuous Scottish rival, the *London Magazine* was perhaps best known for its comprehensive and perceptive literary criticism. Where *Blackwood's* was notoriously coruscating and politicised in its reviewing, the *London*'s criticism was usually more measured, and owed more to the combination of rigour and flair of Francis Jeffrey and the

47 Parker, *Literary Magazines*, p. 26. Parker's account draws on Peter T. Murphey's important essay 'Impersonation and Authorship in Romantic Britain', *ELH*, 59, 3 (Fall 1992): 625–49.

48 Many of Hogg's stories from the *Spy* were collected in *Winter Evening Tales* (1820) and are discussed in Chapter 4.

49 Hogg, *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, p. 165. This letter was titled 'A Scots Mummy', and was indeed published in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 14 (August, 1823): 188–90.

Edinburgh Review than the overt partisanship of 'Maga'. The editor of the *London Magazine*, John Scott, also gave priority to the publication of original literature and the magazine focused in particular on material with a traditional or folkloric bent. A series of very brief tales and legends titled 'Old Stories' started in September 1820, and this was followed in December by Allan Cunningham's long-running 'Traditional Literature' series, much of which was collected as *Traditional Tales of the English and Scottish Peasantry* (1822).

Cunningham was the central figure in the *London Magazine*'s contribution to the folklore revival, and he continued contributing traditions and ballads to other magazines, including the *New Monthly Magazine* and *Fraser's Magazine*, after the death of John Scott and the *London*'s decline in the mid-1820s. The magazine bolstered Cunningham's submissions with essays and editorials on the subject of traditions, legends, and myths and their influence on the modern mind and modern literature. The number for March 1822, for example, carried Cunningham's story 'The King of the Peak', but also included the first part of a series of essays on witchcraft in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as well as a short article on the German legend of Peter Klaus and its relationship to Irving's 'Rip Van Winkle'.[50] In addition to these pastoral legends, the *London Magazine* published examples of urban myths. John Gross describes how 'in its early years the *London* lived up to its name, and to its metropolitan pretensions. For one thing, it marked the beginning of a new romantic interest in London folklore. City types and curiosities—the more smoked in antiquity the better—were wistfully delineated'.[51]

The *London Magazine* was also home to two of the major essayists of the period—Lamb and Hazlitt: writers whose considerable influence on short fiction has been discussed above. Along with its literary reviews and Cunningham's folklore, these two writers helped establish the character of the magazine, and Hazlitt's acidity was palliated by Lamb's dreaminess: enough at least to keep the overall tone of the *London* well away from the fiery excesses of *Blackwood's*. The *London Magazine* never produced anything in the way of short fiction to rival *Blackwood's* Tales of Terror, but it still holds a significant place in the world of the Romantic magazines. In its heyday of the early 1820s it drew a wide variety of contributors of fiction, and published the two-part serial of Thomas De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* (1821), as well as sketches and essays by writers such as Thomas Hood (who later became editor of the magazine) and Thomas Griffiths Wainewright (who later became known as the notorious poisoner).

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50 'The King of the Peak' was collected as part of *Traditional Tales*. The authorship of the other two articles is unknown, but James Rice, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and J.H. Reynolds have all been suggested for 'On Witchcraft', and De Quincey, J.C. Hare, and even Washington Irving himself for the essay on the Peter Klaus legend: see Frank P. Riga and Claude A. Prance, *Index to the London Magazine* (New York and London: Garland, 1978), p. 52.

51 John Gross, *The Rise and Fall of the Man of Letters: Aspects of English Literary Life Since 1800* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969), p. 12.

The New Monthly Magazine

First published in 1814, the *New Monthly Magazine* was remodelled in 1821 by its impresario owner, Henry Colburn, and given a new emphasis on original material. The mild-mannered poet Thomas Campbell was appointed editor and the magazine embraced a new politically conciliatory spirit: a move which Nanora Sweet describes as 'adapting its politics to the liberal coalition-building that replaced strict partisanship in the 1820s'.[52] While the *New Monthly* avoided the more rancorous editorialising of other periodicals, it was a shameless copyist when it came to building up its own literary gravitas. It followed the lead of *Blackwood's Magazine* in publishing translations of German literature, and that of the *London Magazine* in including traditions and ballads. It also successfully enticed both Lamb and Hazlitt away from the *London*. The *New Monthly* was so successful an emulator that by the mid-1820s it resembled an elegant amalgamation of these two rivals. Not quite as brash as *Blackwood's*, nor as learned as the *London Magazine*, it steered a successful middle course in its intellectual tone. Moreover, it paid its contributors well, and soon became a major outlet for new literature.[53]

Largely because of Campbell's editorship, the *New Monthly*'s publication and criticism of poetry was particularly notable, but it also incorporated a variety of short fiction and essays. Lamb and Hazlitt were significant after their moves, and other contributors of narrative prose included Mary Russell Mitford, Cyrus Redding, B.W. Procter, and the humorist Theodore Hook (who went on to edit the magazine in the 1830s). Arguably, however, the *genius loci* of the magazine was Horace Smith, whose comic material was the backbone of the magazine's prose pieces throughout the 1820s. Smith's sketches and anecdotes do not quite match up to any modern idea of a short story, but he was a popular and influential author during his own lifetime. His numerous contributions to the *New Monthly Magazine* were collected in *Gaieties and Gravities* (1825), and the effects of his arch and jaunty style are discernible in many other sketch-writers of the period, notably in the lighter pieces of Irving and Mitford.

The periodical press of the early nineteenth century often sought to make its fictional content commensurate to some degree with its editorial tone. For *Blackwood's* this meant the irreverent and sometimes histrionic Tale of Terror, and the ribald in-jokes of the 'Noctes'. The *London Magazine* was defined by Cunningham's more reverend 'Traditional Literature', Lamb's gentle Elia sketches, and Hazlitt's fiercer reportage. The *New Monthly Magazine* deliberately side-stepped much of the political wrangling which embroiled its competitors, and its lighter overall tone was

52 Nanora Sweet, 'The *New Monthly Magazine* and the Liberalism of the 1820s', in Wheatley (ed.), *Romantic Periodicals and Print Culture*, pp. 147–62, p. 147.

53 Carol Polsgrove discusses the various rates magazines paid for submissions. The *Edinburgh Review* was one of the first periodicals to regularly pay its contributors, and the magazines followed. *Blackwood's Magazine*, the *London Magazine*, and the *New Monthly Magazine* all paid around ten or twelve guineas a sheet—amongst the highest for the magazines. See 'They Made It Pay: British Short-Fiction Writers, 1820–1840', *Studies in Short Fiction*, 11 (1974): 417–21, p. 418.

matched by sketches and stories that managed to avoid becoming entrenched in one or two particular sub-genres. The strength of the magazine was its versatility, and the *New Monthly*'s ability to incorporate the most successful aspects of other periodicals meant that, along with *Blackwood's*, it was one of the few magazines of the 1820s which survived successfully into the early Victorian period.

Other Literary Magazines

Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, the *London Magazine*, and the *New Monthly Magazine* were the most influential magazine publishers of new fiction in the early nineteenth century, with *Blackwood's* by far the most important with regard to short fiction. Orbiting around this triumvirate were a variety of smaller, less-successful and niche publications. Charles Knight published two successive, short-lived periodicals, which specialised in original literature and carried a substantial amount of short fiction: *Knight's Quarterly Magazine* (1823–24) and the *Literary Magnet of Belles-Lettres, Science, and the Fine Arts* (1824–26). The *Literary Speculum* (1821–22) appealed to a similar market to *Blackwood's* and the *London*, and published a handful of tales during its relatively short life. Other periodicals directed themselves at more specific markets, and usually proclaimed their target audience in their titles. The *Lady's Magazine*, for instance, which started in 1770 and went through several incarnations over the years, began a new run in 1820 and published some of Mary Russell Mitford's first sketches. In the main, magazines published in London and Edinburgh enjoyed the largest circulations, but other regions were also represented by a large number of titles, such as the *Kaleidoscope* (1818–20), a Liverpool-based magazine which was the first British periodical to publish Washington Irving's Geoffrey Crayon sketches.

Annuals and Gift-Books

Magazines were not the only periodical publications that carried short fiction. November 1822 saw the advent of a rival to their monopoly on periodical short fiction. The *Forget-Me-Not; a Christmas and New Year's Present for 1823* was the first of a flood of literary annuals (also known as gift-books or keepsakes) over the next twenty years, a trend imported from Germany. The annuals were highly ornate, decorative volumes, often printed on high-quality paper and bound in leather or silk, that contained poetry, prose, and expensive illustrations which often dictated the written content. As their titles suggest, they were published towards the end of the year (usually appearing in the October or November prior to the stated year) as suitable for a gift, and they quickly became extremely popular. By 1825 the *Forget-Me-Not* had been joined by several other titles including the *Literary Souvenir* and *Friendship's Offering*, and by 1832 some sixty-three different annuals were in circulation.[54] The craze had passed its peak by the 1850s, but by then most of

54 These dates and figures are taken from Fredrick W. Faxon, *Literary Annuals and Gift-Books: A Bibliography, 1823–1903*, reprinted with supplementary essays by Eleanore Jamieson and Iain Bain (1912; Pinner: Private Libraries Association, 1973), pp. xi–xiii.

the leading writers of the period had written for the annuals: Walter Scott, Maria Edgeworth, Washington Irving, John Wilson, and James Hogg were all contributors. In her *Memorial of James Hogg, the Ettrick Shepherd*, Mrs Garden describes how 'on all sides Hogg was appealed to for contributions to the "Annuals," and gladly complied, for the publishers paid well, and the work was not difficult'.[55] The editors of annuals and gift-books were often themselves authors. Mary Russell Mitford was asked to edit an annual, *Finden's Tableaux*, in 1837, and Allan Cunningham took charge of the *Anniversary* for 1829. Mitford was also amongst the most prolific contributors to annuals, publishing over one hundred pieces of prose and poetry in their pages, many of which were recycled from her *Our Village* series.[56]

The devotion to polite propriety of the annuals has led many critics to dismiss them from serious literary consideration. Wendell Harris gives a withering description: 'Dealing heavily in sentimentality, the annuals offered little which demanded more of the reader than a ready sigh, and were accordingly held in contempt by writers of reputation.'[57] Some writers certainly came to rue the connections they made with the annuals. Charles Lamb was frequently scathing about the subject, and lamented the fact that 'by dabbling in those accursed Albums, I have become a byword of infamy all over the kingdom'.[58] Lamb made only a few contributions (to the *Cameo*, the *Gem*, and the *Christmas Box*), but while some authors may have resented having to sell off their work piecemeal to make ends meet, the number of poets and writers of fiction whose material appeared in the annuals implies that many were happy to contribute to the genre. Moreover, the contributions made by many writers were by no means inferior to those included in their own collections. The annuals and gift-books hold a small but significant place in literary history. They acted as an extra outlet that allowed many authors to earn money and ply their trade when relatively few others were available. Like the magazines, they were also crucial in allowing authors to try out subject matter and themes, as well as enabling them to gain a foothold in the literary marketplace.

Magazines from the 1830s

In the 1830s a new crop of literary magazines appeared. In terms of the publication of short fiction, the most important of these was *Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country* (1830–82). The first editor of *Fraser's Magazine*, William Maginn, was a regular contributor to *Blackwood's Magazine* during the 1820s. Maginn had become disillusioned with 'Maga', and he set up *Fraser's* as a rival. Other contributors to *Blackwood's Magazine* followed: the first number of the magazine contained John Galt's 'The Hurons: A Canadian Tale' (the first of a series which Galt wrote for *Fraser's*), and further stories soon appeared from old Blackwoodians, including James Hogg,

55 M.G. Garden, *Memorial of James Hogg, the Ettrick Shepherd*, 3rd edn (Paisley: Alexander Gardner, 1903), p. 158.

56 See Andrew Boyle, *An Index to the Annuals, 1820–1850* (Worcester: Andrew Boyle, 1967), *Vol. 1: The Authors*, pp. 193–95 for details of Mitford's annual contributions.

57 Harris, *British Short Fiction*, p. 24.

58 Letter to Bryan Waller Procter, 19 January, 1829. E.V. Lucas (ed.), *The Letters of Charles and Mary Lamb*, 3 vols (London: J.M. Dent and Methuen, 1935), III, 201.

B.W. Procter and D.M. Moir. *Fraser's Magazine* also took over from the declining *London Magazine* as the most significant publisher of folklore and traditional material. The novelist Andrew Picken performed a similar role for *Fraser's* to that of Allan Cunningham at the *London*, and supplied a steady stream of Scottish tales and legends. In fact, Cunningham himself joined *Fraser's* at the end of his career, contributing a series titled 'Rustic Controversies' in 1840. As well as these Scottish writers, the folkloric output of *Fraser's* included articles by the Irish antiquarian Thomas Crofton Croker, who published a series of 'Specimens of Irish Minstrelsy' in the magazine, as well as an assortment of traditions and sketches.

By the end of the 1820s many of the fiercer magazine rivalries had begun to wane, and there was room enough for both *Fraser's* and *Blackwood's* in the marketplace of the 1830s and 1840s. Much of the groundbreaking work of carving out a new magazine market for short fiction had been undertaken during the late 1810s and early 1820s, and the passing of the decade meant an end to some of the heights and excesses. However, the 1830s were by no means stagnant. This was the period in which the great era of Victorian literary periodicals began. Titles from the 1830s, such as *Sharpe's London Magazine* (1829–70), the *Metropolitan Magazine* (1831–57), and *Bentley's Miscellany* (1837–68), paved the way for the significantly greater quantities of short fiction that appeared towards the end of the century in periodicals such as the *Cornhill Magazine* (1860–1975), *Temple Bar Magazine* (1860–1906), and the *Strand Magazine* (1891–1950).

Writers and the Magazine Trade

The early-nineteenth-century periodical market was robust, competitive, aggressive, and highly political. Its fast pace necessitated a steep learning-curve and had the effect of forcing those writers exposed to it to become increasingly professional, and to examine more carefully the intentions of their fiction and the relationship between reader and writer. New techniques were learnt for writing short fiction. Instead of compressed novels and stories that read like extracts from romances, short fiction began to pursue its own narrative strategies: folktale tropes, painstaking realist techniques, and powerful yet brief descriptive skills were all part of the melting pot of short fiction in the early-nineteenth-century periodical press.

Periodicals provided an opportunity for authors to make both money and a reputation. Eighteenth-century magazines had often received contributions for free, or reprinted fiction from other sources, but by the early nineteenth century writing for periodicals had become a viable way to make a living. Carol Polsgrove claims that the 1820s and 1830s saw a significant increase in potential revenue for writers of short fiction and cites a combination of social and technological changes, as well as shifts in the publishing industry:

> The concentration of population, a general population increase, improvements in printing production and transportation, arising from increased technological sophistication, and the expansion of the middle class—all these elements combined to give short fiction writers both readers and avenues to those readers.[59]

59 Polsgrove, 'They Made It Pay', p. 418.

For the first time, an author could spend their entire career writing for the periodical press. They could contribute a mixture of essays, reviews, stories, sketches, poems, and social commentary, and be reasonably well paid for their pains. William St Clair summarises the state of the market: 'By the end of the romantic period there were many dozens of periodicals in Great Britain offering to consider short poems and stories, and payment could be good.'[60]

Alongside the ability to make short fiction pay, periodical literature afforded a freedom to experiment and make mistakes which was not available in the more conservative book trade. *Blackwood's Magazine*, in particular, offered its contributors license to strain their imaginations and to press at the boundaries of taste and sensation. Short fiction thrived in this climate, but the flipside of freedom of expression can be a perceived lack of posterity. Washington Irving fretted over literary longevity in the pages of *The Sketch Book*, and James Hogg was always anxious about the transfer of his magazine stories into book collections. Mary Shelley published numerous pieces of short fiction in annuals and periodicals during the 1820s and 1830s. These works were often her means of sustenance, and yet were far from central to her own sense of literary worth: writing to Leigh Hunt in 1824, Shelley bemoaned the fact that she wrote 'bad articles which help to make me miserable—but I am going to plunge into a novel, and hope that its clear water will wash off the mud of the magazines'.[61] Moreover, as Mark Parker argues, the high turnover and rapid pace of the magazine industry meant that many contributors lived financially precarious existences and lacked control over the uses to which their contributions were put, and even over their literary identities.[62]

In an increasingly professional publishing industry, the magazines also became a place where a writer could serve a literary apprenticeship and refine the mechanics of story-writing. It was in the 1810s and 1820s that some of the conventions for the modern authorial path were established: stories written for magazines, followed by collected editions, followed by novel-writing—a hierarchical route taken by many Victorian and twentieth-century authors. Although publishing stories in magazines served its own purpose, there was something undeniably attractive for many writers about the idea of being master or mistress of one's own text and having responsibility for the entirety of a book's content. Even essayists such as Lamb, Hazlitt, and Horace Smith, who depended on periodicals more than other writers of short fiction, published collected editions of their articles. The magazines were immensely useful for writers of short fiction, but they were also a medium beyond which authors could aspire, and they often operated as a means to an end.

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60 William St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 158–59.

61 Letter dated 9 February 1824. Betty T. Bennett (ed.), *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, 3 vols (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980–88), I, 412.

62 Parker uses James Hogg's rather fraught relationship with *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* as an example, *Literary Magazines*, pp. 19–20.

Magazine Stories and the Book-Length Collection

There is an ideological gap between stories collected in book form and those published in periodicals. Magazine tales have their own history and deserve to be criticised as such. Although the short fiction of magazines such as *Blackwood's* enjoyed a great deal of popularity and attracted many notable authors as contributors, stories published in a periodical have never carried the same cultural weight as a three-volume book. Magazines and other periodicals are cultural artefacts which are far more ephemeral and disposable than the book, and it could be argued that the short fiction they published represents an insubstantial part of an insubstantial medium. Mary Shelley, who clearly loathed writing stories for the periodical press, expressed such concerns about the lightweight nature of short fiction: 'When I write for them [the annuals], I am worried to death to make my things shorter & shorter—till I fancy people think ideas can be conveyed by intuition—and that it is a superstition to consider words necessary for their expression.'[63] Compared to the reassuring bulk of a novel, a magazine story could seem a feeble undertaking for an author. Modern scholarship has sought to reclaim magazine texts and establish their centrality to the literature of a particular period, but authorial doubts about the substance and scope of the medium remain.

In contrast, short fiction in its collected form was in direct competition with the increasingly prestigious novel. It was not until the 1810s that collections began to appear in significant quantities, and in the 1820s the form took off—both in the number of publications and in the energy devoted to the form by writers. Throughout the early nineteenth century, the book trade had a clear preference for the three-volume form, and writers were encouraged to produce works in that mould. Walter Scott's proficiency in three volumes was crucial to his domination of the fiction market from the mid-1810s through the 1820s, but other authors were not so comfortable with the convention, and the triple-decker has historically been seen as detrimental to the publication of short fiction. Rudyard Kipling, one of the most celebrated Victorian short story writers, wrote a poem in 1894 commemorating the demise of the three-decker, visualised as a ponderous and creaking tall ship. In his introduction to a collection of Mary Shelley's short fiction, the nineteenth-century critic Richard Garnett argued that the 'necessary brevity of contributions to an annual operated as a powerful check on the loquacity so unfortunately encouraged by the three-volume novel'.[64] Brander Matthews stated the case even more baldly: 'It is the three-volume Novel which has killed the Short-story in England.'[65]

In spite of critics dancing on its grave, the three-volume convention had other, less damaging effects. Collections of short fiction, published in book form, actually went through a boom in the period. Titles in the form of *Tales of a* […] or […], *and Other Tales*

63 Letter to Maria Gisborne, dated 11 June 1835. Bennett (ed.), *Letters of Mary Shelley*, II, 245.

64 Richard Garnett, Introduction to Mary Shelley's *Tales and Stories* (London: William Paterson, 1891); reprinted in facsimile (Folcroft Library Editions, 1975), p. x.

65 Brander Matthews, *The Philosophy of the Short Story* (New York: Longmans, 1901), p. 60.

were extremely popular, and such collections made up roughly 15–20 percent of fiction output for the 1820s, many of them published in the prestigious octavo format.[66] Pressed to conform to the demands of the market, some authors were inevitably forced to compromise their vision of their works, while others saw the opportunities which were presented. John Galt, though often uneasy in the three-volume guise, managed to remain sanguine about complying with publishers' requests. In the Preface to his *Stories of the Study* (1833), he discusses the duties of the author in this regard:

> I never could understand why works of fiction should always be produced in three volumes; the trade reason for publishing in that magnitude is obvious enough—namely, the expense of advertising is not more than for one volume; but what authors have to do with the rule seemed to me inexplicable, especially as they are at liberty to consult their own predilections, and might make up the fashionable quantity as they think proper.[67]

For Galt, providing 'the fashionable quantity' was simply part and parcel of the authorial process, and how he chose to do so was his business. In an earlier work, *Rothelan* (1824), Galt had used short fiction to help fill his requisite three volumes. The Advertisement to this work states: 'The Manuscript of *Rothelan* not proving sufficient to fill three volumes, three additional Tales have been added, forming part of a design which the Author had some intention of hereafter completing.'[68]

Somewhat ironically, then, the drive for the triple-decker helped to push short fiction into a new literary setting. Collections published in three volumes that contained one very long narrative, followed by several shorter pieces, were common in the 1820s and 1830s. In this particular guise the shorter tales remained very much subservient to the single, novel-length piece in the collection. Nonetheless, the practice encouraged diversification in length amongst authors and gave stand-alone short tales a point of entry into the mainstream of fictional publications, shifting the focus of the genre from its long-held place in the magazines, and helping short fiction to gain a foothold in the wider literary market by acting as filler material for the three-decker convention. Rather than being simply antagonistic towards short fiction, the book trade could, in this way, also offer a positive context.

To collect tales together often (though not always) implies a connection between the individual stories. Many collections of the early nineteenth century employed devices such as framing narratives and thematic or character-based linkages which

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66 This approximate figure is derived from the Corvey Collection. For 1820–29, a total of 682 fiction titles appear, of which 147 (21 percent) are collections of short fiction. The Corvey Collection is regarded as reasonably representative, holding about 80 percent of all known publications for the period, but I have erred on the side of caution in suggesting 15–20 percent.

67 John Galt, *Stories of the Study*, 3 vols (London: Cochrane and McCrone, 1833), Preface, I, iv.

68 John Galt, *Rothelan; a Romance of the English Histories*, 3 vols (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd; and Geo. B. Whittaker, London, 1824), Advertisement, I, [unpaginated]. The three additional tales appear in the third volume, gathered under the designation of 'The Quarantine; or, Tales of the Lazaretto'.

were derived in part from older epic or romance cycles such as the *Arabian Nights* and *Le Morte D'Arthur*. These strategies of organisation gave writers of short fiction new ways of adding scope to their collections. The development of such framing methods in the early nineteenth century can also be discerned in later, more complex composite works: a phenomenon that by the twentieth century was starting to be called the 'short story cycle', or even the 'composite novel'. The interaction of the various stories in a collection became much more sophisticated in twentieth-century short story cycles such as Ernest Hemingway's *In Our Time* (1925) and William Faulkner's *Go Down, Moses* (1942). Nonetheless, the examples from the early nineteenth century often demonstrate the leading characteristic of the short story cycle: the understanding that a series can be greater than the sum of its parts. The framed narratives of Washington Irving, Mary Mitford, James Hogg, and indeed the vast majority of the authors discussed here, all manifest some degree of connectivity—be it through narrator, location, or theme. By recognising the potential of the collection, short fiction was able to sustain social and historical themes in a similar way to the novel, and thereby compete for the same market. As a consequence, the tale became an increasingly viable medium to which talented writers could give greater attention. The practice of collecting together tales and stories became a bolder artistic statement during the early nineteenth century, and moved from being an often indiscriminate amalgamation to a more considered and deliberate creative act.

The Growth of a Market

A shift in attitude towards short fiction through the early nineteenth century was sensed by many writers. Francis Lathom was one of the most prolific authors of the period, and after publishing thirteen of his own and two translated novels between 1795 and 1809, Lathom returned in 1820 with *The One-Pound Note. And Other Tales*, the first of four collections of short fiction that he produced during the 1820s. In the Preface to an earlier novel, *The Fatal Vow* (1807), Lathom had nailed his populist colours to the mast:

> Historical Romances are the taste of the times, and I think it a sufficient sanction for an author, whose remuneration is to arise from gratifying the public taste, to apply his pen to such subjects as interest the feelings of the majority.[69]

Lathom prided himself on being attuned to the prevailing literary winds, and if historical romances were the taste of the times in 1807, then his move into short fiction at the start of the 1820s (almost immediately after Washington Irving's appearance) demonstrates how fast interest in the genre was expanding.

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69 This Preface appears at the start of the second volume. Francis Lathom, *The Fatal Vow; or, St. Michael's Monastery, a Romance*, 2 vols (London: B. Crosby and Co., 1807), Preface, II, iii. Lathom also published *Puzzled and Pleased; or, the Two Old Soldiers: And Other Tales* (1822); *The Polish Bandit; or, Who Is my Bride? And Other Tales* (1824); and *Fashionable Mysteries; or, the Rival Duchesses, and Other Tales* (1829).

Several major figures in the publishing trade shared this newfound enthusiasm, and short fiction was well-placed to take advantage of booksellers' hopes for a greatly expanded fiction market. As the principal Edinburgh publisher of Walter Scott's Waverley novels, Archibald Constable was involved in the major literary phenomenon of the early part of the century. In 1816, his partner, Robert Cadell, reported to Scott on Constable's despondency about the book trade:

> Mr Constable writes me that Trade in the South is generally speaking very dull—and of course the Book Trade is affected by the stagnation. Books of first-rate merit however, sell better now, than at any former period—those of a middle walk in Literature do not sell at all—& almost all periodical Works of talent increase in circulation.[70]

Collections of short fiction would presumably fall for the most part into the 'middle walk' category, and the market was not yet there for them. The comparative success of periodicals, however, was helping to establish this audience. By the mid-1820s, Constable was in a far more buoyant mood. A letter to Cadell describes his optimism for a new market amongst the increasingly literate populations of the expanding manufacturing towns:

> I got safe to London on Thursday Evening—after an interesting Journey by way of Manchester, Derby, Lichfield[,] Birmingham, Worcester, Oxford &c. in the manufacturing districts every thing appears thriving in the extreme. […] The demand for books I am glad to say seems to sustain a fair place in the general improvement.[71]

Constable later related to Scott his plans to enter this market via a series of cheap, yet high-quality, novels published as Constable's Miscellany:

> I have now settled my outline of operations—a three shilling or half-crown volume every month, which must and shall sell, not by thousands or tens of thousands, but by hundreds of thousands—ay, by millions! […] twelve volumes, so good that millions must wish to have them, and so cheap that every butcher's callant may have them, if he pleases to let me tax him sixpence a week![72]

This movement in audience dynamics was also sensed by James Hogg, whose long-standing desire to see his works published in cheap serial form for consumption by a wider popular readership is discussed in Chapter 4. Neither Hogg nor Constable managed to exploit the vast potential audience that the various cut-price publishers' 'libraries' and serial editions of the early 1830s would tap into so effectively. In fact, by January 1826 Constable was bankrupt. Nonetheless, the economic upsurge following the end of the Napoleonic Wars, combined with new strategies of audience-making, helped the fiction market to expand amongst the newly wealthy and the

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70 Letter dated 9 August 1816. NLS, MS 789, f. 615.

71 Letter dated 7 August 1824. NLS, MS 320, f. 177.

72 This account of the conversation between Constable and Scott is given in J.G. Lockhart's *Memoirs of Sir Walter Scott*, 5 vols (1837–38; London and New York: Macmillan, 1900), IV, 259. Richard Altick gives a more detailed account of the history of Constable's Miscellany in *The English Common Reader*, pp. 267–69.

newly literate. These were not yet the workers and trades-people envisaged by Constable, but they were the readers of magazine stories, and subsequent purchasers of collected editions of short fiction.

The early nineteenth century was a period during which literary vacuums were regularly discovered, and which the market then rushed to fill. Magazine publishers found that ghost stories, comic tales, and descriptive sketches could be extremely popular, and rival titles were quick to latch onto new trends. In turn, booksellers became increasingly willing to issue collections based on magazine contributions. In short, an increasingly large amount of money could be made, both for publishers and authors, through the writing of stories. Short fiction was the beneficiary of a swelling market for fiction of all kinds and of a fundamental shift in the way that periodicals began to view themselves and their readerships.

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Chapter 2

Washington Irving: Geoffrey Crayon and the Market for Short Fiction

Washington Irving and the History of Short Fiction

Of all the writers of short fiction examined in this book, Washington Irving casts the longest shadow. Since his first foray into literature in 1807, as part of the New York coterie responsible for the periodical *Salmagundi*, his overall contribution to American literary history, and the American short story in particular, has been widely recognised and extensively charted. In contrast, Irving's influence on British short fiction has been generally neglected, and it is this aspect of his writing which this chapter seeks to redress.

Irving does not feature in Wendell Harris's study of British short fiction, and Harris remarks, 'I have neglected to mention continental or American influences. The fact is that until near the end of the century English writers seem to have taken remarkably little notice of the fiction being written elsewhere'.[1] Transatlantic influences can be difficult to trace and American literature was certainly not held in particularly high esteem in Britain during the early nineteenth century. Nonetheless, the United States and its artistic productions was an increasingly fascinating subject for the British critical press during this period. Furthermore, Irving himself was resident in Britain for much of the late 1810s and early 1820s, and the time lapse between the publication of his works in America and in Britain was very short. Most crucially, Irving's works were widely read, and British writers could hardly have ignored the impact of an author who, for a brief period of time at least, was one of the most popular in their country.

In Britain, the impact of Irving's short fiction was twofold. Firstly, he was notable because of his nationality: Irving was one of the first American authors both to be published by a major British bookseller and to enjoy widespread critical and popular success in Britain. He was, as many critics have noted, the first truly transatlantic man of letters. American literature after Irving was capable of comparison with its British counterpart without fear of embarrassment, and his presence challenged many long-cherished prejudices and a generally scornful attitude towards the literature of the New World. At home, Irving became a literary figurehead for the subsequent generation of American authors. Some wished to emulate him, while others saw his fascination with Europe as a betrayal of their country's republican ideals and

1 Harris, *British Short Fiction*, p. 26.

history, but Irving was there for all to see: perhaps the most famous and most visible American writer of his generation.

Secondly, Irving's achievements were literary. The three collections of short narrative fiction and sketches that he published while residing in Britain (*The Sketch Book* [1819–20], *Bracebridge Hall* [1822], and *Tales of a Traveller* [1824]) attained huge popular and critical recognition and helped legitimise the genre within critical discourse. Short fiction, and specifically collections of short fiction, had previously been part of a tradition often regarded as insubstantial and limited in scope. After Irving, the genre began to be taken seriously by a more discriminating readership. Furthermore, Irving challenged the conventions surrounding the writing of short fiction and helped to blur the accepted boundaries. The examples of the genre that had found a large popular readership prior to Irving (most notably the stories of Hannah More and Maria Edgeworth discussed in Chapter 3) almost invariably focused on achieving a particular moral effect. Irving, in contrast, addressed a more literate audience, which felt itself to be discerning enough to extract meaning from a story without explicit directions.

Washington Irving's one unquestionable gift was as an excellent social and critical barometer. Described by many commentators, and on occasions by himself, as a writer of limited originality, he nonetheless had a talent for recognising a popular mode and style and for bringing a multitude of sources to bear in his own work. Ben McClary, in his exhaustive analysis of the relationship between Irving and his publisher, John Murray, makes two key observations on this point. Firstly he states that 'it is likely […] that [Irving's] ultimate significance is not in his work published for public consumption, but rather in his relationships with individuals within the profession of letters'.[2] Secondly, and in a somewhat contradictory fashion, McClary points out that *The Sketch Book* was extremely successful: 'Certainly John Murray had rarely—if ever—published a work which pleased more and offended fewer people.'[3] While the debate about the lasting technical and literary merits of Irving's writing continues, the fact remains that it is *The Sketch Book*, and its contemporary popularity, that does most to maintain Irving's posterity. It is therefore not primarily the individual relationships, but the influential changes wrought by Irving, both for American letters and for short fiction, which here demand attention.

Why did Washington Irving choose to write short fiction? The question is seldom asked by critics, but it is pertinent to my argument here. An obvious answer is that his early literary endeavours were largely journalistic. His contributions to *Salmagundi* consisted of short articles and descriptive essays, and although it is difficult to determine which contributors wrote which pieces, some formative short fictional works, such as the sketch of 'The Little Man in Black' (1807), have been attributed to Irving. Another factor in the decision to write short fiction must surely have been what many contemporary critics were keen to point out: Irving's apparent inability to sustain a single, forceful narrative, and the consequent dissipation of his intellectual potency. Francis Jeffrey, writing in the *Edinburgh Review*, noted 'the want is of force

2 Ben McClary, *Washington Irving and the House of Murray: Geoffrey Crayon Charms the British, 1817–1856* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1969), Preface, p. vii.

3 Ibid., p. 35.

and originality in the reasoning, and speculative parts [of *The Sketch Book*], and of boldness and incident in the inventive'.[4] By his own account, Irving lacked the stamina and application to write a novel. As he stated in a letter to Walter Scott:

> My whole course of life has been desultory and I am unfitted for any periodically recurring task, or any stipulated labour of body or mind. I have no command over my talents such as they are; am apt to be deserted by them when I most want their assistance & have to watch the veerings of my mind as I would those of a weather cock.[5]

Short fiction must have appealed to a writer who lacked confidence in his ability to create a sustained piece of work. It offered a way to make money by means of a mode that was much less likely than the novel to be subjected to close critical scrutiny. Since the ebb in the literary status of the novel during the 1790s and 1800s, longer works of fiction had experienced some critical resurgence through the 1810s. Short fiction, in comparison, was still a relatively ephemeral genre: one which was conceptually tied up with the magazines and the consequent implications of transience. Irving, it seems, shared this general view. His initial belief was that *The Sketch Book* would primarily be of interest to Americans, and the work was aimed at a readership that had never been to Britain. During the process of publication in America, the possibility of a British edition arose, and the unassuming short narratives of *The Sketch Book* seemed to offer a relatively smooth entry into British literary society.

A more positively-minded reason for the choice of short fiction, however, lies in the possibilities that the genre offered. Irving understood the necessity of making the re-reading to which stories were often subjected work in his favour: 'the very variety & piquancy of [an author's] writings; nay their very brevity; makes them frequently recurred to—and when the mere interest of the Story is exhausted, he begins to get credit for his touches of pathos or humour; his points of wit or turns of language.'[6] Eschewing the broad sweep of novelistic realism employed by contemporary chroniclers of America such as James Fenimore Cooper, Irving chose a much more pliable genre to work with. His success was due in no small part to his appreciation of the ways in which the familiar sub-genres of short prose narrative—folktales, travel narratives, descriptive sketches—could be reinvigorated to fashion new concepts of national identity, both American and British.

Short fiction, or more specifically the idea of the tale, with its connotations of oral tradition and local legend, suited Irving's desire to construct America as a land of myth. This aspect of his writing will be examined in greater detail in my discussion

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4 *Edinburgh Review*, 34 (August 1820): 160–76, p. 161.

5 Letter dated 20 November 1819. Ralph M. Aderman, et al. (eds), *Letters, Vol. 1: 1802–1823* (Boston: Twayne, 1978), p. 570. Forms vol. 23 of *The Complete Works of Washington Irving*, ed. Henry A. Pochmann, et al., 30 vols (Madison and Boston: University of Wisconsin Press and Twayne, 1969–89). This letter declined Scott's offer of the editorship of an Edinburgh anti-radical magazine.

6 Letter to Henry Brevoort, 11 December 1824. Ralph M. Aderman, et al. (eds), *Letters, Vol. 2: 1823–1838* (Boston: Twayne, 1979), p. 91, my parentheses. Forms vol. 24 of *Complete Works*, ed. Pochmann, et al.

of 'Rip Van Winkle' and the other American tales, but it is helpful to note that Irving nearly always turned to stories rather than sketches when dealing with New World themes (notable exceptions to this are the British edition of *The Sketch Book*'s Native-American pieces, 'Traits of Indian Character' and 'Philip of Pokanoket'). In Irving's works, however, the narrative tales are interwoven with other types of short fiction to provide a modest and flexible aesthetic. Irving was never one for extravagant statements. In *The Sketch Book* he painstakingly delineated the connections between America and Britain in a collection of short pieces which offered a variety of tones and perspectives. This not only gave a more rounded and balanced portrait, but also enabled him to re-evaluate the postcolonial transatlantic relationship in ways that were sufficiently satirical and self-deprecating to distance him from any accusations of grand designs.

Publishing The Sketch Book in Britain

The British publication of *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.*, which Irving would explain at some length in a later Preface to the work, was not a simple matter.[7] The work was first published in New York, where it was issued in seven numbers between June 1819 and September 1820. Extracts began to appear in British magazines in 1819, taken unauthorised from the American numbers. The *Kaleidoscope*, a Liverpool-based periodical, reprinted the story of 'The Wife' in August, and went on to reprint the entire work, priding itself on the fact that it had been the means by which the British public had first encountered Irving's work. One of Henry Colburn's periodicals, the *Literary Gazette*, also began publishing parts of *The Sketch Book* in September of the same year. The work had been warmly reviewed in America for its genteel and nostalgic representation of British society and manners, and the publication of these extracts in Britain helped generate a new groundswell of interest. As a consequence, Irving set aside his earlier indecision about publishing outside the United States, and attempted to obviate the burgeoning piracy by issuing his own version.

At first, Irving's dealings with British booksellers were encouraging. In August 1817, prior to the American publication, preliminary overtures to John Murray had been made and received, and Irving had met and dined with the publisher and his clique. Murray was arguably the most prestigious and influential British bookseller of the early nineteenth century. By paying larger sums than ever before for the works of select authors, Murray, along with Archibald Constable in Edinburgh, had revolutionised the book trade and vastly increased the prestige of the business and the celebrity of authors. Scott, with Constable, and Byron, with Murray, had achieved previously unknown levels of critical and popular success. Murray was also the founding publisher (in 1809) of the influential *Quarterly Review*, and until 1819 he had been half-owner and London publisher of *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*. Murray's residence, 50 Albemarle Street, was famed for the gatherings

7 This Preface appears in G.P. Putnam's Author's Revised Edition of *The Sketch Book* (1848). An exhaustive account of *The Sketch Book*'s publication can be found in McClary, *Irving and the House of Murray*, Chapter 1.

of a select coterie of Tory opinion-formers. It was into this heartland of British taste and influence that Irving attempted to gain entrance.

The initial interest waned, however, and Murray rejected *The Sketch Book* on financial grounds. Determined to produce the work, Irving had the book issued at his own expense through the house of John Miller, but when only one of the two volumes had been printed Miller was declared bankrupt. The publication was saved by the intercession of Murray, who acted, according to Irving, in response to Walter Scott's 'favourable representations', though the growing public interest was probably an equally decisive factor.[8] Murray bought the stock, took the work under his own imprint, and published the remaining volume, followed shortly by a second edition of the complete book in 1820. In the end, this protracted process was worthwhile: *The Sketch Book* became a publishing phenomenon, and during the summer of 1820 Irving became the darling of London's literary society and Murray's most fêted and popular author.

The reaction of the British critical press to *The Sketch Book* was varied and often politically motivated, but the attention that the reviewers paid Irving during the early 1820s was crucial in placing his short fiction in such a seminal position. Irving's nationality was immediately as interesting an issue as the quality of his prose, and he was seized upon by the partisan periodicals as the ideal vehicle through which to espouse their particular stance on America. The *Examiner*, Leigh Hunt's radical mouthpiece, perceived Irving's political potential very early on. *The Sketch Book* was reviewed in April 1820, and the journal took great pleasure in introducing to the public this member of 'the Trans-Atlantic literati'.[9] Praising Irving's 'amiable feeling, good taste, and correct sentiment', the *Examiner* attempted to create the impression of a radical tone in what was essentially, and very deliberately, an apolitical work. Attention and praise were focused on 'The Broken Heart' (a sketch about the widow of Robert Emmet, the Irish nationalist) and 'A Royal Poet' (a description of the incarceration of James I of Scotland)—neither of which, when read in full, display much in the way of radicalism. The review closed with the exhortation that 'our ultra-marine brethren may be excited to a rivalry in letters […] worthy to go down to posterity along with their glorious political fame'.[10]

The *Edinburgh Review* was less intent on politicising Irving himself, but it still responded to the politics of nationality. Francis Jeffrey's review of August 1820 set the tone for the majority of Irving's subsequent criticism. Jeffrey acknowledged the fact that *The Sketch Book* was not noticed primarily for its own merits, though these were admitted, but rather because it was the first American work that could be declared to be 'written throughout with the greatest care and accuracy'.[11] In contrast to the radical *Examiner*, the Whiggish *Edinburgh* was never likely to pay tribute to the American Revolution. Moreover, the political dimensions of Irving's work were heightened by the proximity of the events of the 1812–14 war between

8 McClary, *Irving and the House of Murray*, p. xlvii.

9 *Examiner* (26 April 1820): 252–53, p. 252. Reprinted in facsimile, introduction by Yasuo Deguchi, 15 vols (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1996–98), XIII: 1820.

10 Ibid., p. 253.

11 *Edinburgh Review*, 34, p. 160.

the two nations—a historical light in which some reviewers' more anti-American comments should be considered. The *Edinburgh Review* was, however, willing to give America's literary offspring what it considered to be a fair hearing, and like many others, the journal responded directly to *The Sketch Book*'s article 'English Writers on America', where Irving pleaded for a cessation of literary hostility. In part through Irving's explicit olive branch, and in part through what Jeffrey described as the author's 'fairness and indulgence', 'gentleness and philanthropy', and 'candour and kindness', *The Sketch Book* was successful in breaching the considerable critical hostility towards American writers: a literary group which had been previously viewed by large sections of the British critical press as the product of an economically aggressive but culturally backward society.[12] In *The Sketch Book*, Irving spoke to the British in urbane, ironic, and gentlemanly tones. His taste and easy humour attracted the acclaim he had hoped for, and the reviewers, for the most part, extended the promise of friendship towards American literature that Irving had been anxious to solicit.

The Tory *Quarterly Review* followed Jeffrey's lead. Henry Matthews's review praised Irving, but also contained barbed asides on the 'spirit of good sense and moderation that could scarcely be expected from an American', and expressed doubts about a country perceived to be still 'rioting in the first delicious intoxication of national vanity'.[13] The degree of animosity towards America on the part of the Tory press made Irving's overall critical success all the more remarkable. Although Irving shared his publisher with the *Quarterly Review*, the journal's editor, William Gifford, held a notoriously anti-American stance, and to win even faint praise from the conservative journal was a significant coup for the American writer. The *Quarterly*'s approval stemmed in part from a perceived John-Bullish straightforwardness in Irving's style, which was deemed 'exclusively English, and […] not indebted for any of its charms to the common aid of classical allusion or quotation'.[14] This was reinforced by the sympathetic portrayal of Britain in the sketches—indeed, Matthews wished for 'more of English Society and English manners'.[15] It should be remembered that in the same year as *The Sketch Book* was published, Sydney Smith, a noted defender of America, was forced to concede ironically in a much-quoted comment: 'in the four quarters of the globe, who reads an American book? or goes to an American play? or looks at an American picture or statue?'[16] In short, Irving managed to ingratiate himself with the British reviewers and produce a work that successfully deflected much potential criticism and earned him a remarkable amount of acclaim.

Irving's early reviews were not entirely adulatory. The charge that the reviewers raised, and which dogged Irving throughout his career, was that he was derivative and insubstantial. His style, though eloquent, was indebted, as Jeffrey noted, to

12 Ibid., p. 161.

13 *Quarterly Review*, 25 (April 1821): 50–67, pp. 53, 51.

14 Ibid., p. 67.

15 Ibid., p. 55.

16 *Edinburgh Review*, 33 (January 1820): 69–80, p. 79. From a review by Smith of Adam Seybert's *Statistical Annals of the United States of America* (1818).

'Addison and Goldsmith, in the humorous and discursive parts—and our own excellent Mackenzie, in the more soft and pathetic'.[17] The price of Irving's desire to appeal as an elegant man of letters was his being branded a copyist, albeit a good one, of the eighteenth-century British essayists ('Addison and water', as Samuel Rogers famously described him). Such criticism portrays Irving not as an innovator or genius, but as an able consolidator of style and form. In so far as the overall reception of *The Sketch Book* was concerned, these grievances were minor, but Irving would see the same negative sentiments surface with greater alacrity on the publication of his later works.

During the early 1820s, however, the tide of critical attitude towards America was turning and Irving's short fiction was certainly well placed. Ten years earlier, in a lengthy introduction to the collected edition of *Salmagundi* (the first of Irving's works to be published in Britain) John Lambert had taken a strongly pro-American stance. Lambert's essay anticipated Irving's pleas for transatlantic reconciliation by rebuking the prejudices of those who 'begin to prick up their ears at the very name of *American* literature'. [18] Lambert was ahead of his time, but by the 1820s most of the reviews saw fit to give the largest extracts from *The Sketch Book* to the American pieces—tacitly acknowledging the fact that those parts carried the greatest interest for the British reader. Henry Matthews compared Irving's tales favourably to those of Walter Scott, and his review concluded:

> Such is The Legend of Sleepy Hollow [sic], which with 'Rip Van Winkle' and the 'Spectre Bridegroom,' will, we think, be more read and admired than any other parts of the book. There is in the author's sketches of this kind a force and facility of touch, that bespeak the hand of a master.[19]

Irving was himself aware that his American material was likely to prove most popular. In revising *The Sketch Book* for a British readership he included two pieces not present in the American version: 'Traits of Indian Character' and 'Philip of Pokanoket'. These sketches perform a similar function for British readers as narratives such as the Christmas sketches and 'A Royal Poet' did for the American audience: the first purports to give the reader an insight into the more intriguing recesses of an alien culture and the second relates a relatively obscure piece of American history.

It was these insights into the New World that made *The Sketch Book* such an interesting proposition. Had Irving been British, *The Sketch Book* would never have commanded such attention from the critical press. This immensely likeable and well-written work was suitably non-contentious, and gave the reviewers an American book and author to praise, with only minor grievances, as well as a springboard to examine more closely the literature emerging from what many regarded as a country indelibly linked to Britain. The crucial side effect of this transatlantic curiosity was

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17 *Edinburgh Review*, 34, p. 162.

18 *Salmagundi; or, the Whim-Whams and Opinions of Lancelot Longstaff, Esq. and Others*, introd. John Lambert (London: J.M. Richardson, 1811), Introductory Essay, p. ix. Lambert's emphasis.

19 *Quarterly Review*, 25, p. 66.

that some of Irving's gloss rubbed off onto collections of short fiction as a whole, and helped to lend such works a higher status for many decades to come.

Geoffrey Crayon and the Literary Sketch

From the perspective of genre criticism, *The Sketch Book* is something of a miscellany. It consists of thirty-two 'sketches' which display an assortment of styles, themes, locations, and narrative voices. These range from scenic descriptions ('Rural Life in England', 'The Country Church'); to anecdotal character portrayals ('The Wife', 'The Angler'); musings on art, nationality, and customs ('The Mutability of Literature', 'John Bull', and the Christmas sketches); treatises on historical figures ('Roscoe', 'A Royal Poet'); and narrative tales ('Rip Van Winkle', 'The Spectre Bridegroom', and 'Sleepy Hollow'). In an attempt to court popularity and avoid trying the patience of readers, the work presents what Henry Matthews called 'a variety of dishes to please a variety of tastes', but it also manifests a significant degree of tonal and thematic unity.[20] The most obvious harmonising force is the voice of Irving's narrator, Geoffrey Crayon, who presents all but three of the pieces.

Crayon's persona has been thoroughly analysed by literary critics, and the influence of Irving's genial narrator can be traced through much short fiction of the 1820s and beyond. William Hedges describes Crayon's narratorial position as that of an 'alienated observer': a phrase which helps describe Crayon's desire to play the part of a reliable diarist and to maintain an objective reserve and humorous detachment from the scenes he witnesses.[21] Beyond this, Crayon also strives to obey the maxim of brevity—the keynote of the sketch. Richard Sha argues that the literary sketch is a mode in which 'the visual lends the visionary the foothold of ontology, and the imagination the grounding of the real'.[22] This complementary combination of the visionary and the grounded serves as an apt description of *The Sketch Book*'s narrator. Irving presents Crayon as a careful mediator, who attempts to arbitrate the responses of the reader by acting as a conduit between the more fanciful descriptions and the 'real'. Crayon self-consciously exerts himself to give the liveliest and most picturesque sketch, by verbally glossing the attractively-framed foreground in the hope that the reader will share his own fascination with the more substantial background theme of the significance that Britain holds for America.

Crayon is alert to his fundamentally external position. As an American, he can witness, and sometimes participate in, the scenes and customs of Britain, but he cannot experience them with the innate awareness of the native. Sometimes extended to naivety for effect, this perspective provides his American readers with a picturesque, and occasionally mythic, interpretation of an important part of their

20 Ibid., p. 58.

21 See William L. Hedges, *Washington Irving: An American Study, 1802–1832* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1965). Hedges devotes a chapter to this idea, and the phrase has subsequently been reinterpreted by Irving critics, notably David Seed in his article 'The Art of Literary Tourism: An Approach to Washington Irving's "Sketch Book"', *Ariel*, 14, 2 (April 1983): 67–68.

22 Sha, *The Visual and Verbal Sketch*, pp. 12–13.

country's historical point of origin. However, such a proximity to history can be double-edged, and the past becomes both sustaining and potentially overwhelming. By taking the Old World as his subject Crayon runs the risk of becoming a relic himself: fading into nostalgia and antiquity, and losing contact with the vibrancy of the New World.

In a sketch titled 'The Mutability of Literature', Crayon's fears for his own posterity are revealed in a conversation with a dusty and neglected volume in the library of Westminster Abbey. Faced with the threat of historical insignificance, he constructs a positive formulation which contends that works of literature enjoy a cyclic mode: 'springing up, flourishing, adorning the fields for a short time, and then fading into dust, to make way for their successors.'[23] Over and over again, *The Sketch Book* explores authorial anxieties about longevity and posterity, as Irving struggles to differentiate and disentangle his work from both the decomposing morass of European historical literature and the more parochial concerns of his American contemporaries.

Irving was at least partially successful in negotiating the intricate network of cultural debts that Britain and America owed one another. His achievement not only reconstructed Britain as a legitimate starting point for American writers, but also rejuvenated their own country for the British by looking upon well-known vistas with fresh eyes. The child-like glee and unaffected delight at the sheer weight of British history that Crayon expresses so well could not fail to appeal to the British reader. In comparison to his own country, the Old World had an infinitely greater heritage to draw upon, and Irving flattered the British with his myth-making and his celebration of the more poetic qualities of their society. Crayon's adulation is sometimes overdone, but Irving nonetheless managed to construct an ideal of Britishness that struck a chord with that country's writers. In testament to his successful Anglicisation, Mary Russell Mitford chose to exclude Irving from her anthology of American short fiction, *Stories of American Life*, on the grounds that 'his writings are essentially European'.[24] Mitford's collection was published ten years after *The Sketch Book*, and the interceding years had clearly done little to diminish Washington Irving's credentials as the most British of all American writers.

Three Tales from The Sketch Book

At the heart of *The Sketch Book* are its three narrative tales: 'Rip Van Winkle', 'The Legend of Sleepy Hollow', and the less renowned 'The Spectre Bridegroom'. In each of these tales, the voice of the affable and Anglo-centric Crayon is replaced with that of Diedrich Knickerbocker, the resurrected narrator of Irving's satirical *History of New York* (1809). The note which prefaces 'Rip Van Winkle' serves to undermine Knickerbocker's credibility through an overblown description of his 'history of the

23 Washington Irving, *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent*., ed. Haskell Springer (Boston: Twayne, 1978), p. 105. Forms vol. 8 of *Complete Works*, ed. Pochmann, et al. Henceforth cited parenthetically as *SB*.

24 Mary Russell Mitford [?and James Athearn Jones] (eds), *Stories of American Life. By American Writers*, 3 vols (London: Colburn and Bentley, 1830), Preface, I, iv.

province, during the reign of the Dutch governors' (that is, Irving's own *History of New York*). The hyperbolic description of Knickerbocker's work goes on to state: 'Its chief merit is its scrupulous accuracy, which indeed was a little questioned on its first appearance, but has since been completely established; and it is now admitted into all historical collections as a book of unquestionable authority' (*SB*, 28). Knickerbocker is presented as a bluff foil to Crayon's urbanity. An American of Dutch origin, he has a trove of tales and legends concerning the New York region. These have been acquired through his role as a conduit for the gossipy lore of the area (what Irving satirises as his 'historical researches') and Knickerbocker is never afraid to assert their, or his own, veracity.

In ways which are outlined in my first chapter, ideas of plain-speaking, traditional knowledge, and truthfulness are all bound up in the telling of a 'tale', and these concepts are central to the ideology of early-nineteenth-century short fiction. For Irving, the 'truth' of 'Rip Van Winkle' revolves around its construction of an American identity through myth, and the treatment of realism, history, and folklore. Jeffrey Rubin-Dorsky has proposed that Irving belonged to a generation of Americans who suffered from an anxiety with regard to their role within, and relationship to, their country. As the pressure of the achievements of the previous generation made itself felt, Irving's contemporaries became dislocated from their own history. The perception that the old order was passing, and that the responsibility for their nation now fell to them caused a generation of Americans to question their identity.

In contrast, Europe's supposedly clearer and firmer connections to its past appeared to offer secure points of reference. Rubin-Dorsky states: 'It is important to note that Irving's most popular works of the 1820s, especially *The Sketch Book* and *Bracebridge Hall*, illustrate his attraction to England as both a cohesive nation and a united people held together by a respect for fundamental social and political principles.'[25] For an American readership, 'Rip Van Winkle' created a sustaining myth of continuity through the turmoil of national change. The immature figure of Rip, who sleeps away his adulthood and the War of Independence in an enchanted grotto, expresses the childlike self-image of the American male that Irving himself faced. Escaping from the pressures and expectations that society exacts on him, he returns to find change and dislocation, but also to discover his place in society—as a storyteller.

In *The Sketch Book*, and particularly in 'Rip Van Winkle', Irving offers up America as a land of myth. Historically, the events in the story were less than fifty years old, but Irving's treatment of the past portrays Rip's tale as being shrouded in the mists of time. The Dutch settlement, 'of great antiquity', is set in the 'fairy mountains' of the Catskill range (further historicised with the Dutch 'Kaatskill') (*SB*, 29). These mountains had intense personal associations for Irving. He later made the region the subject of his contribution to *The Home Book of the Picturesque* (1852), a collaborative work conceived as a showpiece for the high standards of both American writing and publishing. In his essay, titled 'The Catskill Mountains', Irving describes the area as 'the great poetical region of our country': a place where

25 Jeffrey Rubin-Dorsky, *Adrift in the Old World: The Psychological Pilgrimage of Washington Irving* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), pp. 8–9.

mystery and magic could thrive amid the 'virgin soil' and there could be maintained 'a hallowed ground for fancy and the muses'.[26] Irving takes similar pains to establish the historical credentials of Rip's village, linking it to the formative days of the province and the Dutch governorship of Peter Stuyvesant, and connecting it to a time when humanity's understanding of the world was more opaque. Here, the Catskills become a region where the old ways and the old gods still hold sway.

The legend has long been identified as a reworking of the German folktale of 'Peter Klaus', and the motif of the sleeper appears in many other European tales and myths. More recently, Deanna Turner has compared the magical amphitheatre in 'Rip Van Winkle' to another mythic site: the 'stately pleasure dome' of Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan'.[27] Like Coleridge's dream-palace, Irving's Catskills provide a landscape shaped by imagination. In America's as yet uncharted hinterland, Rip dreams away the history of the War of American Independence, and his return from the past creates a sense of continuity in his country's history. In effect, Irving mythologises America's independence. The disorientation and dislocation experienced by Rip on his return is soon rationalised either as the product of superficial differences (the public house remains the same, but the 'George' on its sign is now 'Washington', rather than 'King'), or as the natural progress of time (all his contemporaries are dead, but he recognises the lineage of the parents in their children). In the land where anything is possible, an event which Irving describes later in *The Sketch Book* as 'one of the greatest political experiments in the history of the world', is almost magically brought to pass. By eliding history, the story of 'Rip Van Winkle' creates a seamless, bloodless change, during which America can continue to be loyal to its past without betraying its new ideals.

The mythologisation of America and its history also had a significant impact for British readers. From the perspective of the old colonial power, Rip's story imbued America with the kind of imaginative potential that could no longer reside in Britain. Poets and Gothic writers had previously turned to the forests, mountains, and folklore of Europe as sites of the Romantic imagination. In 'Rip Van Winkle', Irving revealed America as another location that was not yet fully civilised, and which writers of short fiction, long a powerful vehicle for mythic conveyance, could seize upon as a field with untapped visionary capacity. Washington Irving transposed European myth onto an American landscape, and, in turn, many British writers returned the favour by employing that newly-romanticised country as a location or vehicle for their own tales. European writers had exploited the literary potential of North America as a primeval hinterland before *The Sketch Book*'s publication, but Irving's redeployment of folklore, myth, and culture forged stronger and subtler interconnections. Henry James claimed that Americans who crossed the Atlantic did so with a 'latent preparedness' for the landscape and culture of Britain that was

26 'The Catskill Mountains', in *The Home Book of the Picturesque: Or American Scenery, Art, and Literature* (New York: G.P. Putnam, 1852), pp. 71–78, p. 72.

27 Turner argues that Irving 'maps the topography of Coleridge's poem onto his fictional landscape', see 'Shattering the Fountain: Irving's Re-Vision of "Kubla Khan" in "Rip Van Winkle"', *Symbiosis: A Journal of Anglo-American Literary Relations*, 4, 1 (April 2000): 1–17, p. 2.

not shared by the British for the scenes and society of the United States. Irving's descriptions and stories of America had helped redress this balance just a little, and allowed the land of opportunity also to become the land of literary possibility.

Many of Irving's narrative tales incorporate folkloric devices, but the act of re-deploying the tropes and motifs of fairy tales and oral traditions is not without its problems. From the start of his career, Irving divided critics with his use of the supernatural. A review of *The Sketch Book* by the American critic Henry Brevoort claimed that the work rejected the dry discourse of science in favour of a more poeticised mode. In his view, the work offered succour for 'all those who are not yet sublimed with pure intellect, nor become inveterately wise; who still retain a feeling of human infirmities, and a relish for nature', and Brevoort singled out 'Rip Van Winkle' for special praise.[28] Such enthusiasm, however, could not pass undisputed, even within the confines of the review itself. In an 'Addition' to Brevoort's article, an unknown editor felt compelled to insert a clause damping the effusive praise, and stating that 'we think probability however, should not be wholly overlooked'. Although supernatural forces were acceptable as devices to heighten intrigue and tension, the marvellous elements of a narrative could cause problems for an author if they had not been resolved into a rational explanation by the conclusion of the work. Sydney Smith summarised the stance of most critics in his comments on Walter Scott's novel *The Monastery* (1820): 'It is quite childish to introduce supernatural agency; as much of the terrors and follies of superstition as you please, but no actual ghosts and hobgoblins.'[29]

In 'Rip Van Winkle', Irving went against this accepted wisdom by constructing a set of circumstances that, unlike the supernatural agencies in 'The Spectre Bridegroom' and 'Sleepy Hollow', defy rational interpretation: Rip simply sleeps away a large section of his life. What both Brevoort and the *New York Evening Post*'s editor failed to appreciate, however, is the lengths to which Irving went in order to undermine a purely supernatural (or improbable) reading of 'Rip Van Winkle'. Peter Christensen has described the 'overdetermined' framing device of the tale as the key to an apparent disavowal of 'the fantastic', which he discerns in all of Irving's writings.[30] Christensen employs Tzvetan Todorov's definition of the fantastic as a mode which is deliberately ambiguous—creating hesitancy on the part of the reader between a rational and a supernatural explanation for a story (the adjacent terms are the uncanny, where the rational explanation is accepted, and the marvellous, in which events can be explained only from a supernatural perspective).[31] In Crayon's preface to the tale, Knickerbocker is presented so satirically and the 'truth' of the story is defended so vociferously that any hesitancy is quashed and the reader is

28 *New York Evening Post*, 26 June 1819. Reprinted in Ralph M. Aderman (ed.), *Critical Essays on Washington Irving* (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1990), 46–47, p. 47.

29 Letter to Archibald Constable, 25 March 1820. Nowell C. Smith (ed.), *Letters of Sydney Smith*, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953), I, 350–51.

30 Peter Christensen, 'Washington Irving and the Denial of the Fantastic', in Stanley Brodwin (ed.), *The Old and New World Romanticism of Washington Irving* (Westpoint, CT: Greenwood Press, 1986), pp. 51–60, p. 54.

31 See Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (1970; Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1975).

forced to assume the story to be false. Christensen views this apparent denial of the fantastic as 'a psychological and imaginative liability on Irving's part', and the implication is that the author lacked the courage and the imagination for the leap into the supposedly more artistically credible realm of the fantastic, leaving short fiction grounded until the superior talents of Poe and Hawthorne emerged to take the final step.[32]

Though the later pair may have been more innovative writers, Christensen's criticism of Irving lacking the nerve for fantastic narratives is an injustice. His tales are not stand-alone pieces of short fiction, but contributions to the broader examination of transatlantic national identity that takes place in *The Sketch Book*. It is therefore somewhat disingenuous to claim that the overdetermined framing of 'Rip Van Winkle' represents equivocation on Irving's part. Irving's narrative frames do not simply insulate his stories from the dangers of the fantastic. They engender meaning by situating the tales and their tellers within the tradition of tall tales and hyperbolic yarns which typify the discourse of American folklore—a discourse which Irving himself helped create. Irving's attitude to folklore, which he would go to some lengths to justify in *Bracebridge Hall*, has its foundation here. In Irving's works, traditional tales are vehicles: literary modes that have sufficiently elastic properties to enable them to be used as metaphors for the transmission of his ideas concerning the nature and future of society without damaging the fabric of the narrative. Walter Scott's influence on this aspect of Irving's work is palpable. In their time together during Irving's visit to Abbotsford, the enthusiasm demonstrated by Scott for the folk traditions of his locale encouraged the American writer to read European folklore and weave it into his own work.[33] Irving admired the elevated position that folk culture occupied in Scott's novels and poems, and by seeking to emulate some of the effects of this practice a chain of legitimisation was created. The patriarch of British literature and spearhead of the re-legitimisation of the novel had passed on some of his authority to Irving. The latter, always keen to assimilate new ideas into his work, embraced folklore in his short fiction. Like Scott, Irving believed in the centrality of legend to national and local identity, and if America lacked the wealth of suitable mythic material that abounded in Scotland, he felt able and willing to create more. Irving was by no means the first writer to attempt a literary incarnation of the folktale, but he added an international dimension to the already complex attitudes of British authors towards traditional materials. The popularity of his short fiction verified the appetite for modern, literary folk stories among the reading public, and went some way towards validating the agendas that were being put forward in the regional tales of contemporary writers such as James Hogg and Allan Cunningham.

The second tale in *The Sketch Book*, coming near the close of the first volume, is 'The Spectre Bridegroom'. The motifs of the Continental folktale are even stronger

32 Christiansen, 'Denial of the Fantastic', p. 59.

33 Irving quotes Scott's enthusiastic expatiation on Scottish popular songs: '"They are a part of our national inheritance," said he; "and something that we may truly call our own."' Washington Irving, 'Abbotsford', *The Crayon Miscellany*, ed. Dahlia Kirby Terrell (Boston: Twayne, 1979), p. 134. Forms vol. 12 of *Complete Works*, ed. Pochmann, et al. This influence operated in both directions, and the impact of Irving's writing on Scott's tales and framing narratives is discussed in Chapter 4, pp. 126–27.

in this story than in 'Rip Van Winkle', as Irving employs, and then circumvents, the conventions of the genre to create what is essentially a mock-fairy tale. Irving activates and then gently satirises the fancy of readers of fairy stories and of the Gothic, and concludes by appealing to the section of his audience for whom the machinations of the supernatural were regarded with suspicion and distaste. As with 'Rip Van Winkle', Irving is overtly concerned with contextualising his narrative fiction, and the preceding sketch, 'The Inn Kitchen', establishes mood and tone. Here, Crayon receives the tale from the mouth of one of 'the middle and inferior order of travellers' (*SB*, 119) with whom he shares an inn. The travellers are 'seated around a great burnished stove, that might have been mistaken for an altar, at which they were worshipping' (*SB*, 119), but Crayon undermines this portentous description by conceding that the story 'derived its chief zest from the manner in which it was told' (*SB*, 120). This introductory scene embodies Irving's dichotomous attitude towards folklore by depicting a modernised paganistic ritual of oral transmission, deeply imbued with a sense of moment, which is deflated in accordance with Irving's self-conscious attitude to the appropriation of 'traditional' concepts of truth and story.

The tale centres on a small, parochial community, ruled by a Baron whose world is physically bounded by mountains and forests, and who is himself the epicentre of a society with equally limited perceptions. The motif of a place sealed away from reality in an indolent, insular vacuum, recalls the amphitheatre of 'Rip Van Winkle' and anticipates many of Irving's later village locations. Such places retain the dreamy state of the folktale, but in Irving's stories the pressing power of the 'real' tends to seep through. In 'The Spectre Bridegroom', a suitor who is fatally wounded by bandits sends his emissary to convey the news to his intended wife, the daughter of the Baron. The messenger is mistaken for the groom until his departure, when he reveals that the future husband is dead, whereupon the Baron's family, gorged on a diet of superstition and folklore, all assume the bridegroom to be a phantom. The intended humour of the tale is derived from the credulity of the provincial characters. Irving takes the absolute belief that exists in folktales and applies it to a situation devoid of magic for comic effect. This is a world in which the Baron is able to reject any possibility other than that 'he was to have some wood demon for a son in law, and, perchance, a troop of goblin grand children' (*SB*, 131). When a member of the party attempts to cast doubt upon the supernatural quality of the events by venturing 'to suggest that it might be some sportive evasion of the young cavalier', he finds that he contradicts the community's central ideology: 'This, however, drew on him the indignation of the whole company, and especially of the Baron, who looked upon him as little better than an infidel; so that he was fain to abjure his heresy as speedily as possible, and come into the faith of the true believers' (*SB*, 130).

Irving's mock-folklore struck a chord with his readers. Henry Matthews believed 'The Spectre Bridegroom' to be the pre-eminent piece in the first volume, and his review expresses the contemporary demand for ironically reworked folktales in its request for 'a whole series of *Tales of the Inn Kitchen* executed in the same lively manner'.[34] There is a sense in all three *Sketch Book* tales of Irving testing out various mythic conventions and forms: exploring the properties of traditions and folklore to see if and how they could be made to suit his purposes. Here the form becomes

34 *Quarterly Review*, 25, p. 58.

an extended joke, shared between the narrator and the reader. At the solution of the mystery the narrator takes the reader aside to confirm the connivance: '(for in truth, as you must have known all the while, he was no goblin)' (*SB*, 132). Part of the role of the folktale is to deal with all that is shared and mutual for humanity, and it does so through circumstances that are 'other': separate and removed from normal experience. Folklore implies a fundamental link between human experience, whatever social or historical divides exist, and as such it was well suited to Irving's conciliatory aims. America and Europe are so different, and so similar, and this powerful belief is transformed into an extended metaphor in Irving's various treatments of folk material.

'The Legend of Sleepy Hollow' is *The Sketch Book*'s second attempt at creating an American folk myth, and it is the counterpart to 'Rip Van Winkle'. Like Rip's tale, it has been subject to innumerable critical readings and evaluations over the years, and is often read and analysed outside of the context of *The Sketch Book*. The location, the village of Sleepy Hollow, is yet another of Irving's regions of magical potential. Described as 'one of the quietest places in the whole world' (*SB*, 272), the village is a motionless site where life and change pass by, acknowledged by the people of the village, but exerting little influence on them: 'Certain it is, the place still continues under the sway of some witching power, that holds a spell over the minds of the good people, causing them to walk in a continual reverie' (*SB*, 273). Superstition and naivety play as large a part in the life of the villagers as they do for the characters in 'The Spectre Bridegroom'. Here, however, the narrative events are an inversion of those in the German tale, and it is the outsider who is the victim of the supernatural hoax.

The interloper is Ichabod Crane, a schoolmaster and native of urban Connecticut who leads a somewhat parasitic life amongst the people of Sleepy Hollow. Crane is described as 'an odd mixture of small shrewdness and simple credulity' (*SB*, 277). He has been seen as a predecessor of Mark Twain's Hank Morgan, the unswervingly practical and inventive protagonist of *A Connecticut Yankee at King Arthur's Court*, but this comparison flatters Crane, who lacks Morgan's resolute disbelief in anything supernatural as well as his common sense. Irving's creation is all appetite. He has 'the dilating powers of an Anaconda' (*SB*, 275), both for food and for anything of a marvellous nature. At the climax of the tale, Brom Bones, the village braggart and good-natured local hero, exacts his revenge on Crane for attempting to woo his own intended bride by frightening Ichabod out of Sleepy Hollow disguised as the figurehead of local superstition, the Headless Horseman. In an extremely influential essay, Daniel Hoffman has analysed the encounter between Brom Bones and Ichabod Crane in terms of a mythic duel between the Yankee (Crane) versus the Backwoodsman (Brom), in which 'the yokel gets the best of the city slicker'.[35] Crane sees everything only in terms of its cash value and culinary potential, and his fixation with immediate personal gratification represents early-nineteenth-century America's increasing distance from its own history. Brom, in opposition, is a figure of continuity. It is he, not Crane, who belongs in Sleepy Hollow, since he is able to

35 Daniel G. Hoffman, 'Irving's Use of American Folklore in "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow"', *PMLA*, 68 (June 1953): 425–35, p. 433.

appreciate and sustain the slow moving way of life and protect the core values of the village.

In addition to the battle between Yankee and yokel, the tale operates as an examination of the nature of myth and the relative values of belief in the supernatural. In a similar way to James Hogg's story of 'George Dobson's Expedition to Hell' in *The Shepherd's Calendar* (discussed in Chapter 4), Irving explores the difference between rural and urban superstitions: in this case the former is presented as organic and essential, the latter affected and alien. Crane's credulity is of a different nature from that of the people of the village, and from that of the characters in 'The Spectre Bridegroom'. These are people who have been brought up with a day-to-day awareness of a supernatural world in which their lives continue to be steeped. Brom boasts of having raced against the Headless Horseman, and whether or not this is true it displays his relationship to the mythic: it is something he interacts with and shares space with. Crane's abject terror at the appearance of the supposed Horseman reveals the extent to which the supernatural is 'other' to him. Ichabod is earlier described as 'a perfect master of Cotton Mather's History of New England Witchcraft, in which, by the way, he most firmly and potently believed' (*SB*, 276). He has entered a world where the supernatural is commonplace, but Crane, whose notions of the fantastic are fogged by his modern, urban sensibility, is unable to distinguish between the truly fantastic and the rural ruse that Brom Bones exacts over him.

The success of Irving's attempts in *The Sketch Book* to give America a folkloric tradition of its own can be measured in part by the numerous films, cartoons, abridgements, and popular references that 'Rip Van Winkle' and 'The Legend of Sleepy Hollow' have spawned during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Anthologised over and over again as children's stories, these tales have filtered into the American consciousness to a degree which even Irving could scarcely have hoped for. Through nostalgic sentiment and a borrowed folk culture, these stories have helped to connect America to its colonial past in ways that engage with the contradictory issues of national identity, while managing to sidestep the more problematic discourses of politics and conventional history.

Bracebridge Hall

In 1822 Irving followed up *The Sketch Book* with a new collection, titled *Bracebridge Hall; or, the Humorists*. Geoffrey Crayon returned as narrator, this time to relate the events that take place during his stay with the Bracebridge family—the same family introduced during the Christmas sections of *The Sketch Book*. *Bracebridge Hall*, though by no means a novel proper, has a more unified narrative structure than Irving's first collection. The progress of the main characters is traced through the book, and the central plot culminates initially in a catastrophic May-Day celebration and ultimately in a marriage. The sections dealing with these principal events are inlaid with similar observational sketches to those in *The Sketch Book*, as well as four stand-alone narratives: 'The Stout Gentleman', 'The Student of Salamanca', 'Annette Delarbe', and 'Dolph Heyliger'.

The British reviews of *Bracebridge Hall* were more muted in their praise than those of *The Sketch Book*, though the general response was undoubtedly still warm. With the popular triumph of *The Sketch Book* still fresh in the public mind, Irving could rely on his reputation to offer some degree of protection from the reviewers, but, although *Bracebridge Hall* became a commercial success, a critical consensus emerged that it was inferior to his earlier work. Some negative comments were to be expected. *The Sketch Book* had not been to everybody's taste, and the criticism it had received was equally applicable to Irving's new collection. The *Examiner* once again made America the central issue, but was far more damning this time, as the realisation dawned that Irving was never going to produce the kind of republican polemic that the radical press hoped for. Feeling let down by a perceived ally the reviewer grumbled that 'for a native of the United States to seem to *forget* the more vigorous and healthy tone of society in his own country, in sickly homage to those insubstantial traditions and pictures of nothing, is unnatural and surprising'.[36] The more conservative periodicals shared the *Examiner*'s disappointment at the paucity of American material. The most pressing problem, however, was that *Bracebridge Hall* was felt to lack the incisive socio-cultural commentaries and acute characterisation of *The Sketch Book*. Instead, many reviewers accused Irving of having produced an inaccurate and second-hand vision of Britain: one which, in the words of one reviewer, was 'drawn not from life, but from musty volumes'.[37]

In *Bracebridge Hall* Irving again faced a dilemma regarding British history. Torn between applause for the landowning class's strong links to established social structures, and a republican admiration for the burgeoning independence and politicisation of the villagers, the work responds with a nostalgic and hesitant treatment of past and present. In the narrative tales, which again will be my focus, Irving once more reached back into the past, and in doing so demonstrated a more focused concern with the nature of stories. In 'Story Telling', he introduces the Bracebridge family's ritual of calling 'on some one or other of the company for a story, as it was formerly the custom to call for a song'.[38] This practice is partly a facet of Squire Bracebridge's self-appointed role as guardian of the village's traditional pastimes, but Irving returns to the storytelling custom throughout the book and it becomes a site where his subtle, yet pervasive irony is muted, at least for the duration of each tale. Irving recognised the strength of his readership's desire for narrative, and in particular for fantastic narrative, but the stories themselves are dismissed as mere vehicles. In a letter to Henry Brevoort, Irving explained how he considered 'a story merely as a frame on which to stretch my materials',[39] and here each oral contribution is casually written off as 'some hackneyed tale' (*BH*, 48). Having struggled to release himself from the onus of entertainment, Irving concentrates on positioning storytelling as a communal device, which brings the family together in

36 *Examiner* (15 December 1822): 792–93, p. 793. Reprinted in facsimile, introduction by Yasuo Deguchi, 15 vols (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1996–98), XV: 1822.

37 Eyre Evans Crowe, *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 11 (June 1822): 688–92, p. 689.

38 Washington Irving, *Bracebridge Hall; or the Humourists*, ed. Herbert F. Smith (Boston: Twayne, 1977), p. 48. Forms vol. 9 of *Complete Works*, ed. Pochmann, et al. Henceforth cited parenthetically as *BH*.

39 Letter dated 11 December 1824. Aderman, et al. (eds), *Letters*, II, 90.

a shared pastime, and as a manifestation of the power of even the most unbelievable of tales to turn rational and stolid people into rapt attendees.

Much of *Bracebridge Hall* is taken up with Irving's attempts to define a philosophy of the tale. As Mary Weatherspoon Bowden has argued, the whole work can be read as an attempt to satirise some of the conventions of fiction—the result of an 'intention to take these "persons in old books," to set them in motion, and sketch the resulting confusion'.[40] An ironic attitude to history is certainly evident. The work consistently reveals the folly of trying to ascribe traditional values and customs, which have long since waned, to modern existence. Simultaneously, however, storytelling celebrates those parts of human nature that link society indelibly to the past, without any artificial effort. The Squire's efforts to re-establish pastimes and rituals such as hawking and May Day fall into the category of folly, and Irving is keen to satirise these efforts with comic catastrophe. Their failure stems from a taint of feudality: the resurrected diversions are foisted on the village community from above, since the Hall is always the source for these uneasy impositions. As more than one Irving critic has noted, the villagers take great pleasure in expressing their class frustrations by stoning the allegorical rooks that dwell on the Squire's land: 'a very ancient and honourable line of gentry, highly aristocratical in their notions' (*BH*, 191). Treated like children who need to be shown how to have fun, it is inevitable that the villagers come to resent the overweening 'traditions' devised by the patriarchal Squire. *Bracebridge Hall* is consequently riven by the dichotomy between the narrator's desire to romanticise the past, and his satirical distaste concerning the manipulation of the townspeople into stooges for upper-class nostalgia.

In contrast to these artificially imposed customs, Irving construes folklore as an essential constituent of society: one which grows upwards and disseminates naturally amongst people of all ranks to become an integral part of local and national identity. In 'Popular Superstitions', the Squire's patronising habit of circulating well-known legends around the village, with their location suitably transposed to the local vicinity, is used as a springboard by Irving for a more thoughtful treatise on the phenomenon. Irving's attitude to folklore is broadly comparable to Wordsworth's assertion that, in pagan times, natural and celestial phenomena were interpreted as divine revelations of the hidden mechanisms of the world:

> Those radiant Mercuries, that seemed to move
> Carrying through ether, in perpetual round,
> Decrees and resolutions of the Gods;
> And, by their aspects, signifying works
> Of dim futurity, to Man revealed.
> —The imaginative faculty was lord
> Of observations natural […][41]

For Wordsworth, this benighted grasping at meaning represents mankind's initial steps towards enlightened self-knowledge. For Irving, pre-rational lore is chiefly

40 Mary Weatherspoon Bowden, 'Bracebridge Hall', in James W. Tuttleton (ed.), *Washington Irving: The Critical Reaction* (New York: AMS Press, 1993), pp. 94–109, p. 95.

41 William Wordsworth, *The Excursion* (1813), Bk. IV, ll. 702–08, in *Poems*, ed. John O. Hayden, 2 vols (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), II, 140.

worth celebrating for its poetic propensity: 'These twilight views of nature are often more captivating than any which are revealed by the rays of enlightened philosophy' (*BH*, 232). Like Walter Scott, Irving felt that the judicious use of traditional material was a powerful way of complementing more reasoned historical analysis, and of exploring those shared quasi-religious beliefs that, 'like instinct in animals' (*BH*, 82), act outside of the rational mind without giving way to an unquestioning, paganistic faith. His stories always leave themselves room for common sense and scepticism, yet they continually allude to the presence of the marvellous and remain fascinated by the hold that the supernatural wields over its readers or listeners.

Tales from Bracebridge Hall

The four narrative tales in *Bracebridge Hall* are all related by characters staying at the Hall, as part of the ritual of storytelling encouraged by the Squire amongst his family and guests. This strategy allows Irving to indulge his readers' fascination with the supernatural from the philosophically secure position created by this most conventional of framing devices. The first of these stories, 'The Stout Gentleman', acts as an appropriately ironic entry to this method of relating curious tales. Narrated by one of the Squire's guests—the Nervous Gentleman (later to appear in *Tales of a Traveller*)—the tale burlesques the ratiocinative conceits of deductive reasoning and empirical logic. Trapped in an inn on a wet weekend, the narrator becomes intrigued by the mysterious figure of 'the stout gentleman in No. 13' (*BH*, 51) whom he hears, and hears of, but of whom he cannot catch a glimpse. The failure of his attempts to ascribe a satisfactory mental picture to the stranger becomes increasingly frustrating: 'As fast as I wove one system of belief, some movement of the unknown would completely overturn it, and throw all of my thoughts again into confusion' (*BH*, 54). His imagination runs riot, and the power of the unknown over the imagination, which Gothic writers engaged with so effectively for the purposes of terror, is here employed for comic effect as the hyperactive fancy of the Nervous Gentleman stirs the reader's inquisitiveness.

Inevitably, the mystery is never resolved. The tale is a 'shaggy dog story', and is designed to elicit a groan from the reader on having had their curiosity piqued. The deflation of expectations is deliberate. The introduction to the tale promises 'all the elements of that mysterious and romantic narrative, so greedily sought after at the present day' (*BH*, 48), but by the conclusion that greed has been exposed as a shallow desire for marvellous narrative which Irving thwarts in order to reveal the extent to which the reader's appetite for this type of story matches that of the characters. 'The Stout Gentleman' is an appetiser. It operates as a textually self-reflexive device which increases the desire for narrative, and which resonates throughout the work, inviting the reader to reflect on the nature of a particular narrative, the reasons for its acceptability, and its effect on him or her.

The second tale, 'The Student of Salamanca', is another attempt to juxtapose marvellous and more realist narratives in order to question their relative qualities. It is also one of Irving's most maligned stories. William Hedges derides it as 'a dreadful gothic melodrama' and, aside from minor comments, it has been passed

over in most studies of *Bracebridge Hall*.[42] In spite of this poor reception, 'The Student of Salamanca' foregrounds many motifs and themes which are central to Irving's concepts of narrative and history, and is well worth commenting on in this light. The tale explores the subject of knowledge as a complex and mutable entity, symbolised by the figure of the alchemist. Alchemy, a richly emblematic subject that Irving would return to in *The Alhambra* (1832), has a simultaneously supernatural and rational appeal: it unites the empirical sciences of physics and chemistry with a belief in supernatural forces and the primacy of the imagination. The alchemist strives for a transcendent awareness of powers greater than those acknowledged by science, but the process of attaining that heightened consciousness is a scientific one. Felix de Vasquez, the alchemist of the tale, stresses this contradiction. He explains that 'the elixir vitæ […] is no charmed potion, […] the philosophers' stone […] is no necromantic talisman' (*BH*, 135). The process, he argues, is logical and learned, seeking 'only to apply some of nature's own specifics' (*BH*, 135). The desired result, however, is powerfully occult: 'a seraphic form would rise out of the furnace, holding forth a vessel, containing the precious elixir' (*BH*, 132).

The other characters in the tale act as foils for the compulsive behaviour of the alchemist. In particular, the dreamy and poetic attitude to knowledge displayed by Antonio, the eponymous student of the tale, seems flimsy and vacillating in comparison to the obsessive devotion of de Vasquez. The alchemist, 'this groper after secret and forgotten lore' (*BH*, 103), is also linked to the figure of the antiquary. For de Vasquez, as for Crayon, and Irving himself, historical research is an act of narrative creation. Like Jonathan Oldbuck in Walter Scott's novel, *The Antiquary* (1816), de Vasquez is a worthy pedant, and his obsessive reconstructions of the past have a similar tendency to create myth, instead of revealing truth. His search for the philosophers' stone means collecting and interpreting the indecipherable manuscripts of forgotten alchemists: 'to gather and concentrate the rays which had been thrown by various minds upon the secrets of alchymy' (*BH*, 112). Past events become recast by the alchemist into crucial episodes, as significance is imparted retrospectively to what amount to little more than anecdotes.

As in *The Sketch Book*, and later in *Tales of a Traveller*, Irving undermines and ironises antiquarian pursuits, while simultaneously celebrating such doomed attempts at rescuing the past as necessary devices for coping with the present. The alchemist, and to some extent the antiquarian, must not only believe in the veracity of his convictions, but also in their sublimity. Their hope is that the past still has the ability to make sense of the present, but the anxiety of posterity still looms. While wandering the deserted halls of the Alhambra, Antonio is confronted with 'inscriptions in Arabic, wherein the perpetuity of Moorish power and splendour within these walls was confidently predicted. Alas! how has the prophecy been falsified!' (*BH*, 102). Irving, or at least the Crayonesque manifestation of his anxieties, envies the Moors' ability to live in the moment, without continual referral to the past, but he struggles to reconcile this with the knowledge that history is mutable and the future will obliterate much of what the present holds true. In a passage in *The Alhambra*, a work that is prefigured by the setting and themes of 'The Student of Salamanca',

42 Hedges, *Irving: An American Study*, p. 171.

Irving demonstrates an increasing acceptance of the march of mutability. In 'The House of the Weathercock', a Moorish palace is described, whose weathercock bears the inscription 'Thus Ibn Habus al badise predicts Andalus shall one day vanish and pass away'—a message which is interpreted 'as a perpetual admonition of the instability of Moslem power'.[43] In *The Alhambra* the past is able to accept its own mutability and instability, and Irving's reliance on history as a crutch for the present diminishes, while the transience inherent in the present is embraced. In *Bracebridge Hall* this dilemma is still unresolved, as Irving struggles to make the past and the present coalesce in a satisfactory way.

Like 'The Student of Salamanca', 'Annette Delarbe' is a story which twentieth-century critics have found difficult to admire. Hedges brands it 'pathetic', lumping it in with the previous tale as one of *Bracebridge Hall*'s 'outright sops'.[44] Most commentators do not even mention it. The story is certainly not to modern tastes, and draws heavily on the eighteenth-century sentimental mode. Thematically, it has its antecedent in 'The Pride of the Village', which appears in the second volume of *The Sketch Book*. Both tales concern beautiful and gentle, though naïve and wilful, village maidens, and the disastrous events resulting from mistakes made during the tentative forays of first courtship. Here, Irving tries to construct a tale of poignancy and emotion, and this story is in some ways the most highly wrought of all the pieces in *Bracebridge Hall*. Contemporary reviewers praised the pathos of Annette's descent into a delusional stupor: 'one of those mists kindly diffused by Providence over the regions of thought, when they become too fruitful of misery' (*BH*, 214). Her mental state is a protective measure against the horrors of the past, which here, as throughout *Bracebridge Hall*, represents a site that must be mentally reconstructed in order to cope with the present.

Mary Weatherspoon Bowden is one of the few modern critics to give a lengthy analysis to 'Annette Delarbe', which she reads as another of Irving's attempts to create a contrast between a poeticised past and a realistic vision of the present. In Bowden's view, the story of Annette is a continuation of the 'themes of the role of fancy and how one should view the past'.[45] She argues that the delirium, though merciful, cannot be sustained as a mode of existence: the realities of the present must eventually break through when imagination masquerades as historical fact. While this reading is convincing to a certain extent, it fails to take into account the fact that Annette does not merely follow Squire Bracebridge in seeking to reconstruct the past as a region of nostalgic charm, but that her mind fundamentally refuses to accept the present. Annette's state is no mere 'fancy'; it is history as psychosis, and it terrifies those around her. Her madness anticipates Irving's later explorations of insanity derived from excess of emotion, most notably the story of the German

43 Washington Irving, *The Alhambra*, ed. William T. Lenehan and Andrew B. Myers (Boston: Twayne, 1983), pp. 106, 105. Forms vol. 14 of *Complete Works*, ed. Pochmann, et al. This line does not appear in the first edition of *The Alhambra* (1832), and was part of the extensive emendations made by Irving for the Author's Revised Edition published by G.P. Putnam in 1851.

44 Hedges, *An American Study*, p. 171.

45 Bowden, 'Bracebridge Hall', in Tuttleton (ed.), *The Critical Reaction*, p. 103.

Student in *Tales of a Traveller*, whose mind similarly deludes him as to the starkness of reality (in his case the fact that he has committed necrophilia). This story lacks the Gothic motifs and supernatural overtones that characterise the later tale, but it remains a forceful exploration of the power that imagination can wield over reality: frighteningly adept at subjugating sensory perception to its own construction of existence.

'Dolph Heyliger' is the last of *Bracebridge Hall*'s tales, and also one of Irving's longest, taking up almost half the second volume. Moreover, it is the only part of the work to be set in America and, like virtually all of Irving's stateside stories, was praised by the reviewers for 'those pictures of North American life and scenery, to us so interesting and so new'.[46] This attitude is at the heart of the lukewarm critical response to *Bracebridge Hall*. If Irving had listened to J.G. Lockhart's earlier advice and 'set boldly about *An American Tale, in three volumes duodecimo*', then the promised result of 'an easy, a speedy, and a glorious victory' could well have been his.[47] 'Dolph Heyliger' excepted, *Bracebridge Hall* was never forgiven for its singular failure to deliver those 'interesting' and 'new' American narratives that *The History of New York* and *The Sketch Book* had promised, and which his readership apparently craved.

As with all the stand-alone tales in *Bracebridge Hall*, 'Dolph Heyliger' is delivered as part of the Bracebridge family's slightly awkward re-enactment of oral storytelling. Dolph's story is Geoffrey Crayon's own narrative offering, although Irving once again redirects his New World tale via Diedrich Knickerbocker—who is in turn furnished with a character sketch in 'The Historian'. This short piece constructs Knickerbocker as a nostalgic relic of the magical, dream-like age of America summoned up in 'Rip Van Winkle' and 'Sleepy Hollow', and sets out one of Irving's central dicta in his assertion that he was writing for 'a story-telling age' (*BH*, 246).[48] Even in the nineteenth century, Irving proposes, part of the interaction that humanity continually forms with its own history is the desire for legendary narrative as a strategy of continuity. From this perspective Knickerbocker is the ideal narrator: he remains authoritative and assured while relating tales which leave the reader under no illusion as to their mythic status, in spite (indeed, often because) of his energetic claims to their integrity. Irving's enthusiasm for myth and legend is reinforced in the introductory apparatus to 'Dolph Heyliger' through an unusually vociferous footnote, in which Irving defends his use of folklore in *The Sketch Book*. The note attacks those reviewers who had trumpeted the German origins of 'Rip Van Winkle' and criticised Irving's appropriation 'as if it were a foul instance of plagiarism marvellously brought to light' (*BH*, 247n). In his own defence, Irving insists that his brief allusion to the source in the postscript to the story was indicative of his belief

46 Crowe, *Blackwood's*, 11, p. 691.

47 Review of Irving's *History of New York*, *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 7 (July 1820): 360–69, p. 369.

48 Irving repeats this claim in the introduction to *Tales of a Traveller*, where he states: 'I know this to be a story telling and a story reading age'. *Tales of a Traveller*, ed. Judith Giblin Haig (Boston: Twayne, 1987), p. 3. Forms vol. 10 of *Complete Works*, ed. Pochmann, et al. Henceforth cited parenthetically as *TT*.

that the connection was so well known as to not be worth making explicit: 'In fact, I had considered popular traditions of the kind as fair foundations for authors of fiction to build upon, and had made use of the one in question accordingly' (*BH*, 247n). Irving argues that folktales are communal building blocks of narrative. To reiterate the point he makes in 'Story Telling', every narrative is indebted in its own way to 'some hackneyed tale', and there is no such thing as a truly new story. In returning to folkloric sources, he had hoped neither to disguise his lack of imagination nor to pilfer undetected, but to start afresh in the construction of a literary tradition for his own fledgling nation, using the collective pool of culture shared by all inhabitants of northern Europe, and therefore by America.

Ideas of shared traditions inform the story of 'Dolph Heyliger'. Refracted through yet another narratorial voice, Knickerbocker receives the tale from John Josse Vandermoere: 'a pleasant gossiping man, whose whole life was spent in hearing and telling the news of the province' (*BH*, 250). Vandermoere's role is comparable to that which Squire Bracebridge attempts to perform: he acts as a vessel for those local legends that small communities engender. Ironically, the American tradition is portrayed as stronger and less artificial than that of the parent nation. In the world of Irving's tales, the United States remains in a folktale era. Despite the ongoing and rapid social and industrial development of the country, eyewitnesses to marvellous events live on (as Rip does in his tale) and are able to transmit the lore on to the next generation and keep the nation's social ideals alive.

In 'Dolph Heyliger', America is still struggling to formulate these ideals. The story is set in the early eighteenth century, when New York 'groaned under the tyranny of the English governor' (*BH*, 251) and the country strove to form its own identity. 'Dolph Heyliger' is directly descended from 'Rip Van Winkle' in Irving's *oeuvre*, and is the most folkloric of all his American tales. Dolph himself has many of the qualities of a *Märchen* hero. He oscillates between abject terror and passive credulity, but his naivety allows him to remain ultimately unfazed by the mysterious circumstances in which he finds himself involved. The tale is saturated with fairy-tale conventions: Dolph is the only child of a single mother; he obeys a thrice dreamt ghostly message; he abandons his home to seek his fortune; his fate is dictated by whims of nature when he falls overboard during a storm. Dolph Heyliger is a child of fortune. He exists in a fictional world where those who have the imaginative capacity to trust and (literally) to follow their dreams will reap the reward. The story's precept that 'he who can, in this loose, easy way, link foregone evil to anticipated good, possesses a secret of happiness almost equal to the philosophers' stone' (*BH*, 288) appears somewhat trite, but Irving, at the last gasp, allows the narrator and the tale the refuge of ambiguity as he reveals that 'in addition to his other accomplishments, Dolph Heyliger was noted for being the ablest drawer of the long-bow in the whole province' (*BH*, 300).[49]

49 The critical consensus is that the phrase refers to the ability to spin yarns or tell a good story. See John R. Getz, 'Irving's "Dolph Heyliger": Ghost Story or Tall Tale?', *Studies in Short Fiction*, 16 (1979): 67–68.

William Hedges has famously claimed that 'Dolph is the real hero of *Bracebridge Hall*', after giving meagre praise to the rest of the book.[50] The tale, situated near the end of the work, certainly functions as a narrative nexus. Dolph's story crystallises Irving's ideas about the role of storytelling within a society by once again linking contemporary America to its own past as well as to the broader sweep of European history. Dolph places absolute faith in the narrative he constructs around his own existence, and as a result he becomes prosperous and secure. For Irving, America is similarly self-narrated: it is a country which came into being because it remained faithful to the myth it had created for itself. The mythological past becomes impossible to separate from the actuality of the present, and the contemporary debt to the folktale-like events is impossible to deny. The themes of the work are drawn together as the sceptical modern world is revealed as an organic extension of legendary history. Historical continuity, which is forced and fragile in the England of *Bracebridge Hall*, can occur without effort in America—always the most convincing site for Irving.

Bracebridge Hall contains a series of tales and sketches which together examine the nature of storytelling and imagination. In this work, and in *The Sketch Book*, Irving helped give short fiction a significant role in the literary examination of nationality, history, and identity. 'Dolph Heyliger', 'Rip Van Winkle', and 'The Legend of Sleepy Hollow' were powerful influences on those contemporary British writers who were engaged in a re-examination of the lessons that pre-modern narratives still held for society. British reviewers applauded the American stories in particular because the novelty of the setting rejuvenated the folkloric devices, but it was not only the stand-alone tales which other writers of short fiction drew upon. Washington Irving was one of the first nineteenth-century writers to use the collection of tales to examine the same themes (in his case, ideas of history and nationality) from a variety of perspectives. In doing so, he demonstrated that fluid and contentious concepts could be meaningfully explored in shorter narratives, and in the process he helped to create a recognisably powerful literary mode.

Tales of a Traveller

The last of Irving's collections of short fiction to be published in the 1820s, and the final part of his Geoffrey Crayon trilogy, was *Tales of a Traveller*. The stories were compiled during Irving's European travels, and the work was composed for the most part in Paris in late 1823 and early 1824. After a troubled gestation, the manuscripts were sent to John Murray in June of that year, and when the book was published in August it became the first of Irving's works to appear in print in Britain earlier than in the United States. *Tales of a Traveller* is in some respects Irving's most interesting, and certainly his most problematic, collection of stories. It was initially conceived as a German version of *The Sketch Book*, but eventually emerged as a somewhat disjointed collection of short narrative tales. The work is divided into four sections: 'Strange Stories by a Nervous Gentleman' is a compilation of European ghost stories related by guests at a hunting dinner; 'Buckthorne and his

50 Hedges, *Irving: An American Study*, p. 183.

Friends' concerns the machinations of London's literary world; 'The Italian Banditti' describes the adventures of travellers molested by robbers in the Aurunci mountains; the final section, 'The Money-Diggers', is an assortment of American tales of piracy and buried treasure in the New York region.

By this stage in his relationship with Irving, Murray's ardour had cooled somewhat, and the author's letters from Europe remained unanswered on several occasions. The publisher also gave the manuscript of *Tales of a Traveller* to William Gifford to read and evaluate, later passing on the comments to Irving. Gifford's letter to Murray anticipated much of the later criticism. He not only highlighted Irving's factual mistakes (such as writing about Cathedral *towns*, rather than *cities*), but pointed out what many of the periodical reviewers would later attack: the fact that for the first time Irving could be accused of lacking tact. Gifford accuses Irving of seeking 'to ridicule our provincial clergy, an exemplary body of men of whom he is completely ignorant', of giving a 'false & slanderous' portrait of Oxford, and of presenting a 'revolting' picture of the English nobility abroad.[51] Irving responded as positively as he could to the remarks and made alterations to the work. Despite Gifford's slights, Irving was pleased with *Tales of a Traveller*. He felt that this collection had come closest to the simplicity and immediacy that he hoped his short fiction could achieve. In September 1824 he wrote to his sister, saying:

> For my own part, I think there are in it some of the best things I have ever written. They may not be so highly finished as some of my former writings, but they are touched off with a freer spirit, and are more true to life; for they are the transcripts of scenes that I have witnessed.[52]

Irving was in the minority. After the comparative disappointment of *Bracebridge Hall*, the critics had little goodwill left for the author of *The Sketch Book*, and vented their spleen in the reviews of *Tales of a Traveller*. Lockhart's early review in *Blackwood's* was typical. He described himself as 'miserably disappointed' with the latest offering, and offered a revisionist history of Irving's fiction, where his body of work had 'certainly made no lasting impression on the public mind'.[53] Rather unfairly, Lockhart implied that *Tales of a Traveller* had been Irving's chance to redeem himself as an author of substance, but instead he had revealed his true lack of originality, and squandered the wealth of material that must have presented itself during his European travels. The *Westminster Review* was even crueler, declaring that 'gentle Geoffrey's fame was occasioned by the fact of his being a *prodigy*; a prodigy

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51 This letter is transcribed by McClary from the Murray Archives and given as a footnote. See McClary, *Irving and the House of Murray*, p. 58. Later reviewers voiced strong objections to the descriptions of murder and rape committed by the Banditti in the third section. These accusations of offensiveness are rendered slightly more ironic in light of the tongue-in-cheek claims to morality made by Irving in the introductory address of *Tales of a Traveller*. This aspect of the work is discussed in more detail in Chapter 3, p. 89.

52 Letter dated 20 September 1824. Aderman, et al. (eds), *Letters*, II, 76.

53 J.G. Lockhart, 'Letters of Timothy Tickler, Esq. No. XVIII', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 16 (September 1824): 291–304, p. 294.

for show—such as La Belle Sauvage, or the learned pig'.[54] The radical, Benthamite *Westminster* was only in its second number when this review appeared, and was perhaps eager to make its mark by exposing Geoffrey Crayon, the literate Yankee lion, as an 'ignorant and puling sentimentalist' whose showy tricks were wearing thin.[55] In Britain, Irving's problem was always that he was both too American, and not American enough. He was too arrogant, and too diffident—too ignorant of history, and too much in thrall to it. Pulled in both directions, it is no surprise that *Tales of a Traveller* missed the mark with the reviewers.

Gentlemen, Bandits, and Pirates

Tales of a Traveller opens with the 'Strange Stories of a Nervous Gentleman'—the same Nervous Gentleman who relates his encounter with 'The Stout Gentleman' in *Bracebridge Hall*. The rather clichéd narrative frame (a party of guests forced to remain together overnight, who pass the time by retelling ghost stories), combined with the derivative nature of many of the recitals, angered some critics, who dismissed the work as a cheap and hasty amalgam of rehashed, second-rate European tales. Lockhart claimed that 'printed and reprinted editions of three-fourths' of the ghost stories could easily be found, deriding the American as 'being evidently a man of limited reading',[56] and ignoring Irving's earlier footnoted missive to 'Dolph Heyliger' where he had pleaded for popular traditions to be seen as 'fair foundations' for an author. Lockhart went on to chastise Irving for his levity of tone:

> A ghost story *ought* to be a ghost story. Something like seriousness is absolutely necessary, in order to its producing any effect at all upon the mind—and the sort of half-witty vein, the little dancing quirks, &c. &c. with which these are set forth, entirely destroy the whole matter.[57]

What the reviewers wanted were fresh stories in the German Romantic mode. They felt that Irving had scoured Europe in search of novel tales of magic and horror and returned with only the most obvious and stale offerings which he had then attempted to pass off as his own. Somewhat hypocritically, the clamour for a German *Sketch Book* containing 'a rich repast indeed, of Mienherren and Mynheers', turned to criticism for the perceived attempt to 'pillage the Germans' when the results failed to please.[58]

It is difficult to reconcile this hostile reception with Irving's own view that *Tales of a Traveller* contained some of his finest work. It seems that the American committed a rare error of judgement. Although the 1820s saw a revival of interest in German literature, Irving had failed to strike the right note in his often comic

54 *Westminster Review*, 2 (Oct 1824): 334–46, p. 334.
55 Ibid., p. 339.
56 Lockhart, *Blackwood's*, 16, pp. 295, 294.
57 Ibid., p. 295.
58 Ibid., p. 295.

versions of supernatural tales.[59] In his attempts to recast the German Romantics' treatment of folklore and ghost stories, Irving produced a book that subverted the stylistic conventions of a fictional mode that was already losing ground with readers and becoming subject to critical antipathy. In September 1823 he wrote:

> There are such quantities of these legendary and romantic tales now littering from the press both in England and Germany, that one must take care not to fall into the commonplace of the day. […] I wish, in every thing I do, to write in such a manner that my productions may have something more than the mere interest of narrative to recommend them.[60]

'Strange Stories of a Nervous Gentleman' fulfils this last criterion neither by being frightening nor by containing new stories, but instead by exploring those aspects of human nature that enjoy being scared, and which crave new narrative material. In Europe, Irving had read widely in the German folk–romance mode, and he was also familiar with the formative treatment of legend and horror in Hoffmann's tales. His ghost stories were conceived as a study of the concept of myth in narrative, and were not a failure from this perspective. Twentieth-century literary criticism has redeemed these aspects of the 'Strange Stories' to a large degree, but only recently has Irving's refusal to give satisfactorily uncanny conclusions to his ghost stories been assessed not as a failure of technique, but as a deliberate measure.

William Hedges claims that 'the Keynote of *Tales of a Traveller* is the recognition of a certain fraudulent quality in fiction'.[61] Irving's stories foreground their fictionality, and constantly remind the reader that they are being related by characters with an express narrative purpose. The flow is persistently interrupted with asides and questions, and the protagonists of the tales are referred to as 'my uncle' or 'my aunt', never allowing the reader to forget the external narrative structure, which becomes inseparable from the story itself. As with the tale of 'The Stout Gentleman' in *Bracebridge Hall*, the endings are downbeat and often comic. In 'The Adventure of my Aunt', a haunted picture turns out to be a hiding robber. Similarly, the Gothic necrophiliac horror of 'The Adventure of the German Student' is undermined by the closing revelation that the story was heard 'in a madhouse at Paris' (*TT*, 36). Indeed, all of the ghost stories are carefully repositioned to end up closer to the psychological than the supernatural.

By repositioning such stories as part of a collective cultural phenomenon, Irving allows the tales to function as generic exemplars, around which is built the peculiar reverie that ghost stories conjure. The entirety of the Nervous Gentleman's 'Strange Stories' is far more important than the individual tales, and the impatient clamour of the guests for 'a ghost story! a ghost story!' (*TT*, 12) is the key moment in this section of the work. From a rational perspective, all ghost stories are untrue, but a lack of veracity did not prevent the mode from becoming one of the most popular of

59 R.P. Gillies and J.G. Lockhart were at the forefront of this revival with their 'Horæ Germanicæ' series for *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* (see Chapter 1, p. 13). A feeling that Irving was treading on the toes of the *Blackwood's* men may have been partly responsible for the animosity that the 'Strange Stories' received in Lockhart's review.

60 Letter to Peter Irving, dated 4 September 1823. Aderman, et al. (eds), *Letters*, II, 5.

61 Hedges, *Irving: An American Study*, p. 195.

the nineteenth century. 'Strange Stories of a Nervous Gentleman' is an exploration of the power that a literary formula can exert over its enthusiasts. This approach was not entirely successful, and certainly fell flat with Irving's critics. Nonetheless, it is indicative of an attempt at a new way of constructing collections of short fiction in careful, sophisticated relation to the oral traditions from which they drew inspiration.

I pass over the second section of *Tales of a Traveller*, 'Buckthorne and his Friends', which is a compilation of satirical sketches on literary existence in London. It is comprised of descriptive scenes strung together to form a coherent and continuous novelistic narrative, and therefore lies outside my focus on Irving's short fiction. The third section of the collection is 'The Italian Banditti'. Set in an inn at Terracina, and the surrounding bandit-infested mountains that augur both danger and adventure for travellers, it is the most highly romanticised part of the work. The tales of the banditti are analogous in schema to the 'Strange Stories', and they represent another attempt to analyse the construction of myth. The various robber stories form a dissection of the mechanism of fable: simultaneously denying and affirming aspects of legendary phenomenon. Fact, lore, and conjecture converge to weave narratives in which the component parts are impossible to separate, as the mythologisation of the banditti is deconstructed before the reader.

The bandits themselves are a complex entity. The attitude of the locals towards them is part fear and part worship, since the banditti have constructed themselves as folk-hero outlaws to the mountains' 'poor and semi-barbarous race, whom they never disturb and often enrich' (*TT*, 151). Prosper Mérimée, the French short-fiction writer, describes the guilty appeal of the anarchic bandit outsider: 'I am one of those who have a strong liking for bandits—not that I have any desire to meet them on my travels; but, in spite of myself, the energy of these men, at war with the whole of society, wrings from me an admiration of which I am ashamed.'[62] Several of Mérimée's tales depict the same clash of values that fascinates Irving; both writers are interested in what happens when supposedly civilised travellers come into contact with the impenetrably codified systems of honour and violence that exist in the rural communities of Southern Europe. In Irving's bandit stories the robbers are responsible for the creation of their own mythology, and there are numerous, and sometimes conflicting, folk beliefs that protect their mystique and heroic status.

Their reciprocal relationship with the locals keeps the banditti abreast of the wealth and status of any traveller who passes through their hills, and this foreknowledge in turn generates a myth of omniscience which is explored in the stories. In 'The Adventure of the Little Antiquary', the scholarly Doctor is accosted by the banditti, but spared, because, as the robbers tell him:

> 'We understand you; we know who and what you are; for we know who every body is who sleeps at Terracina, or that puts foot upon the road. You are a rich man, but you carry all your wealth in your head. We cannot get at it, and we should not know what to do with it, if we could.' (*TT*, 161)

62 These comments appear in Mérimée's 1851 article on Nikolai Gogol. Cited in Prosper Mérimée, *Carmen and Other Stories*, trans. Nicholas Jotcham (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), Introduction, p. vii.

The bandits also reject his valued artefacts, saying of his seal ring 'you think it an antique, but it's a counterfeit—a mere sham' (*TT*, 161). The banditti, and Irving, understand the subjectivity of narrative. The trinkets are construed 'by some antiquarian logic' (*TT*, 158) as possessing historical worth. The antiquary creates a story to endow the object with value—rationalising his spoils via narrative just as Felix de Vasquez justifies his lifelong alchemical search in 'The Student of Salamanca'. The robbers fully comprehend this relativity of value, saying, as the Doctor bridles, 'Nay, nay […] Value it as you please' (*TT*, 161). In their world, reality is constructed in much the same way. The bandits encourage the legends that surround them, and the myth is essential for their survival. By releasing the Doctor unharmed the banditti may leave a witness alive, but they also promote their legendary status. The antiquary's story is related to the group at the inn 'by a lively Neapolitan lawyer' (*TT*, 157), and will doubtless be retold and further embellished at other times by members of the audience, augmenting the air of invincibility that the bandits strive to weave about themselves.

The society of the banditti is isolated and heavily codified. Their mountains, like the Catskills of 'Rip Van Winkle', are 'shut up from the rest of the world', marvellously 'embosomed in the midst of one of the most travelled and civilized countries of Europe' (*TT*, 190). The region is yet another that Irving allows to retain its mythic status, while progress whirls past it, leaving it untouched. The bandits operate outside normal society and their self-mythologisation makes them simultaneously desperate and secure. As the stories progress, the myth begins to be penetrated. The guests' stories begin to incorporate those of the robbers themselves, who, once endowed with their own narratives, emerge from the collective fable. Legend begins to be perforated by satire, as the bandits' attempts to justify their crimes collapse under the weight of their individuality and the hypocrisy of the bandit code of honour amid crime.

As a collective and shadowy body, the banditti can be mysterious and magical, but as individuals they are 'both lofty and ludicrous' (*TT*, 187). Occasionally sympathetic, they are nonetheless perpetrators of theft, murder, and rape, and justification for their crimes has the same effect as assurances of veracity do for ghost stories—the myth disintegrates under rational scrutiny and the elaborate web necessary for the suspension of disbelief collapses through over-extension. Here, as throughout *Tales of a Traveller*, Irving probes away at the fundamentals of storytelling. He creates sophisticated framing devices which explicitly question the reasons for their own construction, dissemination, and digestion, and which often crumble under their own scrutiny, leaving little for the reader other than a sense of the enduring pull that narrative exerts.

Predictably, the only part of *Tales of a Traveller* that managed to garner praise from the reviews was the final, American section. Once again, Irving was advised to concentrate on what he knew best: his home nation, and 'his own old genuine stuff'.[63] The concluding pages of Lockhart's review take the form of a lecture to Irving, telling him in no uncertain terms that 'all real judges are quite agreed as to the enormous, the infinite, and immeasurable superiority of his American Sketches over

63 Lockhart, *Blackwood's*, 16, p. 296.

all his European ones'.[64] Irving's tales of American treasure-seeking are scarcely more original than his stories of European ghosts and bandits, but by transplanting his scenes to New England the Gothic apparatus is revitalised and the narratives take on the comparative freshness of the New World scenery. The place names alone are calculated to excite the British reader: 'the city of the Manhattoes', 'Nassau, or Long Island', and the Hudson River construct 'a region of fable and romance' (*TT*, 211, 212). Had the setting remained a German forest or Italian port it seems unlikely that the reviewers would have been so generous, but the imaginative zone of Irving's America helped breathe new life into a stale genre.

The pirates of this section perform the same role as the banditti in the previous, and are imbued with their own innate, mythological potential. In his essay 'On Stories', C.S. Lewis echoes Prosper Mérimée's sentiments about villainous outsiders (above) and argues that such characters are distinguished from more prosaic dangers by virtue of their otherness. Regarding the use of pirates as literary rogues he asserts:

> It is not the mere increase of danger that does the trick. It is the whole image of the utterly lawless enemy, the men who have cut adrift from all human society and become, as it were, a species of their own—men strangely clad, dark men with ear-rings, men with a history which they know and we don't, lords of unspecified treasure buried in undiscovered islands.[65]

In *Tales of a Traveller*, Irving returns again and again to narrative devices that come preloaded with meaning. His tales are founded on common mythic ground, and function not only as narratives in their own right, but also as social artefacts. They are based on the belief that society can be gauged by all that it keeps hidden and mysterious, and that tales of ghosts and bandits and pirates are universal touchstones. Such ideas apply equally well to the 'Strange Stories' and 'The Italian Banditti', but for British critics and readers of the early nineteenth century the shift from Europe to America made the crucial difference.

'The Money Diggers' also develops Irving's theme of the occult. The presence of the Devil is central to Irving's attempts to weave European-style legends into American history. The section opens with a description of 'Hell Gate', a treacherous passage in the sea off Long Island around which innumerable shipwreck legends abound. The Devil is also credited with unholy protection of the hidden spoils of piracy—preventing the success of the money-diggers in much the same way as Felix de Vasquez felt that the malignant spirits were wont to thwart his imminent alchemical vindication. In the world of Irving's stories 'all these rumours, however, were extremely vague' (*TT*, 215). Folklore is crucial to community, and springs up in a very short time to explain even that which requires no explanation. The failure to find pirate treasure is explained by the influence of the Devil, not by a lack of treasure to find. Complex and plural stories evolve rapidly around curious events in order to satisfy the desire, not just for explanation, but for supernatural explanation.

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64 Ibid., p. 296.

65 C.S. Lewis, 'On Stories', in *Essays Presented to Charles Williams* (London, New York and Toronto: Geoffrey Cumberlege, Oxford University Press, 1947), p. 95.

'The Devil and Tom Walker' typifies this craving through a variation on the Faustian pact—anticipating Nathaniel Hawthorne's later treatment of satanic themes in 'Young Goodman Brown' and 'Ethan Brand'. Like Goodman Brown, Tom Walker meets 'Old Scratch' in a forest, where the sinful ways of the villagers are scored on the bark of trees that are 'fair and flourishing without, but rotten at the core' (*TT*, 219). Walker is also connected to Ichabod Crane by his pragmatism and unflinching allegiance to materiality. Like Crane, he is explicitly superstitious, but unlike the cowardly protagonist of 'Sleepy Hollow' he squarely faces his encounter with the supernatural, haggling with the Devil over the price of his soul. In theory, Walker is a deeply unsympathetic character, but 'The Devil and Tom Walker' follows 'Rip Van Winkle', 'Sleepy Hollow', and 'Dolph Heyliger' in Irving's pantheon of American myth by maintaining the device of the ambiguous protagonist. Like all of Irving's heroes, Tom has a comic pathos and a degree of ineptitude, which, combined with the certainty of his unhappy fate, engenders the reader's sympathy.

Walker puts his ill-gotten fortune to use as a money-lender: 'the devil being extremely anxious for the increase of usurers' (*TT*, 223). His life in Boston as a successful exploiter of misery is put to an end when the debt is called in, and, despite affecting the trappings of religion, Walker is borne off to hell on a black steed. The reaction of the locals to the events is predictably Irvingesque:

> The good people of Boston shook their heads and shrugged their shoulders, but had been so much accustomed to witches and goblins and tricks of the devil in all kind of shapes from the first settlement of the colony, that they were not so much horror struck as might have been expected. (*TT*, 225)

The story is presented as just one more fable in the tableau of American folklore, the creation and perpetuation of which was Irving's primary concern with regard to the United States. In Irving's view, America—the country that had been able to imagine and construct its own political and social agenda more fully than any country in modern history—was in danger of making too clean a break with its past. America's future would be more secure if it had the same stable historicity as Europe: a historicity which, somewhat ironically, relied to a large degree upon myth and legend. Irving saw his role in the creation of America's future as a writer whose tales and sketches could help crystallise ideas of national identity both at home and overseas. His American tales imparted internal mythologies to his countrymen, such as the primal contest between the yokel and the Yankee, and also presented his country to a world that was hungry for tales of a nation that shared so much politically and historically with Europe, and was yet so alien.

'Wolfert Webber, or Golden Dreams', the longest and final story in *Tales of a Traveller*, brings Irving's mythic America full circle. Webber, descended from a line of vegetative cabbage-growers, is seized by the gold fever of the money-diggers after thrice dreaming of buried treasure under his garden. Like Dolph Heyliger, he decides that 'a dream three times repeated was never known to lie' (*TT*, 234) and sets about excavating his garden, his family's means of long-term sustenance, in search of immediate and fantastical wealth. Eventually, with his cabbage-patch destroyed and no treasure found, he becomes one 'whose golden dreams have been

disturbed by pinching realities' (*TT*, 236). Webber resigns himself to a pauper's death until he receives a revelation: his farm is located on a site of prime real estate, set to become extremely valuable with the expansion of the town. This final twist to America's legendary potential means that Webber, denied his promised wealth through supernatural agencies, can still have his circumstances transformed by the very real political and economic power that resides within the nation: the American dream lives on.

Irving and British Short Fiction

The mythic America that Irving helped create paralleled his own attitude towards the Old World. His response in *The Sketch Book* to the first sighting of Europe from the deck of his ship could be taken as a description of America for those who came after him: 'There is a volume of associations with the very name. It is the land of promise, teeming with every thing of which his childhood has heard, or on which his studious years have pondered' (*SB*, 14). For many British writers, Europe was fast losing this promise. Lockhart's warning to Irving that 'it is becoming daily a more dangerous thing to pillage the Germans' also held true for other writers of short fiction. In the imaginative guise lent to it by Irving, America offered a respite from the stale familiarity of European tales and presented itself as a new realm where fancy could reign unfettered by the crushing weight of literary history.

Irving's writing was central to the development of British short fiction in the early nineteenth century for a number of reasons. His stories spanned a wide variety of modes, and demonstrated how different forms of short fiction could be combined to great effect within a single collection. They showed that narrative frames could be employed in new ways to reinvigorate familiar material. They were civilised, urbane, and proprietous, unlike many of the popular and Gothic tales published in magazines and in collections of translated European stories. Above all, perhaps, they were widely read and they were written by an American. Between September 1824 (the issue in which *Tales of a Traveller* was reviewed) and February 1825, *Blackwood's Magazine* felt compelled to run five articles under the title of 'American Writers'. The purpose was ostensibly to set straight the 'most ridiculous and exaggerated misrepresentations, one way or the other' being propagated about the development of a national literature for the United States, and the fact that the magazine ran such a series shows how far American writing had pervaded literary discussion.[66] Irving's romanticised America was pertinent even for those not writing directly about the United States. His tone, style, and formative treatment of location as myth were hugely influential for the subsequent wave of story writers who imaginatively charged their landscapes with mythic properties.

The disappointment with which *Tales of a Traveller* was greeted further highlights the impact Irving had on the British literary scene. The popularity of *The Sketch Book* had raised the bar for the quality and the range of short fiction, and created a demand for narratives of substance and scope. The impact of Irving's writing

66 John Neal, 'American Writers', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 16 (September 1824): 304–11, p. 304.

is attested to by the many dedications to 'the author of the Sketch Book' in story collections of the 1820s and 1830s, and by the comments of his contemporaries. Mary Russell Mitford invoked Irving's work as a standard for collections of short fiction when she outlined her own planned series of sketches to a correspondent: 'It will be called—at least, I mean it so to be—"Our Village;" will consist of essays and characters and stories, chiefly of country life, in the manner of the "Sketch Book," but without sentimentality or pathos—two things which I abhor' (*AGL*, II: 172). Mitford's jibe about 'sentimentality and pathos' highlights Irving's shortcomings, and her remarks remain relevant. Debate remains over Irving's ability as a writer, as well as over the level of his own intent and awareness of the changes he was spearheading. Nonetheless, the attitude and expectations of readers and writers of short fiction changed with his success. The conception, legitimised to a large extent by Walter Scott, that myth and legend held a resonance for modern society far beyond that which was derived from simple entertainment or an anthropological interest, was given a new lease in the ironic and self-aware short fiction that Irving propagated—providing a rallying point for British writers who chose collections of short fiction as their medium.

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Chapter 3

Improving Stories: Women Writers, Morality, and Short Fiction

Short Fiction and the Moral Imperative

In his critical survey, *British Short Fiction in the Nineteenth Century*, Wendell Harris states:

> Two groups of tales stand out early in the century, both written with a special purpose which gave them an immediate readership. The first is the edifying or instructive tale inculcating religious, moral, or even economic principles; the second is the regional tale describing the life and manners of a particular people.[1]

The popularity of both the didactic tale and the regional tale grew out of wider literary trends. In the 1810s, prose fiction in Britain saw the emergence of two major artistic modes whose influence pervaded all subsequent nineteenth-century fiction: the historical novel and the novel of domestic realism. In turn, short fiction echoed the concerns of the novel, albeit in a manner that often challenged the conceptions of the longer form. If the early-nineteenth-century novel looked to the large-scale sweep of historicism, then the short fiction of the period can be seen to turn its attention to the smaller and more neglected aspects of the past: the overlooked village stories and the superstitions that often drove such narratives. Similarly, the increasingly realist depictions of manners, family lives, and domestic manoeuvres that concerned many novel-writers found a more condensed expression in the moral tales and didactic exemplars that flourished alongside the longer works.

To make a claim for the centrality of these two strains of fiction inevitably involves a degree of generalisation. Like the novel, short fiction appeared in a variety of guises and covered a broad range of themes. Travel narratives, descriptive sketches of character and scenery, humorous stories, tales of romance from exotic foreign lands, and stories of adventure and warfare were all published in the period. However, these types were by no means peculiar to the early nineteenth century. Most of the above can trace their lineage through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, if not much earlier, and underwent comparatively little development in the early decades of the nineteenth century. The progress in moral and regional tales is tied into the political and social fabric of the Romantic period, and these represent the modes that writers of short fiction most distinctively employed during the period.

Stories with moralistic or didactic intentions constitute a genre that is as old as any in the history of literature. From the earliest parables, fables, and exemplars,

1 Harris, *British Short Fiction*, p. 31.

narratives designed to convey instruction at the same time as they entertain and amuse have remained a staple educational tool right up to the present day. Although relatively few examples of moral fiction from the early nineteenth century have managed to retain their appeal for modern critics and readers, the mode was one of the most recognisable and popular of the period, and attracted some of its most notable and influential writers. This chapter is concerned with short fiction which, to a greater or lesser degree, sought to elevate the morals of its readers, or which presented a model of decorous behaviour suitable for emulation. Of course, the notion of 'moral' literature can be rather nebulous. Children's and juvenile literature, political pamphlets, religious tracts and sermons, and literature aimed at working-class readers with low levels of literacy all circulate under the banner of moral and social didacticism, and I will try to explore these generic boundaries wherever relevant. The vast majority of writers of moral stories were women, and part of the intention of this chapter is also to engage with the place of short fiction in the history of women's writing during the Romantic period. Moral and domestic fiction became the primary literary location in which women could construct a new identity for themselves, a space distinct from, though not necessarily acting in opposition to, the male-dominated public sphere and the traditionally more masculine arenas of history, philosophy, and politics.

Tales and short stories were popular amongst moral and didactic writers, and to examine short fiction in a context of improvement and edification helps elucidate both the medium and the mode. Notwithstanding its long lineage, and a multitude of descendents that stretch through the Victorian period and into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the lifespan of the moral tale, as it manifested itself in the early nineteenth century, was relatively short. The models for these stories were only formulated in the second half of the eighteenth century: in the children's stories of John Newbery or Thomas Day, and in the increased use of fiction in Nonconformist religious tracts.[2] As early as the 1820s, the peculiarities which had defined the genre at the turn of the century were becoming outmoded: as Lisa Wood argues, 'the period spanning the years from 1793 to 1815 was perhaps the most tolerant of overt didacticism in the history of British fiction'.[3] By the mid-century, the practice of explicit literary didacticism had become one reserved, in the main, for works designed for the education of children or for religious conversion, and while fiction with a moral intent remains a powerful genre in the twenty-first century, the confidence that many writers of the early nineteenth century placed in the ideals of teaching through literature has seldom been matched.

There are historical factors which are pertinent to the development of moralistic tales in the early nineteenth century, not least the Continental unrest of the period.

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2 John Newbery was a mid-eighteenth century author and bookseller, specialising in children's literature. His most famous publication was *The History of Little Goody Two-Shoes* (1765), which may have been written by Oliver Goldsmith. Thomas Day's *Sandford and Merton* (1783–89) was an instructive story for boys, whose Rousseauan educational philosophy influenced the tales of the Edgeworths (discussed later in this chapter).

3 Lisa Wood, *Modes of Discipline: Women, Conservatism, and the Novel after the French Revolution* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2003), p. 12.

The revolutionary wars in Europe had left many in Britain concerned about the possibilities of civil disorder in their own country. Radical thinkers and theorists such as Thomas Paine, William Godwin, and Thomas Spence were forcefully countered by conservative writers on the predominantly masculine intellectual and political level, but it was also necessary to disseminate the anti-radical and anti-revolutionary message amongst the lower and middling orders, and to transmit it to the next generation. To make the philosophical arguments waged in intellectual circles simpler and more relevant to younger readers and the poorly educated was a role that many writers of short fiction sought to claim as their own. For a large number of female authors, this was their contribution to the wider effort to keep Britain from the brink of revolution, and this impulse led to a dramatic increase in the early nineteenth century of what Mitzi Myers has termed 'socializing literatures': works which were intended to improve their readers and create a socially-minded populace, whether they were directed at children or at adults.[4]

Patricia Comitini has persuasively argued that the act of writing became more broadly invested with benevolent significance during the Romantic period, through a process she terms 'vocational philanthropy'. Comitini contends that middle-class women writers of the period produced moral literature which 'feminized' the discourse of social improvement. The process of feminisation involved recasting didactic fiction-writing as a vocation or a calling, as well as the creation of a new mode of literature which drew on the language of aesthetics and sensibility, rather than tear-jerking sentiment, to inculcate individual moral responsibility amongst its readers. This vanguard of moral women writers firmly believed that the less fortunate members of society would benefit rather more from the communication of a strong sense of personal morality, and a better understanding of capitalist economics, than they would from a charitable handout or a hectoring lecture. Comitini's study seeks to shift our understanding of popular didactic tales (such as Hannah More's *Cheap Repository Tracts* and Maria Edgeworth's *Popular Tales*) by placing them within a sociological rather than a literary framework. She writes:

> I am not attempting to claim that these texts have universal literary value or potential. I am interested in how these texts imagine societal relations, but this does not mean that the texts were 'coercive' dogma, preaching obedience and submission; they were, however, a new way for the poor to imagine their reality, offering them the opportunity to 'improve' their lot, but only when they began to desire the middling-class values presented in these texts.[5]

4 Mitzi Myers, 'Hannah More's Tracts for the Times: Social Fiction and Female Ideology', in Mary Anne Schofield and Cecilia Macheski (eds), *Fetter'd or Free? British Women Novelists, 1670–1815* (Athens and London: Ohio University Press, 1986), pp. 264–84, p. 265.

5 Patricia Comitini, *Vocational Philanthropy and British Women's Writing, 1790–1810: Wollstonecraft, More, Edgeworth, Wordsworth* (Aldershot and Burlington, VT : Ashgate, 2005), p. 69.

By foregrounding these middle-class values, which were contained within the broader concept of muscular Christian benevolence, Comitini helps elucidate the profound shifts which occurred in moral writing at the turn of the century.

The rise of evangelicalism is connected to Comitini's description of 'vocational philanthropy'. Throughout the Romantic period, the 'practical Christianity' preached by evangelical writers became an increasingly powerful and well-marshalled force. By the late eighteenth century, the British evangelical movement had begun to recognise the power of the popular press, and religious didactic fiction started to assume the character and deploy the techniques of fiction in a way that had not previously been in evidence. From the stories and tracts of Sarah Trimmer and Hannah More in the 1780s and 1790s, to the evangelical novels of Mary Brunton, Lætitia-Matilda Hawkins, and Harriet Corp that flourished through the 1810s, the movement attracted many followers who felt that their talents lay in this clarifying and simplifying mode: repackaging the evangelical message for the minds of the less spiritually adept while ensuring that the kernel remained intact. This is not to suggest that all moral fiction stemmed from writers from a specifically evangelical background, but simply that an ardent religious conviction and a desire to communicate a sense of morality went hand in hand, as they so often had, and that the sophistication of writers of fiction who advocated the teachings of particular religious sects increased in line with the development of the mode as a whole.

Moral fiction, as a literary mode or sub-genre, is also deeply entwined with domestic fiction. While not all moral fiction can be termed 'domestic', domestic fiction was invariably invested with a degree of decorum and rectitude suitable for emulation, and as such most of the short domestic tales that appeared in the early nineteenth century can be located to some degree within a tradition of moral storytelling. 'Domestic' fiction, that is to say fiction which centres around a particular community or group, and which deals predominantly with the exercise of familial and household duties, was also a field dominated by women writers. The central place that this emergent forum for female expression and self-examination would come to claim in the literature of the nineteenth century has been recognised by the substantial body of criticism produced on the subject over the last three decades. Since the publication of feminist, revisionist critical studies in the 1970s, such as Ellen Moers's *Literary Women* and Gilbert and Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic*, histories of female writing have made explicit the debt that fiction owes to the women who found an audience during the early part of the nineteenth century, but who were subsequently excluded from the literary canon.

In examinations of women's writing of the early nineteenth century, modern literary critics have often concentrated on those authors whose works can be perceived as contributing to new understandings of gender relations in the period and the role of women in society. Determining the ways in which women writers of the Romantic period re-imagined the female position and challenged patriarchal ideologies has been a key aspect of late-twentieth and early-twenty-first-century literary criticism. The radical gender politics of authors such as Mary Wollstonecraft; the willingness to use fiction to critique politics the wider public sphere demonstrated in the works of Maria Edgeworth and Lady Morgan; and the subtler exposure and censure of

paternalistic society in Jane Austen's novels all present the reader with texts that can offer stark criticisms of the role of women.

In the context of revisionist criticism it is important to remember that the more polemical and radical female voices were powerfully countered by many of their contemporaries, and that much of the short fiction of the period expressed the views of some of the most vehemently anti-revolutionary, anti-radical, and socially conservative writers of their time. Many of those tale-writers who did not explicitly attack the literature of social reform still had little compunction about asserting the belief that a continuance of the predominantly domestic position of women constituted their best possible contribution to the nation—that of a dutiful mother and wife. To read a desire for a change in gender relations or a questioning of the dynamics of social power into the writings of women like Elizabeth Barber, Mary Russell Mitford, M.M. Busk, or Marion and Margaret Corbett is to read against the grain at the very least, if not to be guilty of a backward projection of values. These writers were fundamentally conservative, and were often concerned with interior life and individual improvement, rather than progressive social questions. They were women for whom a sense of authorial responsibility was the primary shaping force on their work, and who emerged briefly from 'the shelter of private life' precisely in order to proclaim their right to stay there: women who felt uncomfortable with the mantle of author and whose voices may have failed to echo down the years, but were nonetheless potent at the time.[6]

Hannah More and the Evangelical Moral Tale

Hannah More's *Cheap Repository Tracts*—a series of evangelical pamphlets published and distributed for free between 1795 and 1798—was one of the most successful literary endeavours of the late eighteenth century and became the key reference point for many early-nineteenth-century writers of moral fiction. The tracts had limited literary pretensions and were aimed at improving the religious convictions and social conscience of the newly-literate labouring or serving-class readership created in part by the recently established Sunday Schools (a project with which More was involved). It was necessary to ensure that an increasingly literate populace not only read books, but read the right books, and More's tracts sought to achieve this by staking a claim for the soul of popular literature in the war against religious apathy and moral laxity. More believed that by providing an alternative to merely entertaining and potentially seditious mass-market material (the stories of bizarre events and grimly fascinating crimes that constituted most chapbooks and broadsides), a new kind of popular literature could emerge: one that was capable of communicating the most exemplary ideals of evangelical rectitude to a wide audience and of cementing a concern and veneration for the nation's social structures amongst its plebeian population.

The *Cheap Repository Tracts* contain many dozens of simply told and deeply moral tales. Not all of the tracts comprise stories—poetry and essays were also

6 H.C. Caddick, *Tales of the Affections: Being Sketches from Real Life* (London: Longmans; and T. Sowler, Manchester, 1828), Preface, p. v.

popular—but those that were of a fictional bent portrayed shining examples or wicked failures, usually drawn from the same class as the intended reader. These were modelled on the devout instructive tales that sprang from the Methodist tracts of the mid-eighteenth century, popularised in the preceding decade by evangelicals such as Sarah Trimmer. Trimmer published the popular children's collection *Fabulous Histories* (also known as *The History of the Robins*) in 1786, and her *Family Magazine* contained didactic moral tales in each issue that became early benchmarks for the ideal religious exemplar.[7] As well as greatly expanding the market for this kind of powerful religious didacticism, More's stories were fiercely anti-radical, and were distributed amongst a large popular audience, most of whom never approached the more fashionable end of the fiction market but who consumed these evangelical pamphlets in significant numbers.

Despite being aimed predominantly at her social inferiors, More's works also reached the reading-tables of the middle and upper classes. As Myers points out, Hannah More was at the head of a new female didactic movement that strove to 'educate the young and illiterate, succor the unfortunate, amend the debased popular culture of the lower orders, reorient worldly men of every class, and set the national household in order'.[8] More, and women like her, set themselves up as the conscience of the nation during the late eighteenth century, and the writing of moral fiction became a powerful way of making their voice heard, while maintaining a chaste distance from the public sphere proper. The Tory support for More's polemics grew, and the tracts were credited in some quarters as doing immeasurable good in the stifling of revolutionary impulses and in the upkeep of the established order by helping to check 'the growth of infidelity and anarchy'.[9] With an estimated two million copies distributed by 1795, and 114 tracts published by 1798 (not all of which More wrote herself), the reach of the project and the influence extended to later writers of moral fiction were immense.

Claims have been staked for the importance of the tracts in literary as well as social and political history. Myers argues that by 'transcribing her society's exigent

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7 A number of the stories which appeared in the *Family Magazine* (1788–99) were later collected as *Instructive Tales* (1815). The imposing full title of Trimmer's magazine was *The Family Magazine; or, a Repository of Religious Instruction, and Rational Amusement. Designed to Counteract the Pernicious Tendency of Immoral Books, &c. Which Have Circulated of Late Years among the Inferior Classes of People, to the Obstruction of their Improvement in Religion and Morality*. As well as tales, the content of the periodical included poetry, political articles, prayers, sets of rules and principles to live by, religious essays, ballads, and news.

8 Myers, 'Hannah More's Tracts for the Times', p. 266. In the Advertisement for *Tales for the Common People* (which forms volume 5 of the 1801 edition of her collected works), More justifies the inclusion of tract tales in a book that only the relatively affluent could afford: 'As these stories, though *principally*, are not calculated *exclusively* for the middle and lower classes of society, the Author has […] selected those which were written by herself, and presented them to the public.' *The Works of Hannah More*, 8 vols (London: Cadell and Davies, 1801), V, viii, More's emphasis.

9 *Christian Observer*, 12 (1813): 390. Cited in Sam Pickering, 'The *Cheap Repository Tracts* and the Short Story', *Studies in Short Fiction*, 12 (1975): 15–21, p. 17.

problems into fiction, More helped give the novel a new seriousness, relevance, and direction'.[10] Julia Saunders, in an attempt to redress 'the image of More as the bad fairy at the christening of modern feminism', focuses on the ways in which More's tracts spoke not only to the labouring classes, but across the whole of society in an attempt 'to communicate across the perceived class divide of the higher and lower orders'.[11] Sam Pickering makes one of the strongest assertions in favour of Hannah More's cultural significance by claiming that her tales constituted the '"beginning" for the modern British and American short story' and 'firmly established the short story as a distinct literary genre'.[12] While Pickering's argument may stretch the case for artistic credibility rather hopefully, the *Cheap Repository Tracts* undoubtedly constituted an epoch in the history of moral short fiction by demonstrating to later authors that didactic tales could provide a woman with a means of employment that not only had the potential to be highly successful but which was also ethically unimpeachable. During the 1820s and 1830s, and still later into the century, many female writers felt compelled to justify their move into literature, and the most commonly cited reason for venturing out of the safety of domestic quietude was a desire to disseminate improving writings amongst the less morally fortunate.

One principal reason for the significance of Hannah More's tracts in literary history is the number of people who read them. As well as the magnitude of dissemination, however, More's legacy to the next generation of tale writers lay in her unshakeable belief in the potential for her stories to change social attitudes. Asa Briggs has commented that 'the word "improvement" itself which now sounds sober, respectable, and emotionally threadbare was capable then of stimulating daring flights of imagination'.[13] For evangelical writers such as More, narratives describing the trials and moral successes of common folk often held more potential than sermonic exhortations because they made explicit the strong connection between an individual's personal struggle and home-life, and entry to the 'Invisible Church'. The individualistic stance of the evangelicals opposed what was perceived as the ritualistic and over-prescribed orthodoxy of the Anglican Church. Pickering's article contains a quotation from the Religious Tract Society on the subject of fictionalised religious polemics:

> 'A plain didactic essay on a religious subject,' the Society declared, 'may be read by a Christian with much pleasure; but the persons for whom these tracts are chiefly designed will fall asleep over it. […] There must be something to allure the listless to read, and this can only be done by blending entertainment with instruction. Where *narrative* can be made the medium of conveying truth, it is eagerly to be embraced.'[14]

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10 Myers, 'Hannah More's Tracts for the Times', p. 267.

11 Julia Saunders, 'Putting the Reader Right: Reassessing Hannah More's *Cheap Repository Tracts*', *Romanticism On the Net*, 16 (November 1999). Online: Internet (September 2006): <http://www.erudit.org/revue/ron/1999/v/n16/005881ar.html>.

12 Pickering, 'The *Cheap Repository Tracts* and the Short Story', pp. 15 and 16.

13 Asa Briggs, *The Age of Improvement, 1783–1867* (London: Longman, 1959), pp. 2–3.

14 Pickering, 'The *Cheap Repository Tracts* and the Short Story', p. 19, quotation's emphasis. Pickering gives the reference as: 'Religious Tract Society, "An Address to Christians on the Distribution of Religious Tracts" (London, 1799), p. 11.'

The tract societies seized upon fiction as an ideal conduit for moral discourse, but the implications of More's success spread beyond those works with direct connections to the evangelical movement.

Hannah More's belief that fictionalised accounts of common domestic experiences were the best method for the dissemination of firm religious convictions and socially responsible attitudes among the lower classes not only galvanised allegorical and didactic practices among the writers of religious tracts, but also shaped the broader conception of moral writing among female authors. The writing of improving tales became a contribution that any upright woman of taste and education might make towards the common good, and while the bludgeoning pragmatism that characterised some of More's tales faded as the next century progressed, the passion which she gave to the moral form was lasting. The conviction voiced by Elizabeth Barber in the Preface to her *Tales of Modern Days* (1824) became increasingly widespread: 'The diamond is not less valuable in its rim of silver than in the rough hand of the miner […]; nor is a moral aphorism less powerful or beneficial, because arrayed in the robe of fancy.'[15] The marriage of fiction and morality shaped the development of the moral tale for the next half century, and was deeply indebted to More's championing of short stories as an efficacious medium for spreading the good word.

Maria Edgeworth and Rational Morality

Unlike Hannah More, Maria Edgeworth is not remembered primarily as a didactic writer. In addition to her historical novels and fashionable romances, however, she published several improving works for children, as well as the parental guide-book *Practical Education* (1798), and the accompanying story collection, *The Parent's Assistant* (1796–1800), both of which were written jointly with her father, Richard Lovell Edgeworth. Maria Edgeworth later moved beyond these early lessons for the very young into more complex moral narratives. Her two major moral story collections, *Moral Tales for Young People* (1801) and *Popular Tales* (1804), were not religiously didactic in the way that More's tales were, and Edgeworth was certainly no evangelical. Rather, she was concerned with inculcating an understanding of moral rationalism, and as such she was indebted in part to the educational philosophies of Locke and Rousseau, as well as to earlier moral and educational story collections, such as Mary Wollstonecraft's *Original Stories, from Real Life* (1788).

If Hannah More's stories were written to edify and cement the religious and political convictions of the semi-literate lower classes, Edgeworth's short fiction spoke to a younger, though decidedly more middle-class audience. This readership was explicitly defined by her father in his Preface to *Popular Tales*. Carefully aligning his daughter's tales with the section of literate society he felt was inadequately represented by the more public literary sphere, he wrote:

> Burke supposes that there are eighty thousand readers in Great Britain, nearly one hundredth part of its inhabitants! Out of these we may calculate that ten thousand are

15 Elizabeth Barber, *Tales of Modern Days* (London: Sherwood, Jones, and Co, 1824), Preface, p. vii.

> nobility, clergy, or gentlemen of the learned professions. Of seventy thousand readers which remain, there are many who might be amused and instructed by books, which were not professedly adapted to the classes that have been enumerated. With this view the following volumes have been composed.[16]

Like More's tales, those of the Edgeworths were carefully targeted. In his Preface to the earlier *Moral Tales* collection, Richard Edgeworth set out the rationale for his daughter's stories. The intention was to formulate an educational system that would 'neither dissipate the attention, nor inflame the imagination': a rational, Lockean method that refused to 'teach in play', but would help create strong minds at a young age suitable for bearing the heavy burden of life.[17] However, this stern rhetoric belies the gentle tone of many of the tales. As Vineta Colby takes pains to make clear, Edgeworth's 'didactic imperative had a healthy balance of modesty, humor, and good sense', and steered clear of the excessive invective of some of More's tracts.[18]

The moral tales of Maria Edgeworth differ from the majority of collections examined here, in so far as they are directed predominantly at children, but her stories remain hugely influential for the writers who came after her. As well as being able to handle deftly the realist techniques of the novel, with which Hannah More sometimes struggled, Edgeworth was also willing to borrow from a variety of sources. These included the identifiable aphorisms and exemplary morals tastefully and skilfully set out by late-eighteenth-century children's writers, such as Anna Laetitia Barbauld, as well as older fable-type material. Edgeworth's narratives are by no means folktales, but they are often allegorical, and were conceived as modern re-imaginings of traditional stories which would act as an alternative to the use of folklore and fables as oral educational tools. In the enlightened pedagogic philosophy of the Edgeworths, such premodern educational devices were regarded as confusing at best, and dangerously corrosive to the rational mind at worst. Her collections drew instead on the more sanitised and moralised mythology of Charles Perrault's courtly French fairy tales, and they also anticipate the way in which Hans Christian Anderson would successfully remake fairy stories for a bourgeois audience in the 1830s. *Popular Tales* and *Moral Tales* created unimpeachable literary exemplars, which upper- and middle-class parents could give or read to their children without fear of corrupting or inflaming their minds. Some of Edgeworth's titles use mottos to heighten their impact, such as 'Out of Debt Out of Danger', and all are notable for their insistence on good sense and sound character as reliable compasses for life's obstacles.

By carefully situating her hard-nosed pragmatism within accessible narrative homilies, Edgeworth was able to invest her stories with an energy and dynamism that few writers of children's moral fiction could match. Edgeworth's stories are designed to act as the first step in shaping a socially useful and morally independent adult.

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16 Maria Edgeworth, *Popular Tales*, 3 vols (London: J. Johnson, 1804), Preface (by Richard Lovell Edgeworth), I, ii–iii.

17 Maria Edgeworth, *Moral Tales for Young People*, 5 vols (London: J. Johnson, 1801), Preface (by Richard Lovell Edgeworth), I, vi.

18 Vineta Colby, *Yesterday's Women: Domestic Realism in the English Novel* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974), pp. 86–87.

They strive to confer a regard for the rational and the logical, and to instil an understanding of the systems of governance, law, and science, as well as the history which it was felt made Britain great. The legacy of the tales of Maria Edgeworth was partly to inject a measure of literary authority into didactic fiction, but many subsequent writers also imbibed a quality that Ina Ferris has called 'Edgeworth's Enlightenment belief in the clarity, rationality, and uniformity of truth'.[19] Edgeworth gave the women writers who followed the conviction that good stories should contain a hard nugget of common-sense and universal lore around which to base the narrative structure: an indisputable maxim from which the rest of the tale drew its shape, and from which the reader could easily draw his or her conclusion.

Amelia Opie and Moral Sentiment

If Hannah More represents the evangelical wing of turn-of-the-century didactic fiction, and Maria Edgeworth stands for the discipline of rational pedagogy, then Amelia Opie is on the side of sentiment. Although her stories extol a similar Protestant value system to those of Edgeworth, Opie tends to draw more directly upon the eighteenth-century sentimental tradition and to emphasise emotional development and the delineation of good family practice, as well as the identifiable aphorisms that Edgeworth favoured. By lending her tales the language of the novel, Opie helped turn the moral story into a mode suitable for adult fiction-readers. Her four collections of short fiction—*Simple Tales* (1806), *Tales of Real Life* (1813), *New Tales* (1818), and *Tales of the Heart* (1820)—are all constructed along similar lines and became the blueprint for many of the moral collections that appeared in the 1820s and 1830s. The titles of the collections point to everyday sacrifices and triumphs rather than courtly romance or adventure, and Opie's stories locate their narratives squarely in the domestic sphere, albeit often with a good dose of melodrama.

Opie's tales depict those unremarkable narratives that went unnoticed by society at large, but which held a message for all, and her narrators are happy to concede that their stories are primarily vehicles for this moral agenda. In the introduction to the story of 'Love and Duty', one of the *Simple Tales*, the narrator describes hearing of a legal trial 'so replete with moral instruction' that she felt compelled to relate it. She goes on to explain that 'as trials are interesting to few only, but tales to many, I have ventured to call in the aid of fiction to assist the progress of salutary truth'.[20] A semi-serious embarrassment with and apology for the use of fictional techniques for disseminating improving messages is by no means peculiar to Opie's tales, and indeed became the standard stance adopted by many female authors. To justify the means by reference to the end was clearly a truism for writers of moral fiction, but it was important that it be spoken aloud for the sake of decorum.

Amelia Opie's best writing was reserved in the main for her longer works, and *Adeline Mowbray* (1805) in particular has received critical attention in recent years. Gary Kelly argues that the novel contains the possibility for a 'covert subversive text'

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19 Ina Ferris, *The Achievement of Literary Authority: Gender, History, and the Waverley Novels* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 115.

20 Amelia Opie, *Simple Tales*, 3rd edn, 4 vols (1806; London: Longmans, 1809), II, 114.

that explores the desires for deviations from a moral standard within the 'official' reading.[21] Opie had flirted with Godwinian radicalism in her youth, but Jacobinism had been replaced by a strong Christian zeal by the time she began to publish her tale collections (Opie eventually became a Quaker in 1825). From the late 1810s onwards, the possibilities for 'covert' readings of Opie's texts begin to diminish, and her shorter stories are consequently more conservative than her earlier novels. Ostensibly addressed to a female readership, her stories combine explicit social warnings and a high rhetorical language that chills the exuberance of her characters in a way not seen in her earlier fiction. Explicit admonitions against 'tendencies to wastefulness; to unnecessary expense; to want of order:—to want of punctuality in the payment of old debts, and to imprudent haste in contracting new ones' are suspended within tales in which heroines speak with perfect diction, and where even the lower orders have their grammar improved by the officious narrator lest they should prove a bad example.[22]

Implicitly, the intended readership for these collections was of the middling order at least, for 'Simple Tales' seldom meant tales of simple folk. The genre of the 'Romance of Real Life', as defined by Michael Gamer, overlaps here with the moral tale. In Gamer's formulation, 'Romances of Real Life' retain a didactic tendency while attempting a communion between realism, the romance, and history.[23] Opie's stories, unlike those of Hannah More, did not attempt to depict the struggles of the lower echelons of society, but instead spoke predominantly to a more literate, middling class of reader: an audience familiar with the conventions of the novel and the sentimental romance, and desirous of a little passion with their lesson. Recurrent themes in Opie's tales, such as the dangers of the abuse of power, the necessity of self-control, and occasional pointers to the effective redistribution of wealth, reinforce the impression of an intended audience which was financially secure and wielded a degree of power over the lives of others.

In common with the stories of many other moral fiction writers, Opie's tales place the middle classes at the centre of the ethical fabric of the nation. One of her characters makes the claim that the middling orders of society are 'the chief depository of a country's virtue and a country's happiness, as our morality has not those artificial fences which guard the higher orders'.[24] As well as situating the middle classes as guardians of national ethics, the moral stance extolled by Opie's tales was of the utmost rigour. The lapses that occur in her stories, however apparently small, are invariably returned with redoubled vigour upon those who fail to adhere to the letter of the commands set out by society and religion, resulting in what Gary Kelly

21 Gary Kelly, 'Amelia Opie, Lady Caroline Lamb, and Maria Edgeworth: Official and Unofficial Ideology', *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature*, 12, 4 (October 1981): 3–24, p. 11.

22 Opie, *Simple Tales*, I, 82.

23 See Michael Gamer, 'Maria Edgeworth and the Romance of Real Life', *Novel*, 34, 2 (Spring 2001): 232–66. As well as Edgeworth and Opie, Gamer's definition encompasses numerous eighteenth- and nineteenth-century authors, including Charlotte Smith, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Catharine Maria Sedgwick.

24 Amelia Opie, *Tales of Real Life*, 2nd edn, 3 vols (London: Longmans, 1813), III, 7.

terms 'overpayment of suffering for real or imagined transgressions'.[25] Opie's stories consistently argue that society has a certain equilibrium, and each social component has its own balancing act to perform. The responsibility is shared, since if this poise is upset by deviant behaviour, however seemingly frivolous, the entire system will be put at risk.

Moral Short Fiction in the 1820s

By the 1820s, More, Edgeworth, and Opie had between them laid the boundaries of the polite moral tale. Authors who wished to improve the minds and the morals of their readers happily inhabited this mode of plain tales simply told during the 1800s and 1810s. The trials of innocent heroines at the hands of villainous seducers, and the temptations and redemptions that befell pious households constituted the staple narratives and became the vehicles of writers who merely wished to impart a little good sense and wisdom, as well as those who had an explicit religious or social axe to grind. The stories of More, Edgeworth, and Opie never truly engage with the conceptual dialectic that later moral writers would contend with so strongly: the ideological battle between keeping a tale within the bounds of social realism and maintaining a high enough degree of educational clout was still being fought in the mid-century. However, the particular balance that these three authors had managed to strike between literary achievement and moral rectitude constituted the fine line that most subsequent authors of improving short fiction attempted to tread.

These three women were also amongst the most financially successful female authors of their time (Maria Edgeworth in particular was well paid for her fiction) and it was their achievement in the early part of the century, coupled with the new vogue for tale collections during the 1820s, that helped stimulate an increase in the number of female writers of short fiction. Jan Fergus and Janice Farrar Thaddeus cite the Longman archives in crediting Amelia Opie with receiving a respectable £420 for the rights to *New Tales* in 1820.[26] By 1824, however, John Murray had paid Washington Irving 1500 guineas for *Tales of a Traveller*, and, while the American's popularity was exceptional, booksellers had undoubtedly started to view certain types of collections of short fiction as far more lucrative propositions.

Moral Tales and Moral Critics

The combination of an imitable model and an increasingly willing book trade meant that the moral tale collection became a significant literary genre during the 1820s. Profusion, however, also meant competition, and the principal arbitrators of success or failure in this context were the reviews. Pleasing the critics, often only too willing to situate themselves as self-appointed moral and social guardians, was a crucial part of the composition of moral fiction. In reviewing Amelia Opie's *Tales of the Heart*, the *Monthly Review* explained that it regarded itself as referee of whether or not the

25 Kelly, *English Fiction of the Romantic Period*, p. 86.

26 Jan Fergus and Janice Farrar Thaddeus, 'Women, Publishers, and Money, 1790–1820', *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, 17 (1987): 191–207, p. 205.

'productions of that amiable sex' were composed of 'wholesome ingredients'.[27] This review, characteristic of many such in the periodical press, claimed that:

> This duty is more rigidly extracted from us, because the customers of the Circulating Library have voracious and undistinguishing appetites; and it is of the utmost importance, therefore, that articles of such general consumption should be accurately inspected, and their weights and measures superintended by a vigilant police, especially when previous reputation may give a sort of sanction to the things that are vended.[28]

The reviews were often willing to pass a positive judgement if they could be certain of the rectitude of the intentions. Jane and Anna Maria Porter's *Tales Round a Winter Hearth* (1826) was praised by the *Literary Gazette* for its ability to ensure continually that 'the purest morality was ever the companion of romantic fiction'.[29] Similarly, when reviewing Mary Anne Grant's *Tales. Founded on Facts* (1820), the same periodical conceded that 'what we might find to censure on the score of carelessness in some parts, and a want of *causiveness* in others, is amply compensated by the sound moral tone of the whole'.[30] Elizabeth Barber's Preface to *Tales of Modern Days* pre-emptively addressed those who may have wished to criticise her motives, stating: 'I hope […] the most rigid moralists acknowledge there is no sentiment inculcated they ought to condemn.'[31] Rebecca Edridge, in the Preface to her tale collection, *The Scrinium* (1822), went further and claimed that 'the writer of a book tending to make his reader a worse man than he was before, is answerable for the errors or the crimes which he inculcates'.[32] The fact that the critics could be mollified by making explicit claims to good intentions was well recognised by female tale-writers, and the deliberate pursuit of the elusive combination of 'purest morality' and 'romantic fiction' was commonly acknowledged in the prefaces to collections of short fiction during the period.

For tales to be reviewed on the basis of their moral qualities, literary aspirations sometimes had to take a back seat. In her analysis of anxieties of reception during the early nineteenth century, Lucy Newlyn argues that the writer/reader dialectic of the Romantic period encouraged an intense preoccupation 'with the combined threats of modernity and futurity'.[33] While a mindset that placed an emphasis on aesthetic and intellectual posterity may be identifiable in the writings of poets such as Coleridge and Wordsworth, two of the authors on whom Newlyn's study focuses, the majority of the writers of moral tales sought their validation firmly in the present. Their works were addressed very much to the moment, and desired above all to speak without fear of misinterpretation to the widest possible contemporary readership. As such,

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27 *Monthly Review*, 92 (August 1820): 375–87, p. 376.

28 Ibid., p. 376.

29 *Literary Gazette*, 486 (13 May 1826): 292.

30 *Literary Gazette*, 195 (14 October 1820): 662–63, p. 662, reviewer's emphasis.

31 Barber, *Tales of Modern Days*, Preface, p. vii.

32 Rebecca Edridge, *The Scrinium*, 2 vols (London: G. & W.B. Whittaker, 1822), Preface, I, iii–iv.

33 Lucy Newlyn, *Reading, Writing, and Romanticism: The Anxiety of Reception* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), Preface, p. x.

many women writers were quick to head off any artistic critique of their work. The basis for this denial of literary merit drew in part on the principle that a discrepancy existed between fiction and truth: despite the lead shown by More, Edgeworth, and Opie, many writers (particularly women writers) still felt uneasy using fiction as an educational tool. Harriet Corp voiced this unease when she described her *Tales. Characteristic, Descriptive, and Allegorical* (1829) as 'among the fictitious', while fearing that the admission would 'undervalue her performance'.[34]

Precisely who made these crucial contemporary value judgements on a writer's 'performance' is debatable. While the reviews certainly played a part, an author's peer group was also a powerful influence. Writers of moral fiction needed continually to glance sideways to establish that they were not straying too far from what was acceptable to other practitioners. Beyond that, the pressure that polite society, in particular women novel readers, could exert over authors was considerable. Propriety was often seen as a female sphere of influence, and authors who strained its limits could expect severe censure. Ironically, an open avowal of only the most untainted and blameless of motives could also be the critical undoing of didactic writers. To invite the reviewers to inspect a work from a strictly moral standpoint was often to give them a stick with which to beat the author if the example was found wanting. The smallest ethical blemishes were often seized upon by the reviews as justification for condemning an entire work. The quality of ethical instruction could easily become the only criteria by which tales were judged, once the claim to aesthetic intent had been declined.

Moral Tales in the Periodical Press and the Annuals

During the late 1810s and early 1820s there was a sharp increase in the methods by which writers of moral short fiction could seek publication. Magazines such as the *Lady's Magazine*, the *New Monthly Magazine*, *Knight's Quarterly Magazine*, and the *Museum* all had a place for an uplifting or improving narrative.[35] Even *Blackwood's* took an occasional break from its fascination with Tales of Terror to publish stories with a softer centre: John Wilson, for example, published 'The Elder's Death-Bed', and 'The Snow Storm', which would later appear in his highly moralistic collection, *Lights and Shadows of Scottish Life* (1822).[36] Many writers of improving fiction published stories in periodicals, and these in turn fed into books, as several of the prefaces to moral tale collections testify. The Advertisement to *Tales of Humble Life* (1824) declares:

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34 Harriet Corp, *Tales. Characteristic, Descriptive, and Allegorical* (London: Baldwin and Craddock, 1829), Preface, p. vi.

35 Magazine short fiction, and the phenomenon of annuals and gift-books are discussed in Chapter 1, pp. 22–35.

36 Wilson's collection is discussed in Chapter 4, pp. 142–44. The *Blackwood's* stories were signed 'Eremus': 'The Elder's Death-Bed', 6, 36 (March 1820): 682–87, and 'The Snow Storm', 7, 37 (April 1820): 37–44. See also 'The Penitent Son', 7, 38 (May 1820): 171–75, which is a continuation of the story of 'The Elder's Death-Bed', but does not appear in *Lights and Shadows*.

> The following Tales were published in a Periodical Work, which was the first to perceive the necessity for a wholesome Popular Literature,—a necessity which had been, in great part, created by the system of National Education. The original object of the writer may, perhaps, be advanced by their republication.[37]

The stories collected in *Tales of Humble Life* were an exception amongst periodical stories, in that they were explicitly directed at a newly-literate readership. In general, the periodical press helped to more clearly define a predominantly middle-class market, where the readers were no longer cast as inferiors, but as the equals of the writer (or indeed higher up the social scale). Consequently, stories and sketches written for the periodicals were rarely pedagogic in the same way as the tales of More and Edgeworth, but they could still be refined and morally uplifting.

Not all moral authors were comfortable writing for the magazines. The periodical press could be attractive to those who saw themselves as professional writers, and wished to make a living from storytelling, but many authors, especially women, were unhappy in this role. Moral tales were often written by women who treated the form as a hobby, or as a calling, and many such authors preferred another route, which facilitated publication (and financial recompense), but which conveyed a greater sense of genteel propriety. The annuals, or gift-books, which were designed to 'ornament the drawing-room table of the most fastidious without offense either to mind or eye', published many stories of touching and tearful sentiment, and also contained short exemplars which could be read aloud as lessons for a younger audience.[38] Gift-books were an ideal medium for polite moral tales, and a large number of authors contributed improving stories: Edgeworth, Opie, Mary Russell Mitford, Marion and Margaret Corbett, Harriet Corp, Barbara Hofland, and Mrs S.C. Hall, to name just a few. All of the gift-books that sprang up in the 1820s and 1830s were sentimental and decorous, but some (such as the *Amulet*) had a strong evangelical bent, and these also contained middle-class varieties of tract-style stories and poems. Whether explicitly Christian or not, the annuals proved extremely popular with writers of genteel or improving tales, and most include at least one example of moral short fiction.

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37 Anon., *Tales of Humble Life* (London: Charles Knight, 1824), [unpaginated]. I have been unable to trace the periodical in which these stories were published, but their strong Christian message and didactic style suggest they originally appeared in an evangelical magazine (or perhaps a series of tracts). Other writers published stories with moral elements in the magazines: many of Mary Russell Mitford's early sketches from the *Our Village* appeared in the *Lady's Magazine*, and M.M. Busk published in several magazines, including *Blackwood's*.

38 Fredrick W. Faxon, *Literary Annuals and Gift-Books: A Bibliography, 1823–1903*, reprinted with supplementary essays by Eleanore Jamieson and Iain Bain (1912; Pinner: Private Libraries Association, 1973), p. xxi. Gift-books and annuals are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 1, pp. 29–30.

Moral Tales and Moral Novels

New avenues within the periodical press helped increase the interest in moral tales, but short fiction still had to compete with the novel. In the 1800s and 1810s, large numbers of self-consciously improving works of fiction were published, in the form of both the conventional novel and the single-volume tale (or novella)—a quantity which increased after the phenomenally successful publication of Hannah More's evangelical novel, *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife*, in 1808. The popularity of novelists such as Mary Brunton (whose *Self-Control* [1811] and *Discipline* [1814] were part of a host of publications with similarly admonitory titles) helped increase the vogue for instructive narrative by the end of the 1810s. Moral rectitude, as I have indicated, became the cornerstone of much of the critical reception of fiction. Many female novelists strove to establish their ethical credentials, and the excesses of sentimental fiction and the Gothic novel were gradually left behind. In a review of Brunton's posthumously published fragment *Emmeline* (1819), the *Monthly Review* discussed the state of women writers and moral fiction:

> We observe a sweetness and a delicate propriety in the publications of some of our female writers, which the compositions of our own sex do not so often possess. In *their* hands, instruction becomes amusement, and the highest duties of life are inculcated in a manner which makes an equal impression on the imagination and the disposition. Fiction is rendered subservient to the promotion of the soundest principles of morality; and the deepest feelings of the heart, as well as the most sportive powers of the mind, are all excited for the accomplishment of one great end,—the extension of virtuous principle.[39]

By the 1820s a large section of the novel market was devoted to didactic fiction. Given a crowded publishing scene and the examples of the three writers I have discussed, my contention is that many female writers may have looked to short fiction as a means of developing the moral blueprint: in terms of both form and content. Gary Kelly has discussed the strategies by which the novel sought to redeem itself as a serious form in the Romantic period: through the incorporation of the discourses of domestic realism, polite manners, and post-Enlightenment historicism.[40] By the same token, writers of short fiction attempted to carve out their own niche within the literary canon, and many wished to distinguish their writing from association with the novel.

There are of course historical precedents for the use of short fiction to convey a moral. A message, it has long been argued, is digested with greater ease when it is straightforwardly delivered and framed in a short and simple narrative structure. The increase of such collections in the 1820s is in part attributable to a rediscovery of the potency of the short narrative, and the decade saw something of a reinvention of the genre, with new approaches giving rise in turn to new explorations of form.

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39 *Monthly Review*, 91 (February 1820): 174–78, p. 174, reviewer's emphasis.

40 Gary Kelly, 'The Limits of Genre and the Institution of Literature: Romanticism Between Fact and Fiction', in Kenneth R. Johnston, et al. (eds), *Romantic Revolutions: Criticism and Theory* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), pp. 158–75, pp. 164–65.

The rationale for the use of short tales as vehicles for educational matter was at least partly pragmatic. Writers of moral fiction, perhaps more so than any other authors of the period, were acutely conscious of the reception of their work. I have discussed their concerns regarding critics and other authors, but the foremost shaping force on such writing was a conception of the needs, desires, and deficiencies of an imagined audience. Instructive tales were, by their very nature, aimed most often at a lower social order than that supposedly inhabited by their author, or at younger readers of the author's own station. The length of the story, therefore, was ordinarily accommodated to the intended reader's shortcomings in education and attention span. Similarly, to define a moral message as a 'tale' may have also made that message less intimidating. Elizabeth Barber's earliest instructive works were fearsomely titled *Dangerous Errors* (1822) and *Influence and Example* (1823), but although her pedagogic intent remained intact for *Tales of Modern Days*, the title may have been less daunting for the casual reader, and more in keeping with the increasing numbers of titles that announced their status as 'tales' from the first.

Moral 'tales' were presumed to be simpler to understand than moral 'novels', and connected to this premise was the notion that a reduction in length had the advantage of allowing a single tale to convey one particular moral precept. By the same token, if the story became too long the message could be in danger of becoming tiresome through repetition, or being swamped by narrative and so diluted for the reader. In the introduction to *Tales of a Traveller*, Washington Irving claimed for each of his tales the same effect on the reader as if he had had 'a bolus of sound morality popped down his throat' (*TT*, 4). Irving never paid more than lip-service to the concept of didactic moral fiction, but the fact that he did at least allude to the subject of ethical improvement points to the tendency for writers of short fiction to justify their choice of mode, and to hold up the edifying aspects of their work as mitigation for the merely entertaining qualities. While Irving was essentially content with writing fiction for its own sake, those authors who were sincere in their desire to educate found the idea of dosing their readership with a 'bolus of morality' extremely enticing. Moral fiction often suffers from the fact that it has a task to accomplish over and above its role as literature. If a tale fails to teach—if the message is lost to the medium—then it is unsuccessful according to its own criteria. A shorter tale that carried the perceived elegance of one maxim per tale was therefore appealing for many writers, since it allowed them to combine their role as social benefactors with some degree of literary skill, and to trust that their meaning would be communicated unscathed to the reader.

The relationship between length and successful instruction was not lost on the reviewers, who frequently tired of relentless sermonising when it appeared in novels, and who often praised a story's shortness for its own sake. The *Monthly Review* declared, in its review of the Porter sisters' *Tales Round a Winter Hearth*, that 'there is one thing, however, very remarkable about them [the stories]: we mean their brevity; which we cannot help noticing as a peculiar merit'.[41] Whether critiquing character or plot, the likelihood of a reviewer finding fault with the plausibility of a tale was increased in line with its length, since the contortions that didactic writers

41 *Monthly Review*, n.s., 2 (July 1826): 333–34, p. 333.

were often forced to go through in order to achieve the desired moral effect were more likely to grate during longer works.

It is important to remember that the moral tale, in its early-nineteenth-century manifestation, was a genre in ideological dialogue with the novel. The 'polyvalence' of women's attitudes towards literature has been discussed by Jacqueline Pearson, who describes a situation where novel-reading could be considered idle and wasteful, and yet, simultaneously, an inability to appreciate literature was indicative of a woman's dullness or ignorance.[42] The complexity and hypocrisy of social attitudes towards the position of women both in the reading and writing of fiction placed women's short fiction in a literary no-man's-land, and many authors wished to distance themselves from the novel—a genre not always regarded as particularly wholesome or instructive. After a decline in favour at the end of the eighteenth century, authors such as Scott and Edgeworth had boosted the credibility and authority of the novel during the first decades of the nineteenth century. The sneering estimation of novel-reading that Jane Austen satirised so sharply in *Northanger Abbey* (a work published posthumously in 1818, but which may have originated as far back as 1795) was well on the wane by the 1820s. However, such attitudes remained a strong enough part of the cultural fabric in 1824 to make relevant Sarah Green's warning of the dangers of having a head full of Scottian novelistic heroes and heroines in her *Scotch Novel Reading; or, Modern Quackery*. While the virtues of the novel remained in doubt, it seems likely that those writers who were most anxious to set a virtuous example to their readers still felt more comfortable operating just outside this questionable category of literature. The substantial increase in works calling themselves 'a tale' rather than 'a novel' from the late 1810s, a phenomenon discussed in Chapter 1, is particularly relevant here. The implicit notions of truth, simply-stated fact, and common-sense wisdom that many writers felt the title 'tale' conferred on their work held the greatest appeal for those who hoped to improve the morals of their readership. To publish a collection of tales was conceptually a very different proposition from publishing that still potentially frivolous thing—a novel.

On the other hand, since the 1810s the novel had firmly established itself as the dominant literary form, however critically dubious. The major effect of this fact on writers of short moral tales was a shift in their attitude towards realism. Hannah More's *Cheap Repository Tracts* had used the exemplar as their staple fictional tool. The message had been all, and overly elaborate attempts to situate that message in a realist environment were deemed potentially confusing or simply unnecessary. In the instructive fiction of the turn of the century, it was still considered far more effective for the protagonists of a moral tale to be caricatured representations of social classes, political or religious persuasions, or professions: the '"the *beau ideal*" of character', in Ann Jones's words, versus the flawed villain who must receive his comeuppance.[43] By the 1810s, however, the didactic story-writers who took their cue from More had to come to terms with the fact that the novel had been establishing

42 Jacqueline Pearson, *Women's Reading in Britain, 1750–1835: A Dangerous Recreation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 2.

43 Ann H. Jones, *Ideas and Innovations: Best Sellers of Jane Austen's Age* (New York: AMS Press, 1986), p. 15.

itself as a moral force since the eighteenth century. Furthermore, it was doing so without the downward hectoring and simplistic preaching of the shorter genre, by exhibiting far greater psychological, social, and historical complexity. As early as the 1750s, women novel-writers had given voice to female protagonists who were neither paradigms of virtue nor execrable harlots. Novels such as Eliza Haywood's *History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless* (1751) portrayed women who strayed from the righteous path, but who nonetheless remained sympathetic characters. It was to be decades before short fiction caught up.

No consensus existed in the early nineteenth century, as none exists now, as to what precisely constituted realism in fiction. In the broadest terms, the three main avenues of realist representation employed by novel-writers of the period were historicism (an Enlightenment-derived emphasis on a connection to the past exemplified by the Scottian historical novel); expositions of manners (the painstaking and decorous depiction of human interaction in the novels of writers from Frances Burney to Jane Austen); and description (the painterly attention to the minutiae of surroundings and environment demonstrated by Mary Russell Mitford). These broad-brush terms clearly fail to do justice to the complexities of novelistic realism, but they do help to establish the points at which the short moral tale began to borrow from the novel, and started to consider itself a realist form.

Many writers of moral tales were also novelists. However, like Maria Edgeworth, most considered the two streams of fiction as performing separate functions for different audiences—a distinction which helped demonstrate the important ideological gap between moral philosophy and moralising fiction. Edgeworth's novels were serious fictional endeavours, and they remain distinct from her didactic tales because of their willingness to engage the reader in argument and to present their social commentary obliquely: that is, to engage in a debate on moral philosophy. For Edgeworth, short fiction was a genre that ought to furnish its readers with what the author regarded as irrevocable truths, and had little need for the potentially ambiguous stylistic trappings of the novel.

In other cases, where authors of moral short fiction did branch out into the novel, their attempts at extended narratives tried to match too closely the style and tone of the shorter form. Few critics had time for long didactic tales that spun out a single admonition over three volumes. Moreover, the reviews often made a distinction between those who had mastered the novel form, and those whose skill lay in writing shorter pieces. As the *Literary Gazette* argued, 'the talent […] so often evinced of keeping up vivid interest throughout a protracted narrative, is the very opposite of condensing the whole spirit in the short space of a slight tale'.[44] Sentiments that appeared pithy and sharply focused in brief tales could easily become clunky and over-egged when transferred to a novel. The novel of manners required its characters to exemplify the polish and ethical excellence that society deemed virtuous, but that same elegance of delivery was also necessary for successful novel-writers, who ran the risk of disfavour if perceived to be forcing the moral down their readers' throats or failing to write to the high standards they were depicting. There were exceptions

44 Review of Jane and Anna Maria Porter's *Tales Round a Winter Hearth*, *Literary Gazette*, 486 (13 May 1826): 292.

to this rule, as *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife* proved. Nonetheless, Hannah More's novel was far more successful with the public than it was with the reviews, and the novelists who attracted the highest critical plaudits remained those whose formal elegance and sophistication could match those of their characters. As a consequence, many writers of moral tales found that short fiction best suited those who only wished to improve their audience, without shouldering the pressures of style and vraisemblance that the novel conferred on its writers.

A strong indicator of a major shift in attitudes to short fiction, and of an increasing recognition of the opportunities offered by the genre, is the number of writers who made a switch from longer forms to short fiction. This movement had begun as early as the 1800s and 1810s when Edgeworth and Opie began to write collections of shorter tales after initially publishing novels (or at least much longer varieties of the tale). Here, it is worth reiterating the point that while the single-volume, novella-length moral tale remained a consistently employed medium throughout the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the collection of shorter didactic tales had a much bumpier ride through the period, emerging only briefly in the late 1810s and 1820s as a distinct and popular genre. One author who followed the trend from novel to tale in the 1820s was Barbara Hofland, a writer with a long pedigree of didactic fiction. In the 1810s, Hofland wrote several long novels including *Patience and Perseverance; or, the Modern Griselda: A Domestic Tale* (1813) and *A Father as He Should Be: A Novel* (1815). She also published a large number of single-volume moral tales for young people through the 1820s, with titles that expounded virtues such as *Integrity* (1823), *Decision* (1824), *Patience* (1824), *Moderation* (1825), *Reflection* (1826), and *Self-Denial* (1827). In the early 1820s, however, Hofland exemplified the vogue for collections of shorter tales with *Tales of the Priory* (1820) and *Tales of the Manor* (1822). In a similar fashion, Jane and Anna Maria Porter enjoyed success in the 1800s with novels such as Jane's *Thaddeus of Warsaw* (1803) and Anna Maria's *The Hungarian Brothers* (1807). These were large, multi-volume works that spanned continents and embraced expansive and dramatic themes and scenes, but in the 1820s the sisters turned to short fiction with *Tales Round a Winter Hearth*.[45]

The fact that successful novelists should embrace, in the 1820s, the comparatively humble story collection demonstrates the greater prestige that the concept of the tale had held since the publication of Scott's first series of *Tales of my Landlord* in 1816 and the newfound commercial potential that short fiction collections had acquired after the sensation of Washington Irving. Amongst writers of moral short fiction, another collection was to have an even greater impact. Mary Russell Mitford's *Our Village* rejected the heavy-handed sermonising of much of the short fiction of the 1800s and 1810s, and became a blueprint for a more subtle, pervasive mode of moral writing. Mitford, building on the sentimental tales of writers such as Amelia Opie, helped to draw short fiction away from the margins of literature, and to place it in

45 Anna Maria Porter had also written an earlier collection of short fiction. *Artless Tales* was published in 1793, when Porter was thirteen, and attracted attention by virtue of the youth of its author. See Garside, et al. (eds), *The English Novel, 1770–1829*, I (1793: 36) for extracts from some of the reactions to the work.

a position where it could contend with the novel as a form with which serious and talented writers could engage.

Mary Russell Mitford and Our Village

Our Village: Sketches of Rural Character and Scenery was issued biennially in a series of five volumes from 1824 to 1832 and became Mary Russell Mitford's most successful and celebrated achievement.[46] Stylistically and generically difficult to place, it is possible to view the collection as both a series of distinct pastoral sketches and stories, and as a work with some degree of over-arching narrative connectivity. The individual pieces are not entirely stand-alone, and there is a great deal of cross-referencing between the various sketches. The context of each sketch or story within the collection as a whole helps lend the work a broader, cyclic cohesion, and although many of the segments were first published separately in periodicals, the effect of reading the work is often more akin to that of reading a serialized novel, with the reader anticipating the next instalment, than to a series of self-contained narratives.[47] Conversely, the overall unity and plot development of a novel are lacking: upon reaching the end of the first series of *Our Village*, the reader, despite having met and visited sundry persons and places, has the sense of a return to a narrative point of origin, and of having been presented not with a progression and conclusion, but with a series of snapshots of rural life. This is, of course, an intrinsic part of the work's charm.

Like many writers of short fiction, Mitford's attraction to the form was prompted by a lack of self-belief with regard to novel-writing. On more than one occasion she expressed the conviction that the sustained, expansive style necessary for longer literary compositions was beyond her:

> I began a novel myself once, and got on very prosperously for about a hundred pages of character and description. […] I came to a dead stop for want of invention. A lack of incident killed the poor thing. It went out like a candle. In all those hundred pages not one person had said or done a single thing but my heroine: and she—guess what she had done! Turned the lock of a drawing-room door! After that it was time to give up novel-writing.[48]

The predilection for 'character and description' was to find its niche in the dramatically less-demanding scenes of *Our Village*. Nonetheless, a desire to emulate

46 The later parts of *Our Village* are described on the title-pages as 'Vol. II', etc., with the exception of the fourth part which is given the title of 'Fourth Series'. The parts were published in London by G. and W.B. Whittaker in 1824, 1826, 1828, 1830, and 1832 respectively and are henceforth cited as *OV*, I–V.

47 Mitford began publishing sketches and essays in the *New Monthly Magazine*, the *London Magazine*, and the *Museum* in 1821. Most of the pieces that were collected in the first volume of *Our Village* appeared in the *Lady's Magazine* between 1822 and 1824.

48 Letter to Sir William Elford, dated 30–31 January 1820. R. Brimley Johnson (ed.), *The Letters of Mary Russell Mitford* (London: John Lane, 1925), p. 167.

the scope and realism of the novel remains a fundamental part of Mitford's stories and sketches.

Amongst Mitford's novel-writing contemporaries, the greatest influence on *Our Village* was Jane Austen. A letter of February 1825 illustrates the debt: 'Of course I shall copy as closely as I can Nature and Miss Austen—keeping, like her, to gentle country life; or rather going a little lower, perhaps; and, I am afraid, with more of sentiment and less of humour' (*AGL*, II: 198). Indeed, the advice that Austen dispensed to her niece, Anna, concerning the construction of a novel ('3 or 4 Families in a Country Village is the very thing to work on') could equally well have been adopted by Mitford, and the basic Austenian template of the vicissitudes of a small, insular community provides a key model for *Our Village*. Austen's acute depictions of manners and mores were not the only influence. After the success of *The Sketch Book*, Mitford was keen for her work to tap into the audience for short fiction that Washington Irving had helped create. As time went on Mitford sought to distance herself from the connection to Irving: indeed, by 1830 she felt able to describe the American's work as 'a pack of maudlin trash' (*AGL*, II: 297). However, a perceptive comment from the *Monthly Magazine*'s reviewer demonstrates that she was initially perfectly willing to borrow from his model:

> 'Jack Hatch' […] is manifestly founded on Washington Irving's inimitable story of 'The Fat Gentleman.' Indeed, if we mistake not, Miss Mitford has a penchant for the American's style, and owes more to his *crayon* sketches than she would choose, perhaps, to acknowledge.[49]

Aside from Irving and Austen, Mitford drew inspiration from a wide range of literary contemporaries. The stories of More, Edgeworth, and Opie were as important for Mitford as they were for all writers of short fiction with an ethical dimension. Gary Kelly has also noted the debt that Mitford owes to the naturalistic depictions of village life in Elizabeth Le Noir's *Village Anecdotes; or, the Journal of a Year* (1804) and Elizabeth Hamilton's *The Cottagers of Glenburnie; a Tale for the Farmer's Ingle-Nook* (1808).[50] Such works were part of an emerging concern with the position occupied by rural life within society as a whole: a concern that is central to Mitford's works, and which presented her, if not with a ready-made readership, at least with an audience attuned to descriptive village tableaux that her works were able to tap into successfully.

While Mitford's writings are undoubtedly connected to the novel of female experience and the short moral tales of the previous generation of women writers, she also aligned herself with those authors whom she felt challenged generic and stylistic preconceptions. She makes frequent references in her letters to the essays of William Hazlitt and Charles Lamb, praising the relaxed conversational style of their magazine writing, and claiming that as a result 'we are free and easy in these days,

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49 Review of *Our Village. Volume II*, *Monthly Review*, 3 (November 1826): 316–26, p. 322, reviewer's emphasis. 'Jack Hatch' is one of the sketches in the second part of Mitford's series, and 'The Fat Gentleman' refers to Irving's story of the 'The Stout Gentleman' in *Bracebridge Hall* (1822).

50 Kelly, *English Fiction of the Romantic Period*, pp. 86–92 and 202–206.

and talk to the public as a friend' (*AGL*, II: 179). Mitford's stories and sketches were part of a new approach to lighter literature. Popular works were less easily dismissed as inconsequential because they lacked weighty political or historical themes, or because they were not explicitly and pedagogically didactic. It was fast becoming possible to hold essayistic musings and well-wrought sketches in as much regard as the densest philosophical treatise, and *Our Village* was ideally placed to enjoy this small expansion to the literary world.

Mitford and the Morality of the English Countryside

There is, as Raymond Williams memorably describes in *The Country and the City*, a long and glorious literary tradition of lamenting the decline of the English countryside. Williams enumerates the various examples of this phenomenon metaphorically, using the image of a literary escalator that continually retreats further and further back into the past, away from a threatened present in search of the rural idyll of the previous generation.[51] During the 1820s—in the midst of the Industrial Revolution—the dichotomy of town and country, and the ideal of a rural golden age, held no less fascination than at any other time. Depictions of country life seldom have their rural protagonists in mind as a prospective readership. Instead, such works are usually written for a literate, and therefore predominantly urban audience, and *Our Village* is no exception. In the early nineteenth century, metropolitan regions were not only wealthier and more literate than rural areas, but they also had the appetite for expositions of the countryside that reinforced desires for continuity and stability in a rapidly changing urban environment. Broad concerns about the increasing industrialisation of the country and the loss of an older way of life created ideal conditions for Mitford's nostalgic depictions.

Williams's criticism of rosy retrospection reminds us to remain sceptical about assertions of truth in rural literature, especially concerning the decline of country life. Verisimilitude, however, is a central component of the history of pastoral literature. W.J. Keith argues that Williams's point can be granted 'without denying the accuracy—let alone the sincerity—of the individual writers', and he goes on to stress 'the premium put on truth and accuracy by most rural writers' (and, crucially, by their readers).[52] From this perspective, *Our Village* continues the role that pastoral literature had historically played in Britain by reinforcing those belief structures that asserted the importance of the morality of the countryside to the ethical and economic fabric of the nation. It was crucial that Mitford's portrayal of the country offered an urban audience a world which should be at least convincing, if not strictly accurate or representative from a twenty-first-century critical perspective.

In *Our Village* the countryside is as much a state of mind as a physical location. From the outset this stance is clear. The reader is invited to enter 'a little world of our own, close-packed and insulated like ants in an ant-hill, or bees in a hive, or sheep in

51 See *The Country and the City* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1973), Chapter 2.

52 W.J. Keith, *The Rural Tradition: William Cobbett, Gilbert White, and Other Non-Fiction Prose Writers of the English Countryside* (Hassocks, Sussex: Harvester Press, 1975), pp. 14, 15.

a fold, or nuns in a convent, or sailors in a ship' (*OV*, I: 1). These analogous situations help place the village and its environs outside of society's normal boundaries, and lend them an internal social code and logic that signify a site of escape from the wider social sphere. The village is not hermetically sealed away from the rest of society, but it does have a meniscoid insularity that enables it to retain its otherness. This otherness is apparent in the sketch titled 'Violeting'. Returning to the country 'from the heat, the glare, the noise, and the fever of London', the narrator explains: 'I must go violeting—it is a necessity—and I must go alone' (*OV*, I: 100). The countryside is an elixir to her, and becomes a magical site of transport:

> What a renewal of heart and mind! To sit in such a scene of peace and sweetness is again to be fearless and gay and gentle as a child. Then it is that thought becomes poetry, and feeling religion. Then it is that we are happy and good. (*OV*, I: 106)

Mitford's pastoral vision is not simply a sanctuary from the increasingly stultifying qualities of urban society; the simple, pure pleasures that it provides are the basis for all the discerning faculties. Here, the discriminative powers that are instilled organically into the rural mind by close contact with nature's magic and beauty far outreach those artificially acquired for measuring quality in human terms.

Much of the uniqueness of Mitford's village experience is derived from the formal qualities of *Our Village*. The level of description contained in the work could not be incorporated into a novel without severely taxing the reader's patience, but in these short pieces, the fresh start and minor variation brought by every sketch allows a repetitive pattern to evolve without the constant demands of plot progression. The assortment of styles and narrative modes that make up *Our Village* are held together by a connective series of descriptive and anecdotal discursions titled 'Walks in the Country'. Shelagh Hunter accurately describes the 'Walks in the Country' as the 'backbone' of the work, and as well as imparting a degree of rigidity the recurrent nature of these scenes means that they are also able to act as restorative devices that re-engage the reader with the work's primary function of rural description.[53] These particular pieces possess an immediacy which derives from the narrator's sudden and complete immersion in the landscape. The 'Walks in the Country' are the sorbets between the various courses of *Our Village*, and are often delivered following an especially involved narrative, or a sketch in which the mood darkens.

It is important to recognise that the countryside that appears in *Our Village*, and which is so crucial to the formation of the minds which dwell in it, is represented not as nature unalloyed, but instead as a quintessentially English interpretation of the beauty of environment. Here, the narrator's beloved flowers cannot be fully appreciated without their 'decent, homely, well-wearing English names' (*OV*, I: 55) and vegetation can always be rendered even more delightful by cultivation. Domestic gardens provide a recurring image of the English attitude to nature. The narrator's own garden is not only her constant solace and her absolute pride, but is in competition with that of others: 'My garden wants no watering, and is more beautiful than ever, beating my old rival in that primitive art, the pretty wife of the

53 Shelagh Hunter, *Victorian Idyllic Fiction: Pastoral Strategies* (London: Macmillan, 1984), p. 70.

little mason, out and out. Measured with mine, her flowers are nought' (*OV*, I: 203). Although 'primitive', this art captures the imagination, and allows genteel combat to flourish in the village as nature is simultaneously brought to heel and encouraged to express itself in full.

The foremost example of the interface between humanity and nature, however, is that supreme embodiment of the English countryside: the meticulously landscaped garden of a country house. In 'The Visit', a day's outing takes in a location where the idealised conflation of the organic and the civilised can be found: 'the very midst of that beautiful piece of art or nature (I do not know to which class it belongs), the pleasure-ground of F. Hill' (*OV*, I: 266). Nature here has been tamed and, in the eyes of the narrator, this can only be for the better. Landscaping not only improves, but in fact engenders the very essence of the land and gives it morality and meaning: 'Thirty years ago this place had no existence; it was a mere undistinguished tract of field and meadow and common land' (*OV*, I: 267). For the English countryside to attain its full potential it must first undergo some alteration at the hand of humanity. As Elizabeth Helsinger states: 'The "country" that is metaphoric for the [British] nation is worked land, land marked and shaped by its inhabitants.'[54] The application of taste upon nature almost always ameliorates the latter, but occasionally the narrator's love of aesthetic improvement comes into conflict with the undiluted beauty of nature. The ruined gardens of 'The Old House at Aberleigh' provide 'sad memorials of past grandeur!' (*OV*, II: 244), but their reversion to nature cannot be entirely without merit, since 'the shrubs and flowering trees are undestroyed, and have grown into a magnificence of size and wildness of beauty, such as we may imagine them to attain in their native forests' (*OV*, II: 245).

Landscaping alone, though, is not enough. It is the collaged variety of the countryside that constructs its aesthetic function. There is more than one way to cultivate and humanise the country, and farmland also has its visual attractions. The fields are separated by hedgerows, bear different crops, house a variety of animals, and lie fallow in their turn. This lends them a mosaic appeal that sits well in the mind of the narrator with their agricultural value, and which is mirrored by the montage structure of *Our Village*. Part of the attraction of the rural landscape for the narrator, and for the reader, is the function that informs the beauty. The pleasure that can be derived from a scene is enhanced if that scene is a backdrop to employment, and a vista is all the more enjoyable if it can be comprehended in functional as well as aesthetic terms.

Complementing the farmland, and increasing the narrator's pleasure in both vistas by their juxtaposition, are the numerous unspoilt oases that pepper the landscape. These 'delicious green patches, the islets of wilderness amidst cultivation, which form perhaps the peculiar beauty of English scenery' (*OV*, I: 101) are sought out as palate-cleansers for the artistic temperament. The carefully circumscribed pockets of profusion are considered as nature unfettered and act as reminders of the basis for imitation and improvement upon which the principles of rural aestheticism are founded. Indeed, the entirety of the rural scenes depicted in the work forms

54 Elizabeth K. Helsinger, *Rural Scenes and National Representation: Britain, 1815–1850* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 15.

a microcosm of an idealised British countryside. In this utopian vision, the land acts simultaneously as a bountiful provider, a canvas for the application of artistic endeavour, a cornerstone of the appreciation of those endeavours, and an untouched natural haven.

Like so many literary rural environments, the countryside depicted in *Our Village* is under siege. The 1820s saw some of the most profound social shifts of the Industrial Revolution. The first railways appeared in this decade, helping to close the gap between the rural and the urban. The rapid expansion of the towns of the industrial north was at its peak, and even Mitford's comparatively unaffected Berkshire village is exposed to some of the more political changes and threats to the country. However, the dominant description of the decline of rural life in *Our Village* addresses a less tangible fear. The rural mode of life is often presented as being on the cusp of ruin, and the narrator's overriding concern is that she lives in what are somehow 'degenerate days' (*OV*, II: 52) for the strength and industry of the country people. Even in Mitford's bucolic utopia, the weight of the archetypal crisis of perspective to which Raymond Williams refers can be felt. The pastoral literature of any period in history draws upon a mythologised, prelapsarian, and idyllic past, where the way of life of the previous generation was comparatively exempt from the incursion of modernity, and *Our Village* is no exception.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning described Mitford's pastoralism as that of 'a sort of prose Crabbe in the sun'.[55] The comparison is derived from the adherence of both writers to the detail of nature, and their assertions of accuracy. For George Crabbe, however, the decline of the land is already beyond retrieval, and the woes of rustic life are exacerbated by the poetic idealisation to which it is subjected. In the opening lines to Book II of *The Village*, Crabbe's poem claims to redress this sentimental idyllicism: 'No longer truth, though shown in verse, disdain, / But own the village life a life of pain.'[56] Not only does Mitford's optimism differ markedly from such unflinching anti-sentimentalism and anti-pastoralism, but *Our Village* further diverges from Crabbe's stance by presenting the reader with an idealised past that still retains a precarious existence. In Mitford's work the value-system of a rural golden age still holds sway, although it is periodically threatened. This position allows Mitford to assert, at the close of the first part of the series, that not only has the village 'undergone less alteration than any place of its inches in the kingdom' (*OV*, I: 273), but to claim naïvely that the modernisations that have taken place will not merely beget a series of others: 'we shall see no more of him [the road-mender]; for the Mac-Adam ways are warranted not to wear out' (*OV*, I: 277). If only the village could be let alone, she insists, it could become a site of rest from the flux of existence—its movements circular and natural, rather than linear and man-made.

A powerful conception of cyclic existence, daily reinforced, connects with the villagers' appreciation of history. The past, for the small rural enclave, is a common

55 Letter to Richard Hengist Horne, 20 October 1843. Philip Kelley and Ronald Hudson (eds), *The Brownings' Correspondence*, 14 vols (Winfield, KS: Wedgestone Press, 1984–98), VIII: October 1843–May 1844, p. 1.

56 George Crabbe, 'The Village' (1783), Bk. II (ll. 1–2), *The Complete Poetical Works*, ed. Norma Dalrymple-Champneys, et al., 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), I, 168.

site—one to which the connections of the whole community remain strong. The elder members of society, therefore, become links to that site. Mrs Mosse, the family housekeeper during the narrator's childhood, holds the position of keeper and chronicler of the lore of a bygone age that remains intensely relevant. Mitford's housekeeper can be seen as a more personal version of Nathaniel Hawthorne's 'Old Esther Dudley', who is believed to be capable of conjuring lost imperialistic grandeur from her mirror in the derelict New England mansion she inhabits, and who acts as a receptacle for the collective unconscious of a departed era. Mrs Mosse's similar temporal displacement is acknowledged in the narrator's parting message, 'thou wast of the antique world' (*OV*, I: 240), but the necessity of her and her kind as beacons of reference for the present is undiminished.

The treatment of history in Mitford's work never extends very far back into the past. To travel beyond the recollection of a single generation implies that the chosen subject matter, to be worth remembering, would by necessity be larger than the narrative of an individual or a single family. This would in turn endanger the archetypal quality that the work strives to maintain: the sense that the stories it tells are not extraordinary, but are those that every person has to offer, yet which deserve to be told. From this perspective, *Our Village* can be seen to edge towards a more modern, gentrified version of the folktale, wherein the rural existence becomes the basis for all understanding, and the origin of a collective unconscious. The village life, and the simple morality of its populace with 'their little frailties and their many virtues' (*OV*, I: v), provides a basic model for the distillation of the universality of experience, which exists in even the most mundane and trivial of circumstances.

Mitford's vision is of a socially inclusive, non-partisan country village, open to all who are willing to engage wholeheartedly with its belief system. The fundamental moral ideal behind this model is a sense of rural utility: a philosophy that allows every person in the community their own mode of contribution to the common good. This concept, as with all the ideological arguments expressed in *Our Village*, is in turn bound up with the formal qualities of the book, and short fiction lends itself to this firmly limited theatre. With the scope sufficiently narrow, the individually mild lives of the villagers can be explored in full. The characters can begin to be represented more than 'merely as figures in the landscape' and thus merit 'an essay to themselves' (*OV*, I: 16). A belief in the intrinsic value of an individual's narrative informs the entire work, and the variety and individuality of the villagers and their lives matches the diversity of the landscape that surrounds them. The emphasis on the significance of the singular finds its expression in the form of the work—a solitary person or incident is less likely to be subsumed into the collective narrative or general landscape if they have their own, separately-titled story within which to exist. The people, who in a conventional novel would be relegated to the fringe of the plot as minor characters, here become masters of their own narratives.

Village life celebrates those who would be subsumed into the morass of human existence in a town or city. Hence, the interfering Aunt Martha becomes 'the most delightful of old maids!' (*OV*, I: 250). Not merely endured, but venerated, Martha is able to channel her energies into the whole community as a beloved busybody. The country village becomes a location for an exposition of the conservative ideal of the moral individual: the implication being that every person has unique talents,

and those willing to set those talents to work in any form can thrive in the society which *Our Village* presents. A strong belief in social utility is connected to the value system extolled by Hannah More's tracts, in that it demands responsibility, as well as collective values and agendas. At harvest time, the gathering of the crops requires the help of more people than have a direct interest in the yield. Furthermore, this help must be given, if not for free, then at least in return for only a nominal reward—companionship and a glass of beer. Without this willingness to place community above self, Mitford's village way of life could not survive, and the stifling impersonality of modernity and progress would be unopposed.

Our Village purports to represent an actual place: a place where its readers could, and did, visit. By the 1830s, Three Mile Cross (the Berkshire village on which the work was based) had become a site of pilgrimage for the Mitford enthusiast: a place where one could meet the characters from the books and visit the locations described, and where readers could continue the narrative for themselves. By the 1880s and 1890s, large numbers of single-volume, illustrated editions of *Our Village* had helped cement its status as a series of snapshots of a lost era. From a modern critical perspective, Mitford's literary portrayal of the village must be considered as highly mediated. For nineteenth-century readers, however, such careful discrimination was unnecessary. *Our Village* was Three Mile Cross. The people and places in the book matched those a visitor would see, and the stories were therefore perfectly suited to an audience eager for a reinforcement of idyllic rural descriptions.

Our Village and Literary Realism

I have already argued that Mitford's success with her highly wrought, painterly style was in part due to the fact that conditions within her readership had been attuned to descriptions of rural idylls in the 1800s and 1810s. Vineta Colby has traced the lineage of depictions of rural existence further back into the eighteenth century, attributing the rise in the stock of idyllic and descriptive pastoral writing in the early nineteenth century to the popularisation of an idealised version of village life by *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766), and Goldsmith's subsequent imitators. *Our Village*'s contribution to this movement was to give the descriptive elements of the narrative the greatest weight. Colby's study also includes a quotation from Harriet Martineau's autobiography. Martineau (whose own novels were influenced by the rural descriptions of Mitford and her contemporaries) gives the stylistic mode of *Our Village* the term 'graphic description', and claims that during her childhood: 'we had no conception of detail like Miss Austen's in manners and Miss Mitford's in scenery', placing Mitford at the centre of at least one facet of the increasingly important literary 'real'.[57]

The realist model that Mitford was working within was under construction at this point. Since the turn of the nineteenth century and the advent of the Waverley novels, the parameters for realism in fiction had shifted. Scott had helped create a demand for a close and naturalistic descriptive style in which scenes were not only depicted as they stood, but also as they had been and would be: landscape constructed as post-Enlightenment history, and also as continuity and futurity. As a result of the critical

57 Cited by Vineta Colby in *Yesterday's Women*, p. 13.

and popular success of the historical novel, even evocations of contemporary rural life were expected to conflate elements of an eternal and ineffable ideal of Britain, and to maintain an exactitude that precisely located the narrative in space and time. This challenge is recognised in *Our Village*, and the dialogue between the personal and the universal that the work presents is partly the result of an attempt at this realist combination.

Mitford's desire for a high level of verisimilitude necessitated a painstaking and painterly style that the work acknowledges is not unmediated. The narrator's admission that she has given her village 'a brighter aspect' (*OV*, I: v), stems from an awareness of the subjectivity of painting, both of landscapes and of portraits. A contemporary of John Constable, Mitford's scenes can be seen to offer a similarly intense, ultra-realistic vision of the culture and vista of the English countryside—one which is necessarily sentimentalised, moralised, and Picturesquely polished to achieve what the author (or painter) regards as the most accurate and appropriate mode of representation available. In Mitford's case, however, while the devotion to a particular ideal of moral verisimilitude is retained, the literary sketch—and in particular the series of literary sketches—offers an added narrative element. Sketching the changing scenes of the English countryside not only threads separate pieces together, but provides scope for chronological shifts. *Our Village* narrates the changing countryside, rather like an artist's portable sketch-book, but unlike a single canvas, and it is this belief in the power of cyclic, shifting sketches that gives Mitford's work its particular ideological dimension.

Richard Sha has argued that the sketch, in both art and literature, is a mode that 'must appear to resist rhetoricity if it is to maintain its truthfulness, authenticity, or propriety', yet rhetoric is precisely what creeps into many of Mitford's scenes.[58] The sketches that Mitford created were part of an ongoing negotiation between realism, romance, and morality that engaged much of the fiction produced during this period. P.D. Edwards identifies the rural pictorial mode as one example of literature's drive for 'the illusion of realism, of actuality', but some of Mitford's contemporary critics construed her efforts as faux-naïve stylistic affectations, rather than earnest attempts at realism.[59] George Procter, reviewing *Our Village* in the *Quarterly Review*, excoriated what he considered to be 'the conceit of pastoral infantine simplicity', compounded by passages of 'mere "babbling o' green fields"', and much subsequent criticism has read the work as an example of purely nostalgic idyllicism.[60] Instead, I would argue that Mitford's short fiction always remains conscious of a fundamentally illusory quality inherent in landscape description. Her sketches work towards a particularly bourgeois, unashamedly sunny aesthetic of realism, rather than claiming to be concretely and unassailably 'real'.

58 Sha, *The Visual and Verbal Sketch*, p. 1.

59 P.D. Edwards, *Idyllic Realism from Mary Russell Mitford to Hardy* (London: Macmillan, 1988), p. 10.

60 *Quarterly Review*, 31 (1825): 166–74, p. 169.

Mitford's Influence

The self-aware exploration of realist tropes in a moral, rural setting was Mitford's major contribution to the local colour story, a mode which would develop into an increasingly important part of British (and American) short fiction over the remainder of the nineteenth century. A number of imitative works followed *Our Village*: The anonymously written *Village Incidents: or, Religious Influence in Domestic Scenes* (1828) was one of the most explicitly didactic, but others, such as Elizabeth Holmes's *Scenes in Our Parish* (1830), Anne Catherine Monkland's *Village Reminiscences. By an Old Maid* (1834), and Amelia Bristow's *Village Walks: A Series of Sketches from Life* (1834) closely followed Mitford's pattern. As well as imitations, *Our Village* also attracted burlesques. Many contemporary readers felt that her pristine delineations of the minutiae of rural existence begged for a more satirical treatment, and several such works appeared. The pseudonymous Peregrine Reedpen gleefully parodied Mitford's harmonious, close-knit village community in *Our Town; or, Rough Sketches of Character, Manners, &c.* (1834). Thomas Crofton Croker's satire, *My Village, versus "Our Village"*, appeared in 1833, with a verse prologue which contended that 'village life is not all à la Mitford, / Or else, 'tis very plain that I'm unfit for't'.[61] Croker was already an author of some renown, and had published several collections of Irish folklore in the 1820s (discussed in Chapter 4). The fact that he felt it worthwhile to write an entire series of sketches parodying Mitford indicates not only how widely the *Our Village* blueprint was known, but also the degree to which it was seen in some quarters as a condescendingly superficial version of country existence, which glossed lightly over rural deprivation and the erosion of a way of life that was keenly felt by many.

Victorian concerns about the rural condition, individual morality, and the detailed representation of place and community also owed a great deal to *Our Village's* polished charm and attentive precision. Vineta Colby describes how Mitford's legacy of 'graphic description' (to use Harriet Martineau's term again) runs through the second half of the century:

> As the village novel evolved from Miss Mitford's little sketches and other prose idylls and pastorals into the realistic novel of social community like [Martineau's] *Deerbrook*, [Elizabeth Gaskell's] *Cranford*, and *Middlemarch*, it became increasingly a register of the interdependency of human lives in society.[62]

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61 Thomas Crofton Croker, *My Village, versus "Our Village"* (London: H. Fisher, R. Fisher, and P. Jackson, 1833), [unpaginated]. The comic rhyme owes a debt to William Maginn's earlier description: 'Still may her picture, when she's pleased to sit for't, / Shew her the same good-humoured Mary Mitford.' '"The Gallery of Literary Characters" (No. XII) Mary Russell Mitford', *Fraser's Magazine*, 3 (May 1831): 410. It has been suggested that Croker's wife, Marianne Nicholson Croker, may have been the author of the work. See the entry for the work (1833: 19) in Peter Garside, et al. (eds), *The English Novel, 1830–1836: A Bibliographical Survey of Prose Fiction Published in the British Isles*, *Cardiff Corvey: Reading the Romantic Text*, 10 (June 2003). Online: Internet (October 2006): <http://www.cf.ac.uk/encap/corvey/1830s>.

62 Colby, *Yesterday's Women*, p. 236.

Mitford's themes of interconnection are perhaps most notable in *Cranford* (first published in *Household Words*, 1851–53), which uses a series of tableaux to give a nostalgic portrayal of a country town operating in the shadow of Drumble—a large industrial town usually interpreted as a representation of Manchester. George Eliot's *Scenes of Clerical Life* (serialised by *Blackwood's* in 1857), also explores the same understated morality of those minor, even mediocre, stories and lives that are consistently championed in Mitford's stories and sketches. Mitford never undermines conventional moral or social mores, but she does prefigure the more complex explorations of rural life that appeared in short fiction from the middle of the century onwards. When read as a complete unit, *Our Village* gives a sense of gradual change, like time-lapse imagery, and the work remains a powerful expression of rurality, made through a series of brief, individually cohesive, sketches.

The accumulated variety of narratives portrayed by Mitford give rise to a plethora of minutely distinguished environments, individuals, and social echelons—all connected, but also individually defined. She was praised by some of her contemporaries for this diversity of representation, especially her depictions of the lower orders. The Shepherd of *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*'s 'Noctes Ambrosianæ' series declared:

> I admire Miss Mitford just excessively. I dinna wunner at her being able to write sae weel as she does about drawing-rooms wi' sofas and settees, […] but what puzzles the like o' me, is her pictures o' poachers, and tinklers, and pottery-trampers, and ither neer-do-weels, and o' huts and hovels without riggin by the way-side, and the cottages o' honest puir men.[63]

The shifting narratives, styles, persons, and scenes which pass successively in front of the reader are embodiments of the fragmented and multifarious topographic qualities of the countryside, and the short pieces coagulate to provide the full scope of Mitford's vision of rurality, nationality, and morality. The complex social and physical geography of the English countryside is laid out in *Our Village* in a very different way to a conventional novel, or even collection of tales, and Mitford's work embodies the belief that the figurative representation of protean variety must necessarily be conveyed by a multitude of distinct yet intertwined narratives.

Mitford's influence on the history of short fiction extends beyond her own writing, and beyond Britain. In the 1830s she edited several anthologies of American stories. The Preface to *Stories of American Life* (1830) describes the aim of the work, and argues that the 'lighter literature' of a country offers a unique insight into a nation's self-image. All of Mitford's American collections express the belief that the short stories produced by a country are 'as national and characteristic' as it is possible for

63 'Noctes Ambrosianæ. No. XXIX', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 20 (November 1826): 770–92, 780. The character of the Shepherd is usually regarded as John Wilson's somewhat satirical impersonation of James Hogg, although Hogg himself may have had some input into the persona at some stages. Similarly, George Procter's review (cited above) singled out the depiction of the poacher, Tom Cordery, as 'the best portrait of low life in the volume', *Quarterly Review*, 31, p. 170.

literature to be.[64] By encapsulating a particular quality or principle a story is capable of demonstrating even more powerfully than a novel the basic characteristics that a nation felt itself to possess, and of reflecting commonly held hopes and beliefs. Mitford's edited collections are concerned less with individual literary ability than with narrative and descriptive archetypes, and the exposition of shared national values. There is a strong sentiment, reminiscent of Irving's conciliatory aims in *The Sketch Book*, of the need to bridge the literary gap between the Old World and the New, as well as a sense of discovery on the part of Mitford at finding such gems amongst the rough-hewn body of American writings.

American authors were in turn influenced by Mitford's own collections and her anthologies. Kristie Hamilton gives Mitford's sketches a place alongside those of Irving in providing a template for local (often female) voices within the nationalist discourse of American literature. Hamilton claims that 'in *Our Village* and *The Sketch Book*, early-nineteenth-century American authors found the paradigms for composing their own visions of society and authorship in the United States'.[65] These comments echo those of Lawrence Buell, who also cites Mitford as second only to Irving in 'teaching [American] writers to exploit regional material for literary purposes'.[66] *Our Village*, he claims, provided writers such as Catharine Maria Sedgwick and Sarah Hale with 'a more documentary model than Irving's of the blend of essay and anecdotalism, especially (but not exclusively) attractive to women writers'.[67] Such analyses of the impact of Mitford's work can be applied almost equally well to her own country. British writers were clearly less concerned about the construction of a national literature than their American counterparts. Nonetheless, the attention paid by Mitford to those small stories and descriptions that usually pass by unnoticed helped to formulate a new position for short fiction in the canon of literary genres.

Mitford was among the most popular female writers of short fiction in the early nineteenth century, and in *Our Village* she developed new ways of combining narrative and descriptive entertainment with an undercurrent of morality. Even before the publication of *Our Village*, however, the moral–domestic short fiction of the 1810s and 1820s was characterised by a less dogmatic approach to social improvement. The rigidly orthodox moral tale of the turn of the century was a genre in decline, and Mitford's works were part of a broad shift from a didactic and often allegorical approach towards a more literary and realist vision of ethical literature.

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64 Mitford [?and James Athearn Jones] (eds), *Stories of American Life. By American Writers*, 3 vols (London: Colburn and Bentley, 1830), Preface, I, iii, and v. This work was followed by a children's collection, *American Stories for Little Boys and Girls* in 1831, and two more works were published in 1832: *American Stories for Young People* and *Lights and Shadows of American Life* (a sequel to *Stories of American Life*).

65 Kristie Hamilton, *America's Sketchbook: The Cultural Life of a Nineteenth-Century Literary Genre* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1998), p. 54.

66 Lawrence Buell, *New England Literary Culture: From Revolution Through Renaissance* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 294. For further details of Mitford's relationship to American writers see John L. Idol, Jr., 'Mary Russell Mitford: Champion of American Literature', *Studies in the American Renaissance* (1983): 313–34.

67 Buell, *New England Literary Culture*, p. 294.

Some fire-breathing evangelicals remained, but many now sought to appeal also to the intellectual faculties, and to press aesthetic and philosophical arguments into the service of religious virtue, instead of simply aping the didactic parables of the previous generation. As a rule, moralistic novels were more sophisticated than shorter tales, but this period saw some catching-up and the arrival of a new vogue for subtlety and literary experimentation amongst story-writers.

M.M. Busk

Mary Margaret Busk's story collection, *Tales of Fault and Feeling*, was published in 1825.[68] Busk's work is more self-consciously didactic than *Our Village*, but it still aims at a gentler mode of improvement than earlier writers such as More and Edgeworth. The titles of some of the tales, such as the allegorical 'Arthur Errington' and the explicit 'Parental Guilt', make clear the desire to be instructive, but many of Busk's stories have messages that are less easily imparted than the dangers of profligacy or negligent parenting. *Tales of Fault and Feeling*, belying somewhat the sentimentality of its title, consciously distanced itself from collections that wallowed in emotion, and while Busk was willing to draw on characters and situations derived from the sentimental novel, she was simultaneously careful to draw a line between her own tales and the excesses associated with that mode.

Busk's short fiction is concerned with the broader social and political implications of moral dilemmas, as well as the place of individual ethics within a community. The ambitious subject of the collection is 'the conflict of all the best and worst passions and principles of humanity', and many of Busk's stories deal with clashes of ideologies or social forces.[69] 'The Unknown Champion' brings the spectres of revolution and radicalism into conflict with feudal values and loyalties; 'The Prince and the Merchant's Daughter' focuses on class war; the extremes of Puritanism and profligacy are explored in 'Miriam'; the collision between traditional ways of life and the necessity of progress occurs in 'The Young Cacique'; and 'Parental Guilt' situates Roman Catholic, Protestant, and atheist views in a triangle of opposition. Busk expresses little sympathy for any of the extreme positions juggled by her stories, and her concern with finding a middle ground means that her central female characters, often assailed from both sides by strong rhetoric, are forced to internalise their conflict and produce their own moral codes. These stories stress that individual freedom also brings duty and responsibility, since more often than not the established dicta of church and state do not provide the appropriate answers to the moral conundrums that are raised.

M.M. Busk was part of a growing movement during the 1820s of writers who worked within the broad moral sphere, but who helped to turn the didactic medium down a new path. Her earlier novel, *Zeal and Experience* (1819), had also been

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68 M.M. Busk was a novelist and story writer, and she was also a prolific contributor to the magazines. For details of her literary career see Eileen Curran, 'Holding on by a Pen: The Story of a Lady/Reviewer, Mary Margaret Busk (1779–1863)', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 31, 1 (Spring 1998): 9–30.

69 M.M. Busk, *Tales of Fault and Feeling*, 3 vols (London: T. Hookham, 1825), I, 131.

explicitly instructive, but by the 1830s Busk had moved on to non-fictional works, such as *The History of Spain and Portugal* (1833) and *Manners and Customs of the Japanese* (1841)—a shift prefigured by the historical leanings of *Tales of Fault and Feeling*. Busk was also firmly established within the Edinburgh publishing world: she wrote for the reviews throughout her life, and her *oeuvre* includes translations, literary criticism, and essays, as well as original poetic and prose fiction compositions. *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* printed over thirty of her contributions, and she was acquainted with John Wilson and William Blackwood. Her background in periodical publishing had taught her to modify her authorial voice, as Eileen Curran explains: 'lively, impertinent in *Blackwood's*, more scholarly in the *Foreign Quarterly*, subdued and straightforward in the *Athenæum*.'[70] Busk's magazine articles frequently adopt a male persona, and she was adept at making her own political and religious leanings ambiguous, as well as approaching the same argument from several perspectives—techniques which are put to good use in *Tales of Fault and Feeling*.

As a rule, story-writers of the early nineteenth century lagged behind novelists in their willingness to let the reader take moral responsibility for the story. Many were not prepared to allow their audience to draw their own conclusions from a narrative, and the resulting tales typically depicted only the most unrealistically upright characters and exacted the most excruciatingly linear moral consequences from their actions. In contrast, Busk wrote tales that predicted the later separation (or at least complication) between morality and religion: two concepts which were indissoluble in the majority of earlier tales but which interact far less easily in the works of many Victorian moral writers. This is not to argue that Busk was an atheist, or even that her stories engaged in any direct debate with the church, but her fiction suggests that all art can and should be in some way moral and that fiction can have a positive effect on its readers without preaching to them, and without brandishing its own didactic intent like a shield. In doing so, she made way for the more humanist and philanthropic, and sometimes secular, ethical vision that would appear in much of the moral fiction of the Victorian period.

In *Fiction With a Purpose*, Robert Colby argues that many moral writers considered themselves as 'intermediaries' between the public and the high intellectual moral arguments of theology and philosophy. He goes further, stating that 'the nineteenth-century novelist believed that art was didactic precisely because life, which it imitated, was didactic'.[71] While Colby's first point about moral fiction as social intercession is highly visible in the collections of the early part of the century, the second part of his argument implies that writers of moral fiction believed their realist techniques constituted the moral backbone of their writings. Such a contention may be valid for the stories and novels of Victorian writers such as George Eliot and Elizabeth Gaskell, but it remained a philosophy that the writers of moral tales in the 1820s were only just beginning to grasp. An ideological gap can be discerned between the moral fiction of the early nineteenth century, and the realist ethics of later writers.

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70 Curran, 'Holding on by a Pen', p. 22.

71 Robert A. Colby, *Fiction With a Purpose: Major and Minor Nineteenth-Century Novels* (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1967), p. 24.

By the time that Eliot began publishing *Scenes of Clerical Life* in 1857, the fissure between respectability and female novel-writing had narrowed considerably. The obvious contradiction of Eliot's male pseudonym notwithstanding, the closing of this gap in the second half of the century allowed female writers to take greater risks in their fiction. In contrast, the majority of earlier tale-writers remained committed to stern markers of propriety that made morality equivalent to a rejection of change, and effectively separated those who wrote improving fiction from those who wrote fiction for the sake of art.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, a framework of humanitarian ethics and social responsibility began to appear alongside and even supplant religious dogma as the basis for moral law. Consequently, the aggressive didacticism, extensively mediated through conciliatory prefaces and authorial asides, which had dominated the story collections of the 1800s and 1810s became less visible. The concept of moral fiction expanded, and as stories began to gain credibility as an ethical form, writers began to allow their readers to form their own moral judgements. Hannah More's teacherly manner of writing down to her readers was beginning to be questioned and, while Victorian authors shared More's bourgeois conception of their fiction as writing across the social divide, most were willing to allow some of the responsibility to fall on the shoulders of their audience. The discourse of morality remained a Christian one, but the dogmatic theology began to wane as religious humanism supplanted evangelicalism as the dominant ethical literary force. The modest steps taken by writers such as Opie, Mitford, and Busk were partially responsible for initiating this shift. The moral short fiction of the 1820s helped break down the absolute distinctions that existed between 'improving' and 'entertaining' literature, and helped make the advancements that saw the beginnings of the bleaker, more humanist morality which appears in the Victorian tales of Eliot, Gaskell, and Hardy.

The Corbett Sisters

The stories of the literary sisters, Marion and Margaret Corbett, operated in a similar manner to those of M.M. Busk in attempting to push the definition of moral short fiction beyond the limits established during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.[72] The majority of the Corbetts' works were jointly written, and together they published three collections of short fiction during the 1820s which advanced the conception of the role of the female writer as moral practitioner and expanded the

72 Little information is available regarding the Corbetts. The Scottish settings of many of their tales and the fact that over half of their works were published in Edinburgh implies a Scottish origin and base, as do the titles of two contributions by 'One of the Authors of "The Odd Volume"' to the gift-book *Friendship's Offering*: 'Muirside Maggie: A Legend of Lammermuir' and 'Robin Riddell's Pose: A Legend of Lochar Moss'. See Andrew Boyle, *An Index to the Annuals, 1820–1850* (Worcester: Andrew Boyle, 1967), *Vol. 1: The Authors*, p. 67. Later in life, however, an application to the Royal Literary Fund from 1835 gives their place of residence as St. Saviours, Jersey. See Nigel Cross (compiler), *Archives of the Royal Literary Fund, 1790–1918*, on microfilm (London: World Microfilms Publications, 1982), case no. 834, reel no. 27.

boundaries of the genre within which they worked. *Petticoat Tales* (1823), *The Odd Volume* (1826–27), and *Tales and Legends* (1828) are slight enough in the canon of literary history, but in the context of a genre where the established order was usually the object of veneration, and style was almost invariably subjugated to an explicit message, these works can appear more challenging.

The first of the Corbett sisters' collections, *Petticoat Tales*, was, in a small way, a new kind of moral tale collection. Less daring in its techniques than the sisters' subsequent works, it nonetheless demonstrated what could be achieved within the moral theatre, given a little imagination. The work draws inspiration as much from the informal tone and leisurely variety of Washington Irving's short fiction as from the downward dissemination of knowledge practised in the tales of earlier moral writers. *Petticoat Tales* contains as many contemporary reference points as most fashionable novels while retaining the strong instructive bent of the moral tale collection. Unlike Maria Edgeworth, who had pointedly declined to 'teach in play', the Corbetts imbued their stories with light-hearted references, comic characters, and the odd moment of Gothic suspense—refusing to stick to the tried-and-tested mode of po-faced pedagogy. Borrowing from the novel of manners, the Corbetts travelled a well-worn route, highlighting the emotional equality that exists between the lower orders and the aristocracy, at least in trials of the heart. Earlier writers of short fiction had attempted to create tales that bore these novelistic motifs—a leading example being Harriet and Sophia Lee's *Canterbury Tales* (1797–1801). The Lee sisters, however, produced condensed novels: abridging the detail of their romance models, without being willing to sacrifice the scope and sweep. The Corbett sisters were more inventive, and used novelistic devices, such as letter-writing, as well as the emotional weight of sentiment and romance, without sacrificing the punchiness of the short form.

Despite referencing a multitude of styles and modes, the Corbetts maintain a consistently Christian moral tone throughout their works, and some beneficial message awaits the reader in all of their tales. Their contribution to the development of the moral tale was not to rethink the social and religious politics of the form, as M.M. Busk had done, but instead to show a willingness to flit from mode to mode: trying literary styles on for size and bending the idioms of each to their own didactic purposes. This butterfly attitude is supplemented by intertextual asides. In the opening story of 'Dora', the presence of a fat alderman in a coach is whisperingly linked to Irving's mysterious and portly inn-dweller: 'Do you think this can be the stout gentleman in number two?'[73] 'Dora' also satirises the emerging post-Crayon trend for autobiographical sketch-writing in the character of Captain Stafford, who intends to write the 'Annals of my Regiment' now that he is back in England and has detected an opening in the public taste for the 'the sketch of my adventures'.[74]

73 Marion and Margaret Corbett, *Petticoat Tales*, 2 vols (Edinburgh: W. and C. Tait; and Longmans, London, 1823), I, 6. The reference is to Irving's description of 'The Stout Gentleman', which appears in *Bracebridge Hall*. The 'number two' is presumably intended to refer to the room in which the gentleman is staying, but in Irving's tale the room number is thirteen.

74 Ibid., I, 46.

The second collection of short fiction published by the Corbetts was *The Odd Volume*, which appeared in two series in 1826 and 1827. *Petticoat Tales* saw the Corbetts tentatively enter the literary world, confessing their limited aspirations in the domesticity of the title and negotiating the boundaries of moral short fiction, and *The Odd Volume* moved even further away from the standard collection of didactic tales. It was the most successful of their works, and as well as having two series, the work ran to three editions and was reprinted in America in 1827. The collection became their benchmark title, and the sisters referred to themselves as 'authors of *The Odd Volume*' on the title-pages of their subsequent publications.

As the title implies, *The Odd Volume* contains stories that do not fit easily into any generic category or which seem to have become separated from their fellows. On occasions, there is little to differentiate between the tales of the Corbetts and some of the sketches of *Our Village*, or the more homely stories in *The Sketch Book* or *Bracebridge Hall*. However, *The Odd Volume*'s narratives are all underpinned by a strong desire to improve and to correct, and the work is best considered as a curious and forward-thinking example of the moral tale collection. The borders of the improving tale are extended in this work beyond the domestic and even the European Romantic styles to incorporate European folktales, Gothic romances, and Irvingesque comic sketches. *The Odd Volume* also contains tales of a more conventional format, most of which extol the well-rehearsed values of hard work, sacrifice and loyalty, as well as reinforcing the intimate connections between the moral standards of the middle and upper classes and the state of the nation. Honest folk, it is claimed, will eventually get their rewards, in this life or the next, but a number of the tales depart from this standard domestic configuration. The manipulation of genre and theme to suit the purposes of moral didacticism was by no means unique to the Corbetts, but the sisters adopted the practice as their primary literary *modus operandi*. Many of their tales employ a technique of reinvesting older literary genres with contemporary moral aphorisms. One such is 'The Black Knight', a rollicking Gothic pastiche replete with ruined castles, raging storms, and dark forests. However, in place of the explorations of psychological traumas and the underlying malignancy of human nature that characterised the late-eighteenth-century Gothic fiction of Horace Walpole, Ann Radcliffe, and Matthew Lewis, the Corbetts leave the reader with a repetition of a clichéd romantic motto: 'Innocence should never despair!'[75] A similar tendency towards reductiveness is also apparent in other tales, where the conventions of various genres are unsympathetically sublimated by the overriding power of the moral message.

The Odd Volume also includes several 'Legends of Number-Nip', a mischievous German sprite whose strong sense of justice compels him to appear in order to right wrongs and punish evildoers. These folkloric tales give the sisters an opportunity to recast the kind of frightening fairy justice that appears to such great effect in the tales of James Hogg into a series of simplistic narratives in which Nip avenges hidden misdeeds. The lengthy footnote to the first of Nip's stories describes in detail

75 Marion and Margaret Corbett, *The Odd Volume*, 2nd edn (Edinburgh: Daniel Lizars; Thomas Ogilvie, Glasgow; G.B. Whittaker, London; and W. Curry, Jun. & Co., Dublin, 1826), p. 200.

the history and sources for the traditions, rationalising the fickle goblin nature of Number-Nip, as well as the often arbitrary apportionment of blame that his stories involve. As the premodern aspects of the legend are stripped away by the force of reason, the folklore is pared down to fit the narrow demands of polite literature. The process of retelling traditional or popular tales typically locates a social critique within a supernatural exterior. The Corbetts, however, replace the archetypal moral situations—which enable the folk material used by Scott, Hogg, and their contemporaries to retain its longevity—with a conduct-orientated ethical structure populated by characters who display impeccable nineteenth-century manners. Any era of history will inevitably contribute its own social hue, and pass on contemporary concerns when engaging with traditional stories, but the Corbetts' versions belong without question to their own class and age. While this serves to demonstrate the flexibility of traditional narratives, which bowed to the demands of so many differing agendas at this period, the stress-marks on the host genre remain highly visible.

Not all of the tales of *The Odd Volume*, however, are guilty of forcing unwilling narrative vehicles to transport their moral baggage. The tale of 'The Newhaven Pilot' uses the setting of a quiet Scottish port to extol the virtues of the domestic hierarchies and strict regimens, which the Corbetts consistently admire, with far less discordance than the Continental settings of many of their other tales. The ease with which this narrative of working-class domestic life absorbs and conflates the various genres with which the Corbetts had been experimenting is also striking. Rather than returning to the tried and tested conventions of the domestic mode, the various threads that the sisters have previously woven through a multitude of styles and forms finally come together, and tropes from romances, adventure stories, and tales of the supernatural all coalesce within the social dynamics of a small Scottish village.

Insular backwaters appear in many stories of the early nineteenth century, and this kind of locale was reshaped to accommodate many discourses. The close attention to landscape description in 'The Newhaven Pilot' is reminiscent of the connections that Mitford draws between location and community, and in theme and tone the tale echoes some of the less ghostly of Allan Cunningham's Solway Firth legends in *Traditional Tales of the English and Scottish Peasantry* (discussed in Chapter 4). In the Corbetts' tale, however, the emphasis swings away from the male sphere of seafaring and the physical dangers of work to focus on the virtuous role of the women of the village. In the male-dominated, physically-demanding fishing port the female position initially appears to be defined by impotence. The daily routine of the wives centres around gossip and predictions for the success of the catch, and the women jostle for their place in the social hierarchy from the time the boats leave until their return. By the end of the tale, however, the stoic restraint of many of the women appears more forceful than the hyperbolic descriptions of the men's courage at sea. The wives and daughters gradually emerge as lynchpins of the community and their attitudes are revealed as the bedrock for the endurance displayed by their husbands, fathers, sons, and brothers.

In contrast to Mitford's dominant ethical technique of imbuing her characters and their environment with a moral glow that informs all of their actions—the *genius loci* in which their lives are steeped—the Corbetts weave small but perceptible

moral intercessions into the fabric of their stories. 'The Newhaven Pilot' contains interleaved warnings against coquetry, against gossip, and against the evils of drink, but occasionally these moral deposits are loaded rather insensitively into the structure of the stories. One of the most unusual and severe moral censures in the Corbetts' corpus, and indeed in any early-nineteenth-century collection, occurs in 'Beware of What You Say before Children'. A deeply disturbing tale of child abduction and murder, the story describes the disappearance of several children from a Scottish village, and focuses on the psychological elements of the narrative: the distress of the parents, the blame and aspersions cast about by the community, and the fear and mistrust that result. The perpetrator is discovered to be an unstable woman who had previously been accused of poisoning her husband. She kills the first child in a rage, when the girl repeats the accusations of murder, and eventually gives a full confession:

> 'I struck her, and my passion, being ance up, I gaed on striking her, till I had killed her outright. […] I couldnae forgi'e mysel' for what I had done, till it cam' into my head that it had been the means o' saving her frae sin, and frae haeing muckle to answer for, an' this thought made me unco' happy. At last I began to think that it would be right to save mair o' them, and that it would atone for a' my former sins; an' this took sic a hold o' me, that I was aye on the watch to get some ane or ither o' them by themselves, to dedicate them to their Maker, by marking their bodies wi' the Holy Cross; but, oh!' she groaned, 'if I hae been wrang in a' this!'[76]

Elie, the murderess, is burnt by a furious mob, while a father who arrived at the cottage too late to save his three children kills himself at their funeral. His widow dies of grief soon afterwards in a fittingly morbid conclusion to this violent and unsettling tale.

From a twenty-first-century perspective, 'Beware of What You Say Before Children' contains all the hallmarks of a Hollywood serial-murder thriller: complete with suspenseful build-up, prolonged detection sequence, denouement, and psychological explanation of the killer's motives. The conventions that govern the genre in television, cinema, and modern fiction are the same as those employed by the Corbetts. The author must ensure that the reader empathises with the victims and the detective, and feels alienated and frightened by the perpetrator and the crime. However, the audience should also retain some sense of connection to the motive, so that the horror of the crime is increased by its proximity to shared emotions and beliefs.

As with many of the cinematic versions of this type of story, the Corbetts also felt obliged to give a sociological analysis and a moral explanation for the violence and trauma that has been experienced by the audience. The blame must fall somewhere, and even if the moral has to be tacked onto the end of the tale, seemingly as an afterthought, it must still be there, and be highly visible. Here, the culpability is laid unconvincingly at the feet of the person who communicated the gossip of the murderess's guilt to the child. When a servant in the family of one of the murdered girls admits her part in the story, her husband makes the community's apportionment

76 Corbetts, *The Odd Volume*, pp. 365–66.

of blame clear: '"Then," exclaimed Robert, "you have murdered my master's daughter."'[77] The title motto is chiselled on the dead children's gravestone, and left for the reader to digest, but even the moralising reviewers baulked at the maxim that the Corbetts drew. The *Literary Gazette* concluded: 'The tale which exhibits the peril of speaking carelessly before children, is, perhaps, too horrible to inculcate the moral lesson intended: more probable events would have had a better effect.'[78] Perhaps the sisters were ahead of their time. Such a shocking story would have been at home in one of the penny dreadfuls that began to appear in the following decade, but was apparently too strong a tonic for the thinner-skinned 1820s.

In their final tale collection of the 1820s, the Corbetts moved further away from the moral–domestic mode, and for the most part *Tales and Legends* consists of moralised retellings of stories from antiquity. Between the second series of *The Odd Volume* and *Tales and Legends*, the sisters had published their only novel, *The Busy-Bodies* (1827): a comedy of manners which had failed to impress the critics.[79] Like many writers for whom short fiction was the primary literary mode, the Corbetts found the novel much less satisfactory. Extended over three volumes, their lightness of touch seems slight and inconsequential, and their often derivative narratives appear laboured. In comparison, the return to the short tale apparently pleased all parties. *Tales and Legends* was aggressively promoted by its publisher, Robert Cadell, and the reviews of the work eventually struck the same positive note as had those of *The Odd Volume*.[80]

Although they went on to publish two straightforwardly moral children's works in the 1830s (*Elucidations of Interesting Passages in the Sacred Volume* [1835] and *Lessons for the Heart* [1836]), *Tales and Legends* is altogether darker than *Petticoat Tales* and *The Odd Volume*. The theme of religious disillusion is prominent, and the easy responses to questions of human suffering sometimes offered in the earlier works are much less apparent, as the characters struggle to find meaning in their existence. In the story of 'The Old Block of Wood', the cynicism of Wattie Sandilands, an old man made sceptical by abuses of trust and dashed hopes in his own youth, cuts through the optimism of the younger characters: 'this is just the old story, the strong oppress the weak; and defenceless innocence must lie down and be trodden on by some bloody tyrant.'[81] In *Tales and Legends*, the Corbetts are more willing to acknowledge the complexities and difficulties in following the Christian path. Where they had previously attributed deviation from the righteous road to a lack of knowledge or direction, the sisters' stories now engage more fully with the stark reality that was many people's lives. Although the tale of 'The Old Block of Wood'

77 Ibid., p. 375.

78 *Literary Gazette*, 501 (26 August 1826): 531–33, p. 533.

79 The *Literary Gazette* described the novel as 'a comparative failure', 538 (12 May 1827): 296.

80 Cadell wrote to his agent (Mr Shaw) to encourage the publication of extracts from the work in the newspapers, saying: 'If you cannot get a good extract for the tales and Legends [sic] in London, you must make one—now is the time to push this book while it is hot and warm'. NLS, MS 796, f. 303 (copy, typed transcript). Letter dated 22 March 1828.

81 Marion and Margaret Corbett, *Tales and Legends*, 3 vols (Edinburgh: Cadell and Co.; and Simpkin and Marshall, London, 1828), III, 23.

concludes as a celebration of quiet, pious Christianity as practised by society's lower orders, the message is far less glib than the one preached in their earlier stories.

In spite of this increased scepticism, the Corbetts' ideology remains a thoroughly middle-class vision of improvement. The hamlet of 'The Old Block of Wood' is an idealised community where the various strata of society interact with mutual respect and with common goals. When a domineering landlord threatens the stability of this relationship, the potential for catastrophe is immense since, as in Amelia Opie's tales, the actions of one layer of this society affect the welfare of all the others. Corruption of the highest social stratum has the worst effect on the material well being of the characters, but it is the sturdiness of the faith of the middle orders that keeps society on an even keel. In a similar manner to Mary Russell Mitford's village, the Corbetts' community operates as an organic entity, and depends on each segment working correctly for mutual success. *Our Village*, however, is defined by its exactitude. Three Mile Cross is transformed into a haven by Mitford's idealised vision, but it is still geographically fixed and individually populated. The Corbetts, and indeed most writers of didactic fiction, strove to create exemplary communities: places that could be located anywhere and whose populations manifested struggles and qualities that could be easily imitated or avoided by others.

The Corbetts' model of social interaction is based on an idealised rural way of life. The villagers of these tales have a link to the characters of Hogg's stories, and an even stronger connection to the pious population of John Wilson's *Lights and Shadows of Scottish Life*, by virtue of the fact that they derive their balanced and measured concept of the world from the simplicity of their existence. A shepherd's wife describes her way of life to Wattie Sandilands: 'We hae little trafficking with towns, which keeps us out o' muckle temptation, and the shepherds are weel-living folks, unco keen of reading books, which hauds them out of mischief.'[82] Exposure to death and hardship on a daily basis gives these people a plain and accepting devotion, without bemoaning their losses or coveting more than their position provides for them. They take solace in the traditionary tales of their region and in the certainties offered to them by a life tied to the rhythms of the land. Unlike the vision of rural existence that Hogg's stories depict, however, the Corbetts never offer a philosophy of the agrarian lower orders as an alternative to those of the land-owning ranks. *Tales and Legends* deals trenchantly with real social problems but concludes by offering only pat solutions. As a result, many of the working-class characters become bitter and cynical in the face of oppression and hardship, while the stories can only propose oneness with nature, self-reliance, and stoic religious fortitude as protection from injustices of life.

The Decline of the Moral Tale

In some respects, the three collections published by the Corbetts, with all their contradictions and unfulfilled promise, serve to trace the movement of moral short fiction as a whole during the 1820s. By the second half of the decade, the strident didacticism that had been the hallmark of Hannah More was on the wane, though

82 Ibid., III, 26.

works that imitated her methods of instruction were still visible. To some degree, writers such as the Corbetts are anomalous within the moral mode, but along with others, such as Mitford and M.M. Busk, they are indicative of newfound freedom amongst improving writers—a freedom which arose when the boundaries between didactic fiction and fiction written for the purposes of art or entertainment began to blur. A strict Christian code was still important, but it was no longer the sole arbiter of content. Rather, religious beliefs set the tone for tales that took care not to leave themselves open to criticism, but which were beginning to compete openly with the novel. Moral tales became psychologically active, justifying their arguments to their readers in rational as well as sentimental ways, and acknowledging the political and sociological nature of their content.

The 1810s and 1820s were an intermediary point for moral fiction: a juncture between the age of conduct-book exactitude, where piety was the origin of all moral positions, and the Victorian period, which saw a widening of the gap between evangelical fiction and moral fiction that offered utilitarian, economic, and social edification. Writers from the 1790s up to the 1810s had produced what were in the main model stories. Their collections proposed exemplars of female behaviour, of moral rectitude, of religious belief, and of authorial technique: specimens that were so pristine they encouraged parody and begged to be deflated—as they were in Byron's satirical description of Don Juan's mother, the redoubtable Donna Inez:

> In short, she was a walking calculation
> Miss Edgeworth's novels stepping from their covers,
> Or Mrs. Trimmer's books on education,
> Or 'Coeleb's Wife' set out in search of lovers,
> Morality's prim personification,
> In which not Envy's self a flaw discovers,
> To others' share let 'female errors fall,'
> For she had not even one—the worst of all.[83]

The blatant didacticism and willingness to patronise one's social inferiors typified by More's tracts became outmoded as the eighteenth century receded into the past, and the exemplar ceased to be a suitable model for tales that hoped to transform their readers' views on a wide range of subjects.

The increasingly complex negotiation between writer, reader, and message during the late 1810s and 1820s meant that the moral high ground began to be contested in a way not seen in the early part of the century. New conceptions of morality manifested themselves in the questioning of many previously unchallenged generic conventions, as more liberal tales successfully challenged the conservative hegemony by utilising the same didactic techniques. Earlier writers, such as William Godwin, Thomas Holcroft, and Mary Hays, had sought to expose the flaws in accepted social codes, but while their works identified deep inequalities in British society, the radical novel remained a text which operated outside the fashionable literary mainstream. Unlike radical and Jacobin texts, moral stories assumed a certain status. They borrowed

83 George Gordon, Lord Byron, *Don Juan* (1819–24), Canto I, 16, *The Complete Poetical Works*, ed. Jerome J. McGann, 7 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980–93), V, 13–14.

the ultra-respectable form of the polite novel, and by interpolating the discourses of sentiment and sensibility within a moralistic framework, they achieved much by placing female characters in positions where the maxims of the conduct-book could be gently questioned.

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Chapter 4

Regionalism and Folklore: Local Stories and Traditional Forms

The Regional Tale in the Early Nineteenth Century

My final chapter examines those tales and stories which derive from specific regions and which make reference to traditional or popular narratives. By re-engaging with material that could be considered as common cultural property and which pre-dated contemporary society, much early-nineteenth-century short fiction contested the primacy of progressive, urban, and rationalist thought developed in the post-Enlightenment fiction of the late eighteenth century, and sealed by the arrival of the Scottian historical novel. Many stories with popular foundations also pertained to specific locations, and while the historical novel helped to connect the land to its place in a nation's history, the short fiction of many writers celebrated the more mundane events that failed to make a ripple beyond their own small pond. In magazines and periodicals, regional stories, traditions, and folklore became increasingly popular. Eighteenth-century periodicals, such as the *Gentleman's Magazine*, had occasionally printed articles about local customs and superstitions, but prior to the 1810s the publication of traditions was miscellaneous rather than systematic. *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* and the *London Magazine* were the most committed publishers of these stories, and both carried several prominent, extended sequences of regional tales by writers such as James Hogg and Allan Cunningham.[1] In periodicals and in story collections, short fiction appeared which claimed identification with all of the main national identities within Britain and Ireland, as well as many smaller provincial regions.

Tales of Ireland, Wales, and England

This chapter will come to focus on Scottish writers of short fiction, and their relationship with tradition and regionalism, but it is worth pausing briefly to survey the regional tales that aligned themselves with other parts of the British Isles. Ireland was well represented by traditional stories, and by regional short fiction. The titles of some collections treated the whole of Ireland as a single storytelling 'region', while others aligned themselves with a more particular part of the country, but local and national concerns were often combined in the individual stories. Gerald Griffin published several works set in the Munster region which still deserve critical attention

1 See Chapter 1, pp. 27–31 for an extended discussion of folklore and traditions in the magazines.

for their sympathetic portrayals of the Irish lower orders. *"Holland-Tide;" or Munster Popular Tales* and *Tales of the Munster Festivals* were both published in 1827, and after writing several novels, most notably *The Collegians* (1829), Griffin returned to shorter fiction with *Tales of my Neighbourhood* (1835). Stories such as 'The Brown Man' and 'The Unburied Legs' (which appear in *"Holland-Tide"*) are rooted in a specific locality and incorporate the superstitions and supernatural traditions of the area. Griffin's approach is light-hearted and local for the most part, but his tales are nonetheless connected to wider national politics through their concern with the 'State of the Nation'—an understandable preoccupation of many Irish story writers of the early nineteenth century. The Preface to another Irish collection, Michael Whitty's *Tales of Irish Life* (1824), makes a more explicit reference to Ireland's politics, characteristic of many Irish authors. Whitty proposes to redress the imbalance of the view of Ireland perpetuated by the 'false patriotism' of previous Irish writers, and to present to the reader *The Real State of Ireland* through tales that examine the moral dilemmas of absenteeism, Irish nationalism, and lower-class poverty.[2]

John and Michael Banim's *Tales, by the O'Hara Family* (1825) is one of the best-known Irish tale collections from the period, and is described by Wendell Harris as having begun 'the great flood of fiction portraying Irish life and character'.[3] The brothers' themes can be traced back to the earlier 'national' tales of writers such as Maria Edgeworth and Lady Morgan. Indeed, K.D.M. Snell gives Edgeworth's *Castle Rackrent* (1800) the distinction of being the first regional novel.[4] This work, along with her two series of *Tales of Fashionable Life* (1809 and 1812), examines the parallels between feudal class relationships and the place of Ireland within Britain, and formed the basis for many subsequent literary critiques of Ireland's political status. Lady Morgan's third novel, *The Wild Irish Girl: A National Tale* (1806), established the 'national' form and went some way to engendering a distinct fictional mode for Ireland within anglophone literature. However, many of Morgan's contemporary critics felt that her novels, particularly *The Wild Irish Girl*, were guilty of a rank sentimentalisation of the Irish nation and people, and of advocating a retreat into a mythic past in place of progressive political advancement. It was this allegedly romanticised representation of Ireland that so angered writers such as Michael Whitty, and at which much of the vitriol of works such as his *Tales of Irish Life* was aimed.

Irish regionalism is associated with the negotiation of local and national identities within the more unified Britain that had emerged after the Irish Act of Union (1800) and the Napoleonic Wars. However, not all Irish stories were so politically charged, and the increasing popularity of regional fiction was occasionally employed by writers and publishers to lend stories a touch of spice, and to help drum up a readership. A review of John Gamble's collection, *Northern Irish Tales* (1818), highlights the expectations that regional tales generated. The *Monthly Review*'s critic complains:

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2 Michael Whitty, *Tales of Irish Life*, 2 vols (London: J. Robins and Co., 1824), Preface, I, i.

3 Harris, *British Short Fiction*, p. 39.

4 K.D.M. Snell, 'The Regional Novel: Themes for Interdisciplinary Research', in Snell (ed.), *The Regional Novel in Britain and Ireland, 1800–1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 1–53, p. 6.

> We cannot comprehend why these are called Northern Irish Tales, since they might as well have received their designation from any other quarter of the United Kingdom. No events happen but those which might have occurred *as probably* in the south of England, as in the scenes in which they have been introduced; few or no peculiarities of Northern Irish manners are delineated; nor have we any characteristic evidence of their locality.[5]

The popularity of collections of stories dealing with Irish life did not diminish through the 1830s. William Carleton was a writer of working-class origin whose stories were influential for later writers concerned with literary representations of Irish history (most notably W.B. Yeats). Two long tales by Carleton, 'Father Butler' and 'The Lough Dearg Pilgrim' were published together in 1829, subtitled as 'Being Sketches of Irish Manners'. These were followed by *Traits and Stories of the Irish Peasantry* (1830, second series 1833), *Tales of Ireland* (1834) and an anthology titled *Popular Tales and Legends of the Irish Peasantry* (1834) which Carleton both contributed to and edited. Samuel Lover, who edited and illustrated *Popular Tales and Legends*, also published his own *Legends and Stories of Ireland* (1831, second series 1834). These titles, along with those by more didactic authors such as Anna Maria (Mrs S.C.) Hall, represent just part of Harris's 'great flood' of Irish stories and sketches published throughout the 1830s and 1840s.

As the reference to 'Legends' in the titles of many of the above collections demonstrates, not all Irish tale-writers were concerned with contemporary political and social representations. Thomas Crofton Croker, writing in the 1820s, engaged in a more scholarly fashion with Ireland's popular traditions. The three parts of his *Fairy Legends and Traditions of the South of Ireland* were published between 1825 and 1828. These volumes were followed in 1829 by the more humorous *Legends of the Lakes; or, Sayings and Doings at Killarney* (later compressed to a single volume as *Killarney Legends* [1831]). *Fairy Legends and Traditions* presents folk material anthropologically, and deliberately distances its tales from contemporary discourse by framing them as the products of an extinct society. Croker's work has its formal origins in the collections of the Brothers Grimm, specifically the famous and hugely popular *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (1812 and 1815). Indeed, the preliminaries to Part III of Croker's series include a letter to Wilhelm Grimm, as well as a translation of the preface that Grimm wrote to accompany the German edition of Part I of *Fairy Legends and Traditions*. Croker's exhaustive charting of legendary creatures and folk narratives also extended beyond Ireland. Part III of the *Fairy Legends and Traditions* connects the superstitions and folklore of Ireland with that of the other Celtic regions of Britain, and includes chapters on 'The Elves in Scotland' and 'The Mabinogion and Fairy Legends of Wales'. Croker's project had a proximate methodology to Walter Scott's survey of the border ballad tradition, *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (1802–03), a work that shared the Irishman's protective and occasionally sentimental approach towards popular material. Antiquarianism, however, is not without its political implications—a point that is explored in greater detail later in this chapter.

5 *Monthly Review*, 86 (May 1818): 102–103.

Wales could boast far fewer examples of short fiction. K.D.M. Snell has put forward the hypothesis that the vitality of Welsh-language fiction, combined with the censoriousness of the Methodist church, limited the amount of Welsh regional fiction written in English.[6] Whether for these reasons or for others, works such as William Earle Jr's antiquarian assortment of ballads and tales, *Welsh Legends: A Collection of Popular Oral Tales* (1802), the highly romanticised *Tales of Welsh Society and Scenery* (1827), and the wonderfully titled *Tales of Welshland and Welsherie* (1831) were the exception.[7] For the most part, Welsh stories and traditions were confined to bit parts in the writings of non-native authors.

England is perhaps too large and disparate to allow short fiction to address it as a single 'national' identity. It could also be argued that the English regions lacked the collective enemy and history of occupation that bound together the people and districts of Ireland and Scotland. As such, the majority of English-based collections tended to pertain to specific regions and to reject the overarching political agendas that characterised many Irish stories. Titles such as Mrs Roche's *London Tales; or, Reflective Portraits* (1814), Mary Linwood's *Leicestershire Tales* (1808), and John Roby's two series of *Traditions of Lancashire* (1829 and 1831) were typical of this regional tendency.[8] The preliminaries to another English collection, John Carne's *Tales of the West* (1828), set out intentions that can be applied to many provincial writers. Carne claims to employ Cornish tales 'to illustrate the traditions and antiquities that still exist in the province, together with its manners and customs at a remote period'.[9] This regional specificity distances these tale collections from the 'national tale' fiction of the 1800s and 1810s. Not only are nationwide generalisations avoided, but the improvements to common life disseminated downward from upper-class protagonists that typify many national tales are replaced in many of these collections by a strong popular tone that imputes a degree of self-determination to the lower orders.

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6 See K.D.M. Snell, *The Bibliography of Regional Fiction in Britain and Ireland, 1800–2000* (Aldershot and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002), pp. 7–8.

7 *Tales of Welsh Society and Scenery* and *Tales of Welshland and Welsherie* are usually attributed to Edward Trevor Anwyl, but some doubts exist concerning the authorship. The second update to *The English Novel, 1770–1829* notes that the Bodleian pre-1920 catalogue attributes this work to Thomas Richards, Surgeon. Edward Trevor Anwyl, therefore, may be a pseudonym. See Peter Garside, et al., '*The English Novel, 1800–29*: Update 2 (June 2001–May 2002)', *Cardiff Corvey: Reading the Romantic Text*, 8 (June 2002). Online: Internet (October 2006): <http://www.cf.ac.uk/encap/corvey/articles/engnov2.html>.

8 *London Tales* has been attributed to Regina Maria Roche, but there is some doubt over the authorship. See the entry for this work in P.D. Garside, J.E. Belanger, and S.A. Ragaz, *British Fiction, 1800–1829: A Database of Production, Circulation & Reception*, designer A.A. Mandal. Online: Internet (September 2007) <http://www.british-fiction.cf.ac.uk/titleDetails.asp?title=1814A050>.

9 John Carne, *Tales of the West*, 2 vols (London: Colburn, 1828), Preface, I, [unpaginated]. In his Preface to the first series of *Traditions of Lancashire*, John Roby further demonstrates the dedication to regionalism by expressing the hope that 'not Lancashire alone, but the other counties may, in their turn, become the subject of similar illustrations', *Traditions of Lancashire*, 2 vols (London: Longmans, 1829), Preface, I, ix.

It is the desire to allow the voices of the rural working classes to be heard that characterises many of the collections of tales that were published in Scotland during this period. North of the border, the integration of traditional material into modern fiction made arguably the greatest strides in the early part of the century. A combination of factors helped place Scotland at the centre of this rise in traditional and regional storytelling. Edinburgh's publishing industry was second only to London's, and boasted a thriving periodical market to complement the book trade. The wide-ranging impact of the Waverley novels ensured concepts of history and national identity remained at the forefront of Scottish literature, as Scotland continued to negotiate its own sense of self and its post-union place within Britain. Scottish writers had the desire and the opportunity to engage with questions of oral history, identity, and nation in a more comprehensive way than other regions of Britain. Broadly speaking, the works of Walter Scott, James Hogg, and Allan Cunningham created a climate where the role of traditional and popular material in an enlightened world was closely questioned, and where broad-brush, generalist conceptions of Scotland as a cohesive 'nation' were challenged. It is this peculiarly Scottish use of traditional forms in regional contexts that the remainder of this chapter will examine.

Scotland and the Regional Tale

Regional narratives came to the forefront of Scottish short fiction during the late 1810s and early 1820s. The publication of *Waverley* in 1814 increased the public interest in Scotland and all things Scottish, and from 1817 *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* (shortly joined by English periodicals such as the *London Magazine*) provided a ready outlet for writers of regional short fiction. Scottish identity took on new forms in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, following the failed uprisings of the mid-eighteenth century, and the country's self-image shifted to accommodate an idea of Scottishness within the broader social, political, and economic umbrella of Great Britain.[10] Collecting and publishing stories with popular and traditional origins was one way in which a distinctly Scottish culture and history could exist, while still embracing enlightened ideals—as Walter Scott showed. Most of the Scottish regional stories and collections situated their narratives in rural locations. These tales often avoided claims of national homogeneity and rejected Edinburgh as the cultural epicentre of Scotland by championing provincial values and traditions in much the same way as John Roby and John Carne sought to distance the counties of Lancashire and Cornwall from the long shadow of London. In the aftermath of the success of Scott's novels, an array of short fiction was produced, with widely differing agendas and narrative modes. At the centre of this proliferation of tale material and formal experimentation is James Hogg, to whom I will return

10 Amongst many works dealing with Scottish nationalism and Scotland's place within Britain, see in particular Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1992; 2nd edn 2003) and Penny Fielding, *Writing and Orality: Nationality, Culture, and Nineteenth-Century Scottish Fiction* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).

later, but it is worthwhile including an extended list to help give some idea of the context within which Hogg was operating.

The fact that very few Scottish tale collections were published before 1820 is perhaps attributable to the relative difficulty of publishing magazine tales prior to the arrival of *Blackwood's*, but the vogue for popular ballads may also have been a factor. Collections of ballads and songs began to appear in the 1760s. Thomas Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765) is the most famous, but a large number of ballad collections followed, edited by David Herd, James Johnson, Joseph Ritson, Robert Burns, and others. The phenomenon continued into the early nineteenth century, where Scott's *Minstrelsy* and Hogg's *Jacobite Relics of Scotland* (1819–21) were among the best-known examples. The practice of ballad collecting and editing helped initiate the discipline of folklore studies (or 'popular antiquities' or 'traditions' as it was known at this time), and ballads, rather than tales, were the oral form most prized during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. At some point during the late 1810s, perhaps influenced by Scott's shift from poetry to the novel, the tale began to match the ballad as a subject worthy of study by the antiquarian and the folk historian. The two forms were to some degree complementary, and the intimate connection between the ballad and the tale can be discerned from the numerous interwoven songs that appear in traditional stories.

Amongst those story collections that did appear prior to the boom of the 1820s, the most notable was Hogg's *The Brownie of Bodsbeck; and Other Tales* (1818). The early 1820s saw the publication of two collections which were intimately connected, albeit in very different ways, with Hogg and his stories: John Wilson's *Lights and Shadows of Scottish Life* and Allan Cunningham's *Traditional Tales of the English and Scottish Peasantry* (both 1822). These two collections were joined by a flurry of other titles during the rest of the decade. Among these were John Galt's *The Steam-Boat* (serialised in *Blackwood's* 1821, collected 1822); Andrew Picken's *Tales and Sketches of the West of Scotland* (1824);[11] Archibald Crawford's *Tales of my Grandmother* (1824); the fourth part of Felix MacDonogh's series of 'hermit' sketches, *The Hermit in Edinburgh* (1824); James Denniston's *Legends of Galloway* (1825); Leitch Ritchie's two story collections, *Head-Pieces and Tail-Pieces* (1826) and *Tales and Confessions* (1829), both of which include a large number of Scottish-based tales; and Walter Scott's first series of *Chronicles of the Canongate* (1827), which consists of three stories—two short and one rather longer. Book-ending the decade were Hogg's own collections, *Winter Evening Tales* (1820) and *The Shepherd's Calendar* (1829)—the two works on which this chapter will come to focus.

As well as these collections of tales and sketches, other works were published which lie somewhere between the novel and the short story collection: Hogg's two 'Perils' works, *The Three Perils of Man* (1822) and *The Three Perils of Woman* (1823), fall into this category. Collections which presented figures and episodes from Scottish history in the style of fictional stories were also popular, often aimed

11 *Tales and Sketches of the West of Scotland* was published under the pseudonym of Christopher Keelivine. Picken was also the editor of *The Club-Book* (1831)—an anthology containing tales by many of the Scottish authors mentioned here, and discussed in my Conclusion.

at younger readers: these included Alexander Stewart's *Stories from the History of Scotland* (1827) and Scott's *Tales of a Grandfather* (1828–31). These lists are by no means exhaustive. Many other collections were published, and innumerable individual tales relating to Scottish themes can be found within the pages of novels and in periodicals of the time. However, the titles given here do serve to indicate the diversity of Scottish stories, and they also highlight how James Hogg, who has often been regarded as ploughing a lonely experimental furrow with his works, was writing and publishing within a wider context of Scottish storytelling. Many of these works place an emphasis on the value of traditional ways of life, as well as on the connection between location and folk history, as the legendary narratives of Scotland's past negotiated a process of transformation from an oral to a literary form.

In the same way as stories located in Ireland often blurred local and national concerns, Scottish tales set in specific regions could also serve as exemplars of national history. James Denniston's *Legends of Galloway* is subtitled *Being a Series of Traditions, Illustrative of its Ancient History, Customs, Manners, and Superstitions*. By framing his stories with analyses of Scotland's ancient beliefs and practices, Denniston seeks to position himself as a chronicler and folklorist, rather than a fiction writer or raconteur. By the 1830s, the study of popular antiquities was growing rapidly and the connections between regional folktales and national history were even stronger. Between 1834 and 1840 the ambitious *Tales of the Borders, and of Scotland* was published, compiled by John Mackay Wilson and others.[12] In another collection from the 1830s, *Scenes and Legends of the North of Scotland, or, The Traditional History of Cromarty* (1835), Hugh Miller makes explicit the connections between microcosmic and macrocosmic storytelling in Scotland: 'the history of one Scotch village is, in some measure, the history of every one;—nay more, it may form a not unimportant part of that of the kingdom at large.'[13] *The Traditional History of Cromarty* builds its legends and stories into an empirical, historical framework of research, and is not a collection of short fiction as such. Miller was an early folklorist, and his work belongs to a mode of study of local customs, characters, and lore, which was grounded in fieldwork and first-hand research (much like the work of many of the ballad collectors). Nonetheless, many earlier Scottish story collections display a similar understanding of the way a single tale could reflect the wider social and cultural life of a population, particularly a rural population. By foregrounding their qualities as exemplars, collections of regional short fiction attempted to legitimise their narrow scope, and portray themselves as serious-minded works of literature, to be considered alongside novels and studies of history.

12 *Tales of the Borders* was published in weekly numbers (which were subsequently collected in monthly issues) between 1834 and 1840. Wilson himself died in 1835, and the stories were continued by friends and relatives. A six-volume collected edition of the complete numbers appeared in 1840.

13 Hugh Miller, *Scenes and Legends of the North of Scotland, or, The Traditional History of Cromarty* (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black; and Longmans, London, 1835), Dedication, p. vii.

Critics such as Katie Trumpener, Ina Ferris, and Peter Garside have documented a movement in novel-writing during the 1810s and 1820s.[14] This shift was away from the 'national' tales of Edgeworth and Morgan, and their corresponding anxieties about identity and nationhood, and towards the more masculine discourse of the Scottian historical novel, which saw its protagonists wrestle with the making of history. Trumpener suggests that by the 1820s Scotland enjoyed comparative political stability, or even stagnation, and that the country's establishment as part of Great Britain after the many rebellions and repressions of the eighteenth century was a large factor in the historical novel's concern with identity located in a politicised past. In contrast, the more turbulent contemporary conditions in Ireland attracted novelists towards censure of the status quo and produced works which engaged with political issues perceived to be germane to the country's immediate problems. Scotland, in Trumpener's view, had become a nation which had lost its nationhood, and was subsequently engaged in a semi-legendary reconstruction of its own past.

Writers of short fiction shared the concerns of novelists, and many authors published in both modes, but short fiction could also contest the hegemonic post-Enlightenment philosophy of the novel. By the 1820s, many writers of short fiction were beginning to view that mode as one which offered a different perspective from that of longer prose forms. Archibald Crawford, in the Preface to his collection of tales from the west of Scotland, *Tales of my Grandmother*, explains the motive for his choice of genre:

> It has often occurred to the Author, that these legends, presenting alternately features of horror, of pathos, or of comic humour, were peculiarly adapted to furnish materials for that species of composition, which is perhaps best known in the literature of Germany—the short *Tale*; where, without any elaborate attempt to delineate character, or to excite a sustained and prolonged interest by a succession of incidents, the attention is directed to a few striking events, and characters exhibited only under some brief and momentary aspects.[15]

Crawford offers his stories as diverting entertainment, and never delves into the more complex aspects of tale-telling with which writers such as Hogg and Cunningham engage so deftly. Nonetheless, his description of a combination of Scottish oral tradition and German literary tale is a useful one. The term 'short tale' probably covers a variety of German writings: the *Novellen* and *Erzählung* of writers such as Ludwig Tieck and Goethe, the uncanny tales of E.T.A. Hoffmann, and the *Märchen* collections of the Brothers Grimm, all of which were widely known and read by the 1820s.[16] Crawford's comments also emphasise the necessity of brevity of effect, and

14 See Katie Trumpener, 'National Character, Nationalist Plots: National Tale and Historical Novel in the Age of *Waverley*, 1806–1830', *ELH*, 60 (1993): 685–31; Ina Ferris, *The Achievement of Literary Authority: Gender, History, and the Waverley Novels* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 1991); and Peter Garside, 'Popular Fiction and National Tale: Hidden Origins of Scott's *Waverley*', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 46, 1 (June 1991): 30–53.

15 Archibald Crawford, *Tales of my Grandmother*, 2 vols (1824; Edinburgh: Constable; and Hurst, Robinson, and Co., London, 1825), Preface, I, vi. Crawford's emphasis.

16 See Chapter 1, p. 13 for details of the revival of German literature in the 1820s.

in doing so he anticipates some of Edgar Allan Poe's theories of the tale. Moreover, by admitting the adoption of an external mode within which to place his oral narratives, Crawford makes explicit something which is implied by many of Hogg's tales, but ignored by many other writers of supposedly traditional stories: any transcription from an oral to a literary form inevitably involves a transformation of the tale, and situates it within an alien genre.

Sir Walter Scott and the Death of Orality

Spanning both the post-Enlightenment historical novel and the history of Scottish traditions is, of course, Walter Scott. Scott's novels can be seen not only as the benchmark both for writers and reviewers of Scottish fiction, but also as examples of the dominant Enlightenment view of history as essentially sequential, progressive, and rational. The first three Waverley novels, with their inexorable march through a generation or so of Scottish history, demonstrate this linear discourse. History is presented as a sequence which needs to be correctly interpreted, from the failure of the Jacobite Rebellion of 1745 depicted in *Waverley*, to the multiple historical confusions and misreadings (both personal and national) which are eventually resolved in both *Guy Mannering* (1815) and *The Antiquary* (1816). History becomes narrative in Scott's novels, and for the most part it is a narrative of realism and clarity. While traditions are cherished and legends treated with respect, there is a tragic failure on the part of many of Scott's characters to grasp the nature and necessity of historical change. The dangers of a stubborn, entrenched sense of right and duty are revealed in *Old Mortality* (1816), where Scott describes the Covenanters' uprising and its inevitable bloody suppression. Similarly, the Highlanders who appear in 'The Two Drovers' and 'The Highland Widow' (both published in the first series of *Chronicles of the Canongate*, 1827) demonstrate a pride and dignity which makes them deeply honourable and estimable, but which bars them from full participation in modern Scotland, and ultimately leads to their destruction.

Scott's fiction contains scope for pre-modern attitudes and belief structures, but only within these historical frameworks. The stories of *Chronicles of the Canongate* are elaborately framed by layers of narrative preamble and multiple authorial personae, ensuring that the 'traditions', when they finally emerge, are muffled by a weight of ponderous antiquarian logic. The short, interpolated tales in the novels are similarly bound to their historical context. 'Wandering Willie's Tale', which appears in *Redgauntlet* (1824), is the best known and frequently reprinted away from its parent text, but many other examples of folklore, superstition, and legend can also be found. Meg Merrilies's prognostications are woven into the fabric of *Guy Mannering*, as are those of the White Lady of Avenel in *The Monastery* (1820), and Janet of Tomahourich in 'The Two Drovers'. Similarly, the death of Ravenswood on the treacherous Kelpie's Flow is prophesied in *The Bride of Lammermoor* (1819). All of these warnings are fulfilled at the conclusion of the respective stories, and help to reinforce the sense of mysterious power that traditional narratives wield. In bringing tradition to bear in this way, and in giving a central place to the handed-down knowledge of characters such as Edie Ochiltree, the gaberlunzie who appears in *The Antiquary*, Scott maintains the importance of the lower orders in the construction of

history, while also reinforcing the role that collective memory and folklore play in the modern perception of the past.

Like most writers of the early nineteenth century who incorporated traditional material in their work, Scott was anxious to distance himself from accusations of personal belief or Continental excess in relating supernatural tales and events. In 'My Aunt Margaret's Mirror', the eponymous relative describes her (Scottian) attitude to the supernatural:

> I have a sense of superstition about me, which I do not wish to part with. It is a feeling which separates me from this age, and links me with that to which I am hastening […] It soothes my imagination, without influencing my reason or conduct.[17]

Traditions wield power over the listener or reader, necessitating mediation through a rational framework to ensure they do not become a threat to 'reason or conduct'. In his essay on the literary supernatural, Scott critiques the European mode of fantastic tale-telling, 'in which the most wild and unbounded license is given to an irregular fancy, and all species of combination, however ludicrous, or however shocking, are attempted and executed without scruple'.[18] E.T.A. Hoffmann is held up as the apex of this degenerate tendency, attributed to a 'species of moral palsy' on the part of the German writer.[19] Scott argues that serious dangers arise if the supernatural is allowed to operate unchecked in fiction, and the outpourings of a diseased fancy cannot qualify as art or literature.

Scott's careful framing mechanisms circumvent the challenge to the progressive nature of Enlightenment thought that unmediated folktales and an oral tradition can sometimes imply. 'Wandering Willie's Tale' brings to light a version of historical events that can only ever exist in this traditional form. Willie's story will never reach the official annals of a nation, and is a unique and invaluable addition to the history with which *Redgauntlet* engages. The story's frame ensures that the rational explanation for the tale (the theft of Steenie's silver by an ape) remains available to the reader: 'some believe till this day there was no more in the matter than the filching nature of the brute.'[20] A purely supernatural explanation for Willie's narrative cannot exist within *Redgauntlet* unmediated, and as such can only have a tangential and non-threatening relationship with the novel's broader notions of historical truth. Safely historicised within the novel, Wandering Willie can only ever provide a curious addition, and never an alternative, to history.

In part, this use of overdetermined framing to keep tales within a constructed folkloric discourse can be connected to Washington Irving. Extensive, and even

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17 Walter Scott, 'My Aunt Margaret's Mirror', in *The Two Drovers, and Other Stories*, ed. Graham Tulloch, introd. Lord David Cecil (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 270. This story was first published in an annual—*The Keepsake for 1829*.

18 Walter Scott, 'On the Supernatural in Fictitious Compositions; and Particularly on the Works of Ernest Theodore William Hoffmann', *Foreign Quarterly Review*, 1, 1 (July 1827): 60–98, p. 72.

19 Ibid., p. 79.

20 Walter Scott, *Redgauntlet*, ed. G.A.M. Wood (1824; Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), p. 101.

excessive, narrative framing is part of a mode of tale-writing which bounces back and forth between Scott and Irving, before being taken up by many other writers of short fiction in the 1820s and 1830s.[21] Borrowing from the Scottian novel, Irving uses the figure of the antiquary to simultaneously subvert and give credence to his narratives. The antiquary, with his well-meaning, yet muddled obsessiveness, his fascination with dry detail, and his sometimes naïve credulity, makes an excellent semi-comic narrator. The intricate metanarratives which surround the stories told by Diedrich Knickerbocker and Irving's other bumbling antiquarians allow the material to be safely distanced from the taint of authorial belief. At the same time, the more knowing frameworks allow the stories to access an elevated plane of discourse: for Irving this meant incorporation within an American folkloric canon, and for Scott it meant a way of refining certain aspects of Scottish history.

The long tradition of German *Novelle* scholarship is helpful in analysing this kind of narrative frame. Siegfried Weing summarises some of the theories of *Rahmen* (framing devices) teased out by successive critics of German Romantic tales: 'The frame thus has two functions: it palliates raw content, and it transforms the dramatic dimensions of this content into epic ones.'[22] In the *Novelle*, frames help to 'civilise' folkloric material, allowing both writer and reader to mediate traditions by placing them within an enlightened and epic moral frame. For Walter Scott, the transformation is not so much *epic* as *historical*. His tales are situated within a discourse of historicism, which mitigates against their slippage from useful and enlightened artistic works into what he calls the realm of 'the fantastic or supernatural grotesque'.[23]

The inclusion of Wandering Willie's tale within *Redgauntlet* gives folk material a similar social and historical status as it is afforded by Scott in his major engagement with traditional forms, *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*—a collection of folk ballads amassed by Scott and published between 1802 and 1803. The *Minstrelsy* is a work that derives from the long tradition of the gentleman antiquarian scholar, and was conceived as an attempt to preserve and classify the fast-disappearing oral narratives of Scotland. Its aim was to commit to the safety and perpetuity of the printed book those narratives that for so long had constituted the basis for the nation's self-awareness, but which had been superseded by print culture and the formulation of history as a branch of the rational sciences. Conversely, an oral tradition which operated outside of this carefully circumscribed discourse could be construed as a threat by those who administered and worked within a literary (and therefore civilised) framework.

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21 Irving's narrators and their framing devices are also discussed in Chapter 2, pp. 50–52. The influence of Scott and Irving in this regard was widespread. Discussing Alexander Pushkin's short fiction, Victor Terras describes the 'affected erudition and bonhomie' of the narrators of *Tales of Belkin* (1831) as 'following the practice of Walter Scott, Washington Irving, and other Western writers then in vogue', 'The Russian Short Story 1830–1850', in Moser (ed.), *The Russian Short Story*, p. 6.

22 Weing, *The German Novella*, p. 118. See also Remak, *Structural Elements of the German Novella*.

23 Scott, 'On the Supernatural in Fictitious Compositions', p. 81.

In his introductory apparatus to the *Minstrelsy*, Scott felt it necessary to justify the fact that he had to work from oral sources:

> Who will not regret, with the Editor, that compositions of such interest and antiquity should now be irrecoverable? But it is the nature of popular poetry, as of popular applause, perpetually to shift with the objects of the time: and it is the frail chance of recovering some old manuscript, which can alone gratify our curiosity regarding the earlier efforts of the Border Muse. Some of her later strains, composed during the sixteenth century, have survived even to the present day; but the recollection of them has, of late years, become like that of a 'tale which was told'.[24]

In Scott's view, oral transmission was a basis for the corruption of material, and, as his comments reveal, he also felt 'popular' to be a synonym of 'populist'. This attitude was not shared by some of the contributors to his work. One of these demurring balladeers was the mother of James Hogg, and in a well-known encounter related by her son in his *Familiar Anecdotes of Sir Walter Scott* she forcefully made the collector aware of her opinion of his venture:

> There war never ane o' my sangs prentit till ye prentit them yoursel', an' ye hae spoilt them awthegither. They were made for singing, an' no for reading; but ye hae broken the charm now, an' they'll never be sung mair. An' the worst thing of a', they're nouther right spell'd nor right setten down.[25]

For Hogg's mother, Scott's protectionist attitude is a denial of the ballads' native function of mutability, and his historicisation of the songs takes them out of their popular context and transforms them into an archival rather than a living form. She further argues that the separate status the oral form enjoys is essential to its survival—to be amalgamated into the written word would mean its death.

Folksongs and folktales are without copyright, and belong as much to the singer and teller as they do to the 'composer', whomever he or she may be. Folklore is analogous to language, rather than literature, in the sense that it is owned by no-one. It can also be argued that folklore exists only potentially, in its precise moment of telling, and cannot be 'translated' into printed literature. At the same time, it is too easy to dismiss the efforts of figures such as Scott as 'breaking the charm' of orality, when without them we would have no texts to dispute, and no canons of folklore or ballads to study. As Murray Pittock warns, critics must be wary of sanctioning 'the unholy alliance between Foucault and Hogg's mother, where the song detached from its culture into print […] becomes part of the architecture "of the ideology of bourgeois capitalism."'[26] The central question here is not whether the oral tradition in Scotland was dying out, nor whether the practices of Scott and other antiquarian

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24 Walter Scott, *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, ed. T.F. Henderson, 4 vols (1802–1803; Edinburgh and London: Blackwood; and Charles Scribener, New York, 1902); reissued by Singing Tree Press (Detroit, 1968), I, 163.

25 James Hogg, *Anecdotes of Sir W. Scott* and *Familiar Anecdotes of Sir Walter Scott*, ed. Jill Rubenstein (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), p. 38.

26 James Hogg, *The Jacobite Relics of Scotland. First Series*, ed. Murray G.H. Pittock (1819; Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002), Introduction, p. xi.

collectors contributed to its demise; rather, it is a question of perception. Much like Raymond Williams's description of the literary countryside, which endlessly looks backwards to a golden age, it is the perception of the disappearance of the oral tradition which stirs writers and commentators. As Penny Fielding rightly argues, 'the death of orality is always something just about to happen'.[27]

The lines in this debate are drawn between Walter Scott and James Hogg's mother. The contrasting conceptions of the role and value of traditional material between the educated, cultured author of *Waverley* and the wife of an Ettrick agrarian worker renowned for her prodigious collection of ballads committed to memory broadly lays the ground for Hogg's own attitude and position. James Hogg, the autodidact and shepherd from the Scottish Borders who became a professional writer in Edinburgh and who was lionised on his visit to London in 1832, forms a bridge between the two positions. As Fielding points out, Hogg's stories are self-referentially aware of their printed nature, and are located 'at a transitional point, blurring the boundary between speech and writing'.[28] For Hogg, the merits of using oral traditions and folk material in printed books could never be the act of scholarly salvage it was for Scott or as terribly incongruous as it was for his own mother.

Relating traditional tales meant more to someone in Hogg's position than preserving antiquated curiosities; it meant accessing a system of beliefs that pre-dated and contravened many of the suppositions of the Enlightenment and which called into question the hegemony of Scotland's cultural elites. In his poem, *The Queen's Wake* (1813), Hogg imagines a contest in which bards from across Scotland congregate to compete in verse. Two victory harps are eventually awarded, one to the aristocratic poet Gardyn, and the other to the earthy Bard of Ettrick: a representation of Hogg himself and a symbol of the challenge presented by the ballads and folklore of the lower orders. Hogg continued to depict this kind of cultural conflict throughout his literary career. He came from a world where to engage with oral traditions was to draw upon a conception of the world that held certain forces to be beyond the reach of man's comprehension, and which further contended that events often had a significance beyond that which was immediately discernible. His mother's accusation that Scott had 'broken the charm' pinpoints the belief that the very act of oral transmission constituted a potent, perhaps even magical act. From such a perspective, orality can define the life of a region, empower the lower classes, and signal social defiance in the face of urban incursions into rural life. The power of tales and ballads to embody the history and values of a particular region stems in part from the ties between story and location, and as printed versions begin to ossify the flexible qualities of oral storytelling these connections can seem to ebb away.

The death of orality, real or imagined, is something of a chimera. Changes to the role of the oral tradition in society undoubtedly took place in the early nineteenth century, as literacy increased and print culture became more pervasive, and also as the changes to rural life brought about by the Industrial Revolution continued to take hold. As a cultural concept, oral decline is ideologically potent, but the specifics have always been rather elusive. Oral and written forms have interacted since the advent

27 Fielding, *Writing and Orality*, p. 99.

28 Ibid., p. 122.

of printing, and claims of 'pure' and 'uncontaminated' oral sources are abstractions which bear little relation to the muddy process of storytelling. Consequently, collectors and editors such as Scott were sometimes celebrated as protectors of the past, and sometimes blamed for killing tradition. In terms of literature and the publication of short fiction, orality was a bogey which could be invoked by writers like Hogg, sometimes playfully and sometimes with real concern. Hogg, with a foot in the camps of both literature and the oral tradition, was able to weave such concerns into his stories, while skilfully avoiding simplistic judgements and sidestepping the kind of censure that Scott sometimes attracted.

James Hogg and the Scottish Tale

The start of Hogg's career as an author was characterised by a frustration which was representative of the experiences of many would-be story writers of the early nineteenth century. Before the publication of Scott's novels and Washington Irving's *Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon*, drumming up interest in collections of traditional and regional tales could be extremely difficult, and before *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* revolutionised the periodical market, the remuneration for magazine submissions was relatively low. Hogg's exasperation at the lack of enthusiasm shown by booksellers led him to start up his own magazine, the *Spy*.[29] This publication appeared weekly for one year between 1810 and 1811, and acted in part as Hogg's riposte to the Edinburgh publishing world. He vented his spleen through the satirical editorial persona, Mr Spy, and also through many of the essays, poems, stories, and sketches which he published in the magazine, often masquerading as readers' correspondence. Hogg's first stories were published in the *Spy*, some of which would go on to make up *Winter Evening Tales*, and the magazine acted as the testing ground for his densely layered and self-referential fictional style.

The *Spy* was only the start of Hogg's long relationship with the periodical press. When *Blackwood's* was established in 1817, Hogg was one of the first contributors. The first three numbers of *Blackwood's* carried his series of 'Tales and Anecdotes of the Pastoral Life', and he was also involved in the composition of the notorious 'Chaldee Manuscript' which appeared in October 1817. The majority of the tales in *The Shepherd's Calendar* were also drawn from a series of contributions to *Blackwood's* which ran from 1819 to 1829. Over the course of his life Hogg published stories in a number of other periodicals, most notably *Fraser's Magazine*, as well as several annuals and anthologies of short fiction. However, for Hogg, as for many short fiction writers of the early nineteenth century, the magazines were a necessary evil. They represented a way of gaining a foothold in the literary marketplace, but Hogg felt keenly that selling individual tales to periodicals meant sacrificing artistic control, prestige, and income, and he was always anxious to bring out his own collections of tales. Later negative experiences of volume publication meant that Hogg often had to rely upon the income which the periodicals provided,

29 For a detailed history of Hogg's magazine, see Gillian Hughes's Introduction to the Stirling/South Carolina edition: James Hogg, *The Spy: A Periodical Paper of Literary Amusement and Instruction*, ed. Gillian Hughes (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000).

but although he was one of the more successful magazine writers of the period, he was never entirely at home in that guise.

Around the time that Walter Scott (with the publication of *Waverley* in 1814) moved from poetry to prose, James Hogg was contemplating a similar shift in genre. *The Brownie of Bodsbeck; and Other Tales* was published in 1818, but Hogg had hoped for a much earlier release. Hold-ups in the production by the publisher, William Blackwood, meant that the work was delayed by at least a year, and was therefore preceded by Scott's own novel, *The Tale of Old Mortality*, which appeared in the first series of *Tales of my Landlord* (1816). Both works deal with the persecution of Scottish religious dissenters during the seventeenth century and the title story of Hogg's collection was generally assumed to have been written in response to Scott's less forgiving depiction of the Covenanters.[30] The saga of the publication of *The Brownie of Bodsbeck* was indicative of Hogg's commercial position. He often demonstrated a perceptive grasp of the market, and a strong desire to tap into new readerships, but his plans nearly always went awry.

Despite a conviction, shared with Scott, that fiction would come to replace poetry as the medium with the most commercial and artistic potential, Hogg was unable to get to grips with the conventional novel. While Scott's works flowed consistently (in both frequency and style) to an increasingly appreciative public, Hogg's prose fiction never managed to locate itself in a fixed genre, and the narrative structure of his fiction is often at odds with the linearity demanded by the novel. The highly wrought structure of Hogg's *The Three Perils of Man* (1822) is an attempt to place traditional materials within a longer narrative framework than his earlier story collections afforded. *The Three Perils of Man* holds in opposition two vying plotlines, one supernatural and one realist, in order to create the clash of ideologies upon which many of Hogg's tales have their basis. Moreover, as Ian Duncan has commented, the work allegorises to some extent Hogg's relationship to Scott by its insistence on a largely irreconcilable opposition between traditional and historical modes of representation.[31] The twin narratives of *Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824)—the work of Hogg's which most closely approximates to a conventional novel—also challenge narrative conventions in their juxtaposition of the equally dogmatic personae of the over-rational, enlightened editor and the fervently spiritualist sinner.

The Three Perils of Man and *Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (and to a lesser extent *The Three Perils of Woman*, which leans more towards the story collection)

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30 In his *Memoir of the Author's Life* Hogg claimed: 'it [*The Brownie of Bodsbeck*] was written long ere the tale of "Old Mortality" was heard of, and I well remember my chagrin on finding the ground, which I thought clear, pre-occupied before I could appear publicly on it, and that by such a redoubted champion.' James Hogg, *Memoir of the Author's Life* and *Familiar Anecdotes of Sir Walter Scott*, ed. Douglas S. Mack (Edinburgh and London: Scottish Academic Press, 1972), p. 45. Henceforth cited parenthetically as *MAL*. See also Peter Garside's article 'Three Perils in Publishing: Hogg and the Popular Novel', *Studies in Hogg and his World*, 2 (1991): 45–63 for a more detailed account of Hogg's problems with the publication of this work.

31 See Ian Duncan's essay 'Walter Scott, James Hogg and Scottish Gothic', in David Punter (ed.), *A Companion to the Gothic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), pp. 70–80.

represent Hogg's attempts to conform to the outward standard of novelistic prose fiction in the early part of the century. Despite the many artistic successes of these works, they were commercial failures and it seems that Hogg was not comfortable as a novelist. In contrast to his unease with longer modes, the prose form with which Hogg felt most at home was the shorter tale. This was the genre that he returned to repeatedly from the early 1820s, both in his published collections and in his prolific output of stories for the magazines. It was also as a storyteller that towards the end of his career Hogg had come to feel he would both make his fortune and leave his largest literary mark on the world.

Much of Hogg's shorter fiction explores regional themes. The majority of the stories in both *Winter Evening Tales* and *The Shepherd's Calendar* take place in the valleys and hills of the Ettrick region. Less important, however, than the cartographic accuracy of the villages and glens is the *genius loci* of the Scottish Borders. The geographical isolation allows the region to function in a similar way to the sites in Washington Irving's tales, in particular the New England backwater of Sleepy Hollow. Like Irving's village, Hogg's locations acknowledge the progress that swirls around them, but they retain their older philosophies and elude to some degree the pervasive modernising influence of Edinburgh and the encroaching progressive theories of the Scottish Enlightenment. Small villages also maintain an imaginative hold over their inhabitants. As Cairns Craig argues: 'What is interesting is not the particular place but the interaction of the place with a mind fitted to experience it in a particular way.'[32] For those people who spend their entire lives in one region, specific places and landmarks can attain a powerful, almost religious, significance. Incidents that can seem inconsequential to an outsider are charged with importance for locals by their deviation from an acknowledged norm: an importance that often equals events of supposedly national relevance.

Hogg's practice of situating traditional materials within a contemporary context was heavily influenced by the poetry of Robert Burns. Burns came from a similarly unprivileged agrarian background, and was Hogg's foremost literary hero as well as possessor of the title of poet of the Scottish traditions to which Hogg aspired. Like Burns's poetry, Hogg's stories move between various constructions of rural Scotland, and are alternately hearty, sentimental, tragic, and mystical. Hogg's rural Scotland is never a separate country from its modern, urban counterpart; rather, it is a place which shows a dogged refusal to turn over the ways of its ancestors. The subsequent conflation of the two worlds, personified to some degree in the figure of Hogg as the Ettrick Shepherd—a strident, unabashed rural voice speaking to a predominantly urban audience—implies that traditional culture is capable of making meaningful and occasionally threatening intercessions into modern life and values.

Working from folklore and local legend can be a problematic process. In *Bracebridge Hall*, Washington Irving made a plea for stories derived from folk narratives to be seen as 'fair foundations for authors of fiction' (*BH*, 247n). Similarly, in the preface to their collection of semi-legendary stories, *Tales Round a Winter Hearth*, Jane and Anna Maria Porter argue that 'Stories told in general society, may

32 Cairns Craig, 'Scotland and the Regional Novel', in Snell (ed.), *The Regional Novel in Britain and Ireland*, pp. 221–56, p. 242.

fairly be considered as public property; or rather, as *wefts and strays*, which any one may appropriate, keep unaltered, mar, or mend, without dread of prosecution'.[33] Both Irving and the Porter sisters felt it necessary to defend their use of traditional, popular, or oral material because such material, placed in a literary context, produces an authorial contradiction—a fact with which Hogg's work directly engages.

For Hogg, the use of popular material raises fundamental questions concerning the specificity of authorship that occurs in the printed text, but which paradoxically has little meaning in the oral tradition. 'Donald McDonald', a song which Hogg claims in his *Memoir* to be his first publication, was set to music and printed in 1800.[34] Subsequently, Hogg maintained that he 'heard from day to day that the popularity of my song was unbounded, and yet no one ever knew or inquired who was the author' (*MAL*, 14). The ballad managed to transcend the limitations of its printed version and to achieve the crossover from written to verbal medium, becoming subsumed into the oral tradition, and no doubt subjected to the retellings and variations upon which the survival of that mode depended. Authorship, therefore, ceased to be an issue: something which seems to both please and disturb Hogg. Without authorial attribution a writer cannot build a reputation or earn money, yet if he wishes to operate within a folk tradition, his writings can never be said to be entirely his own, but to belong to some extent to the broader context of oral transmission—and once visited upon the world they must be able to adapt to its demands.

One way in which Hogg explores the authorial complexity of traditional material is by playing games with the figures of writer, editor, and teller. Mark Schoenfield has argued that 'in contrast to the contemporaries who have emerged as the dominant romantic voices, Hogg acknowledges the self as a function of professional contingencies and accidents'.[35] In light of this mutable self, the personae that Hogg donned were crucial to his conception of the role of the writer. The framing devices for his stories evolve into self-contained narratives and serve to interrogate the notion of individual authorship, as well as exploring ideas of truth and fiction in storytelling. First and foremost amongst these multiple selves was the Ettrick Shepherd, the primitive and earthy bard of the forests, but the other *noms de plume* that appeared throughout his career reveal the depth to which Hogg questioned the authorial process. The various fictitious names by which his magazine tales were signed (with 'James Hogg' or 'The Ettrick Shepherd' designated merely as the editor or recipient of a letter), the eponymous Spy of his magazine of the 1810s, and the intermingling of the editorial and confessional personae of *Confessions of a Justified Sinner* with the character of 'James Hogg' all combine to dismantle and subvert the basic premises of authorship and fictionality. The formal qualities of Hogg's works, especially the short fiction, are inseparable from these ideas, and it is to his short fiction that I will now turn.

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33 Jane and Anna Maria Porter, *Tales Round a Winter Hearth*, 2 vols (London: Longmans, 1826), I, iii.

34 Mack has pointed out that the anonymous publication of 'The Mistakes of a Night' in *The Scots Magazine* in 1794 contradicts Hogg's claim (*MAL*, 14n).

35 Mark L. Schoenfield, 'Butchering James Hogg: Romantic Identity in the Magazine Market', in Mary A. Favret and Nicola J. Watson (eds), *At the Limits of Romanticism: Essays in Cultural, Feminist, and Materialist Criticism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), pp. 207–24, p. 208.

Winter Evening Tales

After the problematic and protracted *Brownie of Bodsbeck*, Hogg's next collection was *Winter Evening Tales*. In his *Memoir of the Author's Life*, Hogg relates his version of the composition of the work:

> The greater part of these Tales was written in early life, when I was serving as a shepherd lad among the mountains, and on looking them over, I saw well enough that there was a blunt rusticity about them; but I liked them the better for it and altered nothing. (*MAL*, 50)

Hogg revised his *Memoir* throughout his later years, and it often reads more like the construction of a mythic authorial persona than an objective reflection on a life. His claim to have 'altered nothing' when republishing *Winter Evening Tales* is belied by the numerous revisions and expansions from the versions in the *Spy*, but the 'blunt rusticity' on which Hogg prided himself remains in evidence in the tales, albeit with an acute awareness of the fact that these stories, however much in debt to traditional and popular forms, were written for consumption by an educated and discerning urban audience.

Hogg struggled for years to find a publisher for these particular stories, but eventually struck a deal with Oliver and Boyd, a then less-prestigious Edinburgh publishing firm who went into partnership over what was to become *Winter Evening Tales* with George Whittaker, at that stage an emerging presence on the London publishing scene. After delays in printing, the two-volume edition was eventually brought out in April 1820, and sold well immediately. In fact, *Winter Evening Tales* went on to become Hogg's best-selling work of fiction during his lifetime, and his only prose title to warrant a second edition (1821). *Winter Evening Tales* also succeeded in opening up another readership for Hogg: America. The work went through numerous editions in the United States, in New York, Philadelphia, and Hartford, up until the 1850s—eagerly consumed by an American reading public which by that stage was able to boast an extremely strong domestic tradition of short fiction, particularly in the neo-mythic mode of Poe and Hawthorne, authors whose writings Hogg's tales from the Old World seemed to complement.

By Hogg's standards, the critical reception of *Winter Evening Tales* was positive, and after the chastening experience of being branded an imitator by most of the reviews on the publication of *The Brownie of Bodsbeck*, the upbeat response was especially welcome. *Blackwood's Magazine* made a particular effort with its review, expatiating on Hogg's connections to the magazine, praising the Ettrick Shepherd as 'a deep and graceful poet of pastoral existence', and extolling the truth and simplicity of his 'unvarnished Tales'.[36] The review has been tentatively attributed to John Wilson, and with typical Wilsonian spite it cannot resist a barbed reiteration of the complaint that dogged Hogg throughout his literary career: 'he is too fond of calling some things by their plain names, which would be better expressed by circumlocution; and now and then he betrays what we shall at once call, *vulgarity*.'[37]

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36 *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 7 (May 1820): 148–54, p. 149.

37 Ibid., p. 154. Reviewer's emphasis. For the attribution of the article to Wilson see Alan Lang Strout, *A Bibliography of Articles in Blackwood's Magazine* (Lubbock: Texas Tech. Press, 1959), p. 67.

The accusation of occasional coarseness in the tales was an echo of a criticism made by Scott, who bemoaned, in a letter to John Murray, that though Hogg had 'a very considerable portion of original genius he is sadly deficient not only in correct taste but in common tact'.[38] Hogg himself refuted these criticisms in his discussion of *Winter Evening Tales* in his *Memoir*: 'As to the indelicacies hinted at by some reviewers, I do declare that such a thought never entered into my mind, so that the public are indebted for these indelicacies to the acuteness of the discoverers' (*MAL*, 50). Despite these protestations of innocence, the problem of propriety was one that continued to plague Hogg throughout his later works.

Ian Duncan has proposed that *Winter Evening Tales* marks a shift in authorial guise for Hogg: the persona of the Ettrick Shepherd, who had overseen the transplantation of popular songs from the heart of rural Scotland to the modern metropolis, needed to be replaced, and in some ways reversed, for this project. Hogg's proposal to Archibald Constable in 1813 put forward the pseudonym of 'J.H. Craig of Douglas, Esq.' as author of the tales. Duncan theorises that the proposed adoption of this Scottian tale-collecting landowner would have allowed Hogg to create conditions that suited his notions of authenticity by combining 'both kinds of Romantic cultural authority, absorbing the "naive" function of shepherd-bard within the "sentimental" role of antiquarian laird, collecting the traditions of the country'.[39] Duncan also borrows Mary Louise Pratt's term 'autoethnography' to describe Hogg's mode of self-representation, and he argues that despite the fact that J.H. Craig of Douglas never appeared on the title-page of *Winter Evening Tales*, the subtitle of the work, *Collected among the Cottagers in the South of Scotland*, allows the complex relationship between author and material to remain intact.[40] In some respects, however, the use of 'among' in the subtitle can be seen to imply a rejection of the J.H. Craig persona and to bring the narrator closer to the culture of the people whose tales he is collecting.

Winter Evening Tales displays a fluid attitude to authorial guises and a multitude of distinct narrative modes can be discerned in the work. During the course of the tales Hogg moves between the voices of educated middle-class protagonists (in 'The Renowned Adventures of Basil Lee' and 'Love Adventures of Mr George Cochrane', two of the work's longest pieces), stories from members of the lower orders, redirected through the author ('Duncan Campbell' and 'Maria's Tale'), reworked popular chapbook tales ('The Long Pack'), and epistolary tales written by English travellers in Scotland ('Highland Adventures' and 'Dreadful Story of MacPherson'). One immediate effect of this variation is to place any authorial persona in the role not only of collector, but also of interpreter and filter for the stories. The tales are

38 H.J.C. Grierson (ed.), *The Letters of Sir Walter Scott*, 12 vols (London: Constable, 1932–37), V, 140.

39 James Hogg, *Winter Evening Tales*, ed. Ian Duncan (1820; Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), Introduction, p. xxiii. Henceforth cited parenthetically as *WT*.

40 'Autoethnography' is described as 'the self-authorizing discourse with which writers from cultural peripheries "undertake to represent themselves in ways that engage with the [metropolis's] own terms"' (*WT*, xxiv). Duncan cites Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 7.

mediated for the reader, and their relative merits, as well as their veracity, are held up for examination. Many of the tales deal with circumstances that demand some manner of explanation, and are therefore subjected to two agendas: the rationalising voice of the enlightened reader, desirous to reach a satisfactory conclusion for strange occurrences; and the more accepting attitude of the uneducated and countrified witness—a perspective that tends towards a belief in higher powers and religious allegory as an explanation for the mysterious.

The tale titled 'Singular Dream, from a Correspondent' explicitly draws these two discourses together in its relation of an encounter between a prognosticating moral philosopher renowned for his ability to accurately predict the future, and the teller of the tale, a man from a rural background and therefore 'a little inclined to be superstitious' (*WT*, 164). The two personalities clash forcefully over their differing assessments of the state of mankind. The urbane 'Mr A.T. philosopher, and teacher of the science of chance' (*WT*, 163) argues with pessimistic and crushing logic that the nation's seeming prosperity is a flimsy façade. The 'deformed picture' (*WT*, 160) that he paints of mankind's moral degradation and imminent destruction has the effect of inducing the narrator, who is more sympathetic towards human frailties, to fall into a reverie and mistake Mr A.T. for the Devil. Both characters undergo experiences that shake their faith in appearances, but the cynical wisdom of the philosopher appears a shallow foundation for belief in comparison to the country man who trusts the judgements to which his senses lead him, and adheres to his basic faith in the goodness of human nature.

The narrator of the 'Singular Dream', who remains confident in his judgement of right and wrong despite the plurality offered to him, is blessed with an unusual clarity. The majority of Hogg's narrators vacillate in their belief in their own stories, and display a variety of dogmas that constrain their views. The storyteller of 'Highland Adventures', an English traveller to Scotland, is unable to shake off his abiding predilection for rooting out fact and probability in all the incidents he witnesses. The narrator carts his enlightened sensibilities as well as his romantic desires with him into the Highlands, and reconfigures all that he witnesses until it adheres to both his rigid convictions of reality and his desire to imbibe poetic sensation from the culture through which he passes. These sensibilities are satirised through the narrator's appraisal of Scott's poem, *The Lady of the Lake* (1810). Though he claims to admire the work, the Englishman fears it lacks the 'stamp of reality' and admits he has 'never read it without regretting, that it had not been founded on a fact, though ever so trivial' (*WT*, 108). Here, Hogg mocks both the over-romanticisation of rural Scotland by poems such as Scott's, and the subsequent arrival of tourists bent on experiencing the magical properties of the country in person without the first idea of the importance attached to such legends by the actual inhabitants of the land.

The local character who appears in this particular tale, 'an old crusty Highlander' encountered on the mountain, attacks Scott for 'printing a *lying poem* about a man that never existed' (*WT*, 109, Hogg's emphasis) and for falsely drawing fashionable tourists to an arbitrary location. This show of pragmatism initially allies him to the narrator's rationalist views, until the Highlander's relation of another supernatural tale confounds the teller into exclaiming to his supposedly sympathetic audience: 'the reader will be a little astonished at hearing, that this man actually believed in the

tale of the goblin' (*WT*, 110). The narrator goes on to explain to his readership the proper way to interact with nature in the Highlands:

> Whoever goes to survey the Trossacks, let him have the 11th, 12th, and 13th divisions of the first canto of the *Lady of the Lake* in his heart; a little Highland whiskey in his head; and then he shall see the most wonderful scene that nature ever produced. […] The fancy must be aroused, and the imagination and spirits exhilarated, in order that he may enjoy these romantic scenes and groves of wonder with the proper zest. (*WT*, 111)

The Englishman is an anachronistic interloper in this world—one who feels that the native population are too backward to appreciate the sublime qualities of their own region. The locals, in turn, understand the Highlands as both the functional location of daily labour and domesticity, and unpredictable site of the supernatural. The insular mind of the city-dweller fails to recognise this:

> I flattered myself that I was in reality as much delighted with the country as any of those could be to whom it belonged; and as a proof of my supposition, concluded that none of them would have climbed Ben-More at such a season to get a view of it. (*WT*, 117)

After fatuously ascending the mountain, the narrator loses his footing on the descent and slides haphazardly and swiftly down in the snow, exiting the scene with both his own imported simplistic preconceptions, and the complex actuality of rural life, intact and unaffected by their interaction.

The same urbanised voice relates the 'Dreadful Story of MacPherson'. This tale describes a hunting party of 'noisy invaders' (*WT*, 146) to the Grampian Mountains who are horribly slaughtered in a remote glen under mysterious circumstances that seem not to have been 'effected by any human agency' (*WT*, 147), but which the narrator is unable to attribute further. The unsatisfactory nature of the teller's testimony is revealed in his throwaway remarks. The fact that Major MacPherson, a local landowner and one of the slain, 'was said to have been guilty of some acts of extreme cruelty and injustice in raising recruits in that country, and was, on that account, held in detestation by the common people' is of little account to the narrator, to whom MacPherson remains 'otherwise a respectable character' (*WT*, 146). In *The Shepherd's Calendar*, a similar fate meets Mr Adamson of Laverhope. He is killed by lightning, but, unlike the death of MacPherson, his demise is narrated by a member of the rural community and is attributed by the allegorically inclined villagers to the intercession of the Devil after a lifetime abusing those under his power. In the tale of MacPherson, the attitudes, concerns, and beliefs of the common people can be discerned, but they are ironically filtered through the rational (and, from this perspective, blinkered) vision of educated men. Through repeated use of this device, Hogg maintains his own proximity to the common people by acknowledging their enforced silence, while simultaneously probing away at a metropolitan mindset that marginalises their systems of belief.

Despite his fundamental lack of appreciation for the doctrines of the rural lower classes, the narrator of the 'Dreadful Story of MacPherson' insists on playing detective. The dire events are subjected to 'the most strict and extended inquiry' (*WT*, 146), but the best efforts of ratiocination are confounded and the investigators

are compelled to leave the unexplained deaths to 're-kindle every lingering spark' (*WT*, 147) of superstition amongst the mountain people. Hogg's authorial personae insist on taking up this line of questioning in nearly all of their stories. The tale of 'Adam Bell' is ostensibly a relation of a singular circumstance: the brief appearance of a man in his house at a time, it is later discovered, subsequent to his death in a duel. More interesting than the supernatural event itself, however, is the rigorous examination it is forced to undergo. The story, declares the narrator, while 'in every part true', presents a difficulty for the empirical assessor through the gaps in 'primary causes' which mean that 'even conjecture is left to wander in a labyrinth' (*WT*, 75). The witness to the duel, Mr McMillan, has his story carefully scrutinised and it is found to have 'every appearance of truth' (*WT*, 79), but despite the editor's best efforts, the tale refuses to conform either to the realm of the merely uncanny or to that of the truly fabulous.

Duncan has theorised that the denial of satisfactory conclusions to many of Hogg's tales indicates a lack of coherence between the older, feudal and mythic order, and the modern, empirical and enlightened society.[41] This is undoubtedly true, but the recurrence of these assured and masterful narrative overseers, who are dedicated to explaining to others the hidden meanings of life's incongruities, is a doubly ironic technique. By relying on outsiders to mediate tales that have their origins in insular communities, and by subjecting stories to a logical analysis they cannot withstand, Hogg also brings into focus the motives for his own position as collector and embellisher of those tales for the benefit of an urban readership. Exactly who it is that is supposed to play the role of the credulous audience is unclear in many of these tales. The pedantic editorial persona, the actual teller of the tale, the reader, and the figure of Hogg as overarching collector and disseminator of the stories frequently exchange duties. As each tale passes through its various narrative frames, the burden of the decision regarding its function and veracity is passed on to the reader. In the process, the assumptions of passivity are broken down, and the reader is forced to acknowledge the role that his or her preconceptions play in interpreting an uncanny text.

It is in the shorter stories of *Winter Evening Tales* that this self-reflexive theorising predominantly occurs. The longer narratives, 'The Renowned Adventures of Basil Lee', 'Love Adventures of George Cochrane', and 'The Bridal of Polmood', far outstrip the smaller stories in length (each could easily form a single-volume novella). These stories also have a self-contained quality and employ a radically different tone from their shorter counterparts. The use of a longer, more novelistic form immediately signals a shift in tone for Hogg. With words to play with, he delivers complex, circuitous plotlines that trace multiple narrative strands through to the conclusion. Duncan gives high praise to 'George Cochrane' and 'Basil Lee', claiming that the latter 'shows off Hogg's genre-switching bravura at its most accomplished' (*WT*, xxx), but it is difficult to admire these stories in the context of *Winter Evening Tales*. They certainly seem unlikely to have ever been 'Collected among the Cottagers of the South of Scotland', and the inclusion of tales that have

41 See Ian Duncan, 'The Upright Corpse: Hogg, National Literature and the Uncanny', *Studies in Hogg and his World*, 5 (1994): 29–55.

such a proximity to the conventional novels of the day undermines the balance of the work, diluting the work's main focus of scrutinising the conceptual factors involved in bringing traditional-style narratives to the attention of an urbanised readership.

Taken as a whole, the stories of *Winter Evening Tales* demonstrate an unmistakeable concern for those narratives which a nation employs to define aspects of its own identity. Hogg's anxieties regarding the contemporary uses to which traditional materials were being put make the collection fascinatingly complex and self-referential, but also somewhat disjointed. Its variety of authorial styles clash on occasions, but the inconsistency of tone also forces the reader to question the very premise upon which works such as this were built. Collections such as *Winter Evening Tales* were not written for consumption by those people who formed their subject matter. Instead, they offered a glimpse of an intriguing but largely inaccessible sub-culture to an educated audience. Hogg seeks to break out of the anthropological mould into which such stories were usually placed, and to place emphasis on the value and belief still given to superstitions by people in rural Scottish communities. However, by mediating those tales for a supposedly 'rational' audience he occasionally comes close to destroying his carefully constructed web of credulity.

In this work Hogg never quite fulfilled his grand ambitions. The collection chases its tail through a continued questioning of its own relevance and an insistence on playfully debunking notions of fact and truth. The line between curious antiquarian folklorist and true believer is crossed and re-crossed as Hogg tries to inveigle primal belief structures into a fashionable text. The final line of the last story in the work, 'Tibby Johnston's Wraith', praises its narrator, Davie Proudfoot, for being 'never kend for a liar' (*WT*, 508): a phrase which is eminently applicable to Hogg. Conversely, the narrative convolutions of *Winter Evening Tales* meant that neither was he likely to be 'kend' for a teller of the truth.

The Shepherd's Calendar

If *Winter Evening Tales* aims to place traditional materials in an anachronistically modern setting in order to expose the flaws of the antiquarian pursuit, then *The Shepherd's Calendar* is much more direct in its dissemination of popular narratives. Although both the magazine pieces and the collected version were published later than *Winter Evening Tales*, *The Shepherd's Calendar* is arguably the ideological precursor. The central narrative persona of *Winter Evening Tales* is a former country man, returning to the scenes of his youth after life in the city; here, the 'shepherd' has not yet departed for the bright lights, and has certainly not let them taint his vision of rural life. *The Shepherd's Calendar* celebrates the Ettrick region, its legends, and its people in a way that makes the arch and questioning tone of the narration of *Winter Evening Tales* seem somewhat jaded and sardonic. In this work, Hogg comes closest, in his prose at least, to replicating the voice that poets such as Allan Ramsay and Robert Burns had lent the agrarian classes in the previous century.

In the collected version of *The Shepherd's Calendar*, published in 1829, the original *Blackwood's* stories were heavily bowdlerised at the behest of William Blackwood by Robert Hogg, the author's nephew. Blackwood engaged Robert Hogg to make the cuts and revisions that the bookseller deemed necessary for a work

already published in sections in his own magazine, but which apparently lacked the delicacy desirable in the more genteel novel market. The major complaint was the crudeness of some of Hogg's phraseology and the indelicate subject matter of some of the tales—the same bluntness that drew censure of *Winter Evening Tales*. As Douglas Mack proposes in his edition of the work, the tales deserve to be re-examined in the form in which Hogg first published them. Mack demonstrates how this process robbed stories such as 'Mary Burnet' and 'Tibby Hyslop's Dream' (which deals in part with the unwanted attentions of a tenant farmer being forced on a vulnerable girl in his employ) of much of their vitality and diluted the force of their social criticism, leaving Hogg's reputation scarred for the remainder of the century.[42] Writing to William Blackwood in February 1828, Robert Hogg makes his editorial intentions clear: 'I have also gone over a part of the articles, making such verbal alterations as appeared to improve the style, and striking out what was objectionable or superfluous' (*SC*, xvii). Mack comments that, as a result, scenes that were 'informal and conversational in tone in Hogg's original version' were converted into 'formal literary English' (*SC*, xvii) by his nephew. Such changes deny the text its intimate connection to the oral mode and help to force it into a mode of polite literature in which it is distinctly uncomfortable.

As a literary project, *The Shepherd's Calendar* is more concerned with the practice of traditional storytelling than *Winter Evening Tales*. Its narratives are closer to those of *The Brownie of Bodsbeck* in their depiction of the ways in which traditional beliefs (that is to say pre-Enlightenment systems of thought, as well as pagan myths) are bound up with the strong Christian values of the inhabitants of the rural areas of the Scottish Borders. Most of the tales take place in the Ettrick region, and the importance placed on location, as well as the lack of stand-alone, novella-length stories, gives *The Shepherd's Calendar* more coherence as a collection than the disparate locales and multiple narrators of *Winter Evening Tales*.

Although there is a thematic connection between *The Brownie of Bodsbeck* and *The Shepherd's Calendar*, the tales of the earlier collection (and in particular the title story) contravene Hogg's later attitude towards superstitions. The villagers of 'The Brownie of Bodsbeck' believe themselves to be beset by supernatural forces, headed by the eponymous Brownie—forces which are revealed at the conclusion to be rather prosaic ploys of hiding Covenanters anxious to avoid detection by their persecutors. Such a categorical explanation of apparently supernatural phenomena, after the fashion of the denouements of the Radcliffian Gothic novel, was unusual for Hogg, and it was something he seldom repeated after 'The Brownie'. In contrast, *The Shepherd's Calendar* revels in the uncertainties that it offers the reader, as did *Winter Evening Tales*, and this stubborn refusal to be drawn on specifics came to characterise the remainder of Hogg's tale-writing.

The use of this uncanny or fantastic mode (in which events leave the witness, and the reader, in a state of uncertainty as to their cause) is central to Hogg's depiction of the belief structures of working-class rural people. Despite the work's more coherent

42 See the Introduction to James Hogg, *The Shepherd's Calendar*, ed. Douglas S. Mack (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002), Introduction, p. xvii. Henceforth cited parenthetically as *SC*.

narrative persona, in comparison to *Winter Evening Tales*, the tale-teller remains unwilling to offer a categorical explanation for his stories. The 1829 version of 'The Laird of Cassway', a tale of an out-of-body experience, concludes with a line that articulates the position Hogg adopted at the close of much of his short fiction: 'if the story was not true, the parties at least believed it to be so.'[43] This ending is truncated from the original *Blackwood's* story, which has an additional sentence: 'It [the tale] is certainly little accordant with any principle of nature or reason, but so also are many other well authenticated traditionary stories; therefore, the best way is to admit their veracity without saying why or wherefore' (*SC*, 199). Robert Hogg may have felt his uncle to be repeating himself in the additional line, or he may have perceived Hogg's continual blurring of tradition, eyewitness accounts, and modern retelling to be confusing and unnecessary, since he abridges or amends the framing narrative on more than one occasion. Here, however, the final point differs importantly from the previous line by its insistence on the veracity of the events themselves: it implies that *something* happened, though exactly what it was, and exactly what caused it are open to debate. Despite Hogg's dismissal of the 'why or wherefore' of his stories, by taking such a position he shifts the emphasis unavoidably onto explanation, and the collective weight of the other 'well authenticated' stories further pushes the reader towards acceptance of the supernatural explanation.

A passage from 'Mr Adamson of Laverhope', where a cruel, inhuman tenant farmer receives his deserts, supposedly at the hands of the Devil, discusses the influence and truth of tales, and reiterates this design:

> Above all, the still and drowsy embers of superstition were rekindled by it [the tale] into a flame, than which none had ever burnt brighter, not even in the darkest days of gospel ignorance; and by the help of it a theory was made out and believed, that for horror is absolutely unequalled. But as it was credited in its fullest latitude by my informant, and always added by him as the summary of the tale, I am bound to mention the circumstances, though far from giving them as authentic. (*SC*, 54)

The 'theory' proposes the Devil's participation in the events, and the proof offered is a series of meetings, events, and denials that bolster the supernatural account. The narrator carefully distances himself from these assertions in this tale, as he does in all the stories of the collection. Ironically, however, the more care that Hogg's narrator takes to hedge his assertions of popular belief, the further the cumulative narratives' adherence to the strange and the marvellous serves to dull the repeated rationalistic framings, and the more the stories emerge as believable truth. He never goes further than to say that the stories are held to be true by certain parts of the population, but the implicit argument is that they contain at least as much truth from a supernatural perspective as they do from a rational one. The emphasis on the persistent contemporary power of the supernatural prevents the tales from being offered simply as relics of a deceased mode of thought. Instead, they become examples of a conception of the nature of existence that can mount a challenge to the relentless rationalism of enlightened attitudes.

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43 James Hogg, *The Shepherd's Calendar*, 2 vols (Edinburgh: William Blackwood; and T. Cadell, London, 1829), I, 211.

Hogg, Religion and the Supernatural

By the early nineteenth century, most Christian teaching had done away with witches, goblins, and demons and placed God in the role of an autocratic deity, who alone had the power to intercede in human affairs. In Hogg's stories, however, the villagers manage to combine Christian beliefs with a firm conviction in the operation of other supernatural forces. *The Shepherd's Calendar* retains a paganistic hierarchy of interlocutory agents who ensure that justice is meted out in this world, and supernatural belief in the likes of angels, wraiths, kelpies, brownies, and the agency of the Devil through witches and warlocks remains compatible with fervent Christian faith. The tales implicitly argue that these intercessory beings act as powerfully on the imagination as any Godhead preached by the church, and are therefore entitled to be accorded the same degree of credence. Moreover, depictions of the Scottish peasantry that fail to take into account the potency of these long-held convictions do not do justice to the complexity of popular faith. From the perspective of *The Shepherd's Calendar*, sentimental moral works such as John Wilson's *Lights and Shadows of Scottish Life* (and even the geographically distant, genteel scenes of *Our Village*) are guilty of glossing over the aspects of country life less palatable to the modern mind and replacing them with a bland piety that robs the rural condition of its vigour and ignores its unique perception.

Critics of Scottish literature have argued for an explicit and responsive connection between James Hogg's work and that of John Wilson. A number of essays have been devoted to the parallels between *The Three Perils of Woman* and *Lights and Shadows of Scottish Life*, as successive scholars have mapped the degree to which the narrative complexity of the former acts as a critique to the easy, linear resolutions of the latter.[44] The relationship that the two writers shared was certainly unusual. Hogg himself described one facet of his attitude to Wilson in a letter to William Blackwood: 'I have a strange indefinable sensation with regard to him, made up of a mixture of terror[,] admiration and jealousy just such a sentiment as one deil might be supposed to have of another.'[45] Peter Garside has gone as far as to suggest that the intricacies of Robert Wringhim's relationship with Gil-Martin may reflect similar sensations of demonic nemesis to those Wilson excited in Hogg.[46]

The Shepherd's Calendar certainly displays Hogg's mistrust, if not directly of Wilson, whom he admired in many respects, then of the sentimentalisation of the Scottish peasantry in works such as *Lights and Shadows*. Wilson's characters consistently exhibit a simple, pure faith derived from a conception of religion as a

44 See Douglas S. Mack, 'Lights and Shadows of Scottish Life: James Hogg's *The Three Perils of Woman*', in Horst W. Drescher and Joachim Schwend (eds), *Studies in Scottish Fiction: Nineteenth Century* (Frankfurt-am-Main, Bern and New York: Peter Lang, 1985), pp. 15–27; and Anthony J. Hasler, '*The Three Perils of Woman* and John Wilson's *Lights and Shadows of Scottish Life*', *Studies in Hogg and his World*, 1 (1990): 30–45. More recently see Ian Duncan's article 'Hogg's Body', *Studies in Hogg and his World*, 9 (1998): 1–15, and Douglas Mack's response, 'John Wilson, James Hogg, "Christopher North", and "The Ettrick Shepherd"', *Studies in Hogg and his World*, 12 (2001): 5–24.

45 NLS, MS 4014, f. 287–88. Letter dated 29 January 1825.

46 Hogg, *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, Introduction, pp. xl–xli.

spring of goodness that sustains and nourishes all those who accept it, and which perpetuates a deferential and hierarchical order. By promoting a submissive devotion, *Lights and Shadows* masks the complexities and contradictions of religious belief, and never acknowledges the ways in which ardent faith can sometimes draw out the darker aspects of human nature. Death, which occurs frequently in Wilson's stories, is almost always accompanied by bedside familial reconciliations and affirmations of faith. The demise of Hogg's Mr Adamson, blasted out of existence by a vengeful deity while at his too-long delayed prayers, is inconceivable in the world of Wilson's pious village elder, whose funeral is a cleansing, cathartic event at which 'there was no need why any out of his own household should weep'.[47] 'Mr Adamson of Laverhope', instead, acknowledges the sense of the ridiculous that often comes with death, as well as the sheer futility of humanity's efforts in the face of mortality.

In a similar contrast, the deadly power of the storm that appears in *Lights and Shadows of Scottish Life* and threatens to obliterate an entire family is averted by an appeal for divine intervention. In the story of 'The Snow-Storm', the snowbound daughter whose 'low prayer was heard in the centre of eternity' (*LS*, 118), and her distraught mother whose offering 'might pierce the sky up to the very throne of God' (*LS*, 119), are both resurrected from the state of a 'cold corpse' (*LS*, 123) by virtue of a relationship with a protective Lord who intercedes to save his faithful creatures. In comparison, Hogg's storm, which is described with the exactitude of bitter experience as occurring on 'the memorable 24th of Janr 1794' (*SC*, 4), is surrounded by doubts concerning its origins and import. The narrator explains: 'I thought the storm was a great judgement sent on us for our sins, and that this strange phantasy was connected with it; an illusion effected by evil spirits' (*SC*, 10). The 'phantasy' is the appearance of nature horribly mutated, of 'trees over my head flourishing abroad over the whole sky' (*SC*, 10), and the belief in the event as a 'judgement' reflects the intensely personal and local nature of the storm.

Wilson's meteorological phenomena are non-specific and metaphorical: the snowstorm is simply a device for demonstrating the benevolence of God. Hogg's blizzard has its origins traced by popular opinion to an assembly of locals who had undertaken 'some horrible rite, or correspondence with the powers of darkness' (*SC*, 15), provoking the catastrophic intercession. The narrator, who admits that he regarded the group upon which the aspersions are cast 'as my brethren', is further forced to concede that 'to tell the truth, though I am ashamed to acknowledge it, I suspected that the allegation might be too true' (*SC*, 16). The narrator here is too close to the supernatural explanation for his own comfort, and, given slightly differing circumstances, he might have been amongst the guilty. The relationship between humanity, God, and the forces of nature is far more liminal in Hogg's tale than in Wilson's, and this uneasiness is reflected in the text. As Mack has commented, the narrator's admission that he is ashamed of mentioning the supernatural connection points to his awareness of the potential absurdity of retaining such beliefs and typifies Hogg's ability to hold in balance the concerns of the two worlds of Ettrick

47 John Wilson, *Lights and Shadows of Scottish Life: A Selection from the Papers of the Late Arthur Austin* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood; and T. Cadell, London, 1822), p. 150. Henceforth cited parenthetically as *LS*.

and Edinburgh.[48] By continually allowing the question of causality to remain open, Hogg strives to keep the vibrancy of popular forms alive and to prevent his tale from lapsing into either stultified anthropology or quaint anecdote.

The stories of *Lights and Shadows of Scottish Life* are characterised by a different tone, one of calm, orderly assurance which implies that however terrible a situation may appear there remains in place a structure that explicates actions within a divine scheme. Employing Providence as a narrative device has the effect of smoothing out the rough edges of lower-class existence, as threatening and chaotic events are kept in check by an act of God. In fact, so much reference is made by Wilson to the Almighty and His will that the *Literary Gazette* was moved to comment that 'the name of God is so frequently invoked, as sometimes, we think, to be almost taken in vain'.[49] Even the most irredeemable characters in the work—the forgers of a will who are condemned to death for their crimes—are revealed to have 'never doubted the truth of revealed religion' (*LS*, 199). Hogg's characters often seem to do little else but challenge the accepted tenets of 'revealed religion'. For Hogg, religion and superstition share a common root, purpose, and power. In an earlier poem, 'Superstition' (1815), Hogg even insists that supernatural belief is essential for a full religious conception, claiming that once the 'cold ungenial lore' of Christian faith chases away the last remnants of superstition, 'true Devotion wanes away with her'.[50] In Hogg's pantheon, God is the sun to the ephemeral lunar magic of the fairies, but the religious attitude championed by Wilson leaves no room for this symbiotic relationship. The harsh glare of his God robs lesser immortals of their existence, or, in Hogg's words, 'the light of the gospel then grew too bright for their tiny moonlight forms' (*SC*, 107–108).

For Hogg, both religion and superstition not only offer an insight into universal truths of existence, but also help reveal the depravity to which humanity may sink, and both are connected to mankind's basic vices. In 'The Brownie of the Black Haggs', the strange figure of Merodach, the supposed brownie, is believed by the lower orders to be an agent of fairy justice, sent to punish Lady Wheelhope for her cruelty and irreligiousness. In addition to this notion of other-worldly revenge, the tale dwells on the destructive relationship that develops between Merodach and the Lady. The brownie becomes the focus for all of her vindictive qualities, and the more he deflects her spite the more obsessed she becomes:

> She could not stay from the creature's presence, for in the intervals when absent from him, she spent her breath in curses and execrations, and then not able to rest, she ran again to seek him, her eyes gleaming with the anticipated delights of vengeance. (*SC*, 246)

48 See Douglas S. Mack, 'Aspects of the Supernatural in the Shorter Fiction of James Hogg', in Valeria Tinkler-Villani, et al. (eds), *Exhibited by Candlelight: Sources and Developments in the Gothic Tradition* (Amsterdam and Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1995), pp. 129–35, p. 131.

49 Review of *Lights and Shadows of Scottish Life*, *Literary Gazette*, 278 (18 May 1822): 304–306, p. 304 [cont. in 279 (25 May 1822): 322–24].

50 James Hogg, 'Superstition' (1815), ll. 18, 8, *Selected Poems*, ed. Douglas S. Mack (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), p. 72.

The horrific conclusion to the tale sees Lady Wheelhope bound to Merodach by violent extremes of emotion, refusing to leave his side no matter how badly she is beaten and terrifying an elderly couple with her masochistic infatuation. She is finally killed by the object of her unnatural attraction, and buried 'like a dog' (*SC*, 254) by the frightened populace. This tale places the horror element of much popular tradition within the firmly human sphere of desire. Merodach may have magical talents attributed to him, but Lady Wheelhope's demise is secured by the twisted spirit that she cultivates within her own heart, and by the conclusion she has displaced the brownie as the face of horror. As with the character of Gil-Martin in *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, the reader is never forced to make a choice between the co-extant explanations of Merodach's power as an agent of spiritual vengeance or as an imagined manifestation of Lady Wheelhope's psychological demons. The sight of a blackened soul is every bit as frightening as anything the fairy world can conjure up.

The enduring power of the supernatural is brought home in the introduction to the tale of 'George Dobson's Expedition to Hell'. Here, the narrator expounds on the nature of dreaming, and specifically on the failure of rational philosophy to elucidate, or even to comprehend, the phenomenon. In contrast to the established hegemony of the reasoning faculty, he argues that dreams speak clearly to those whose minds are not clouded by rationalism:

> They prove to the unlettered and contemplative mind, in a very forcible manner, a distinct existence of the soul, and its lively and rapid intelligence with external nature, as well as with a world of spirits with which it has no acquaintance, when the body is lying dormant, and the same to it as if sleeping in death. (*SC*, 119)

In the original *Blackwood's* version, George Dobson's tale appears under the heading of 'Dreams and Apparitions', a sub-section which includes, amongst other tales, 'The Souters of Selkirk', 'Tibby Hyslop's Dream', and 'The Laird of Cassway'. All of these tales describe crossovers between the world of conventional reality and other planes of existence. Here, sleep and dreams form a connection to a spirit world that also interposes its forces at other times. The transmigration of the soul was a fundamentally unenlightened belief, and became a theme that Hogg returned to more explicitly and with a greater degree of complexity in the later tales 'Strange Letter of a Lunatic' and 'On the Separate Existence of the Soul'.[51] In the stories of *The Shepherd's Calendar* the emphasis is placed more broadly on the importance of being attuned to other sources of understanding than those provided by the five senses.

In his 'Expedition to Hell', George Dobson, an Edinburgh coachman, dreams of a fare that takes him beyond the gates of hell, after which he is only released on condition of his return by an appointed hour. Dobson is a hard-headed professional, not susceptible to flights of fancy and unafraid of any situation. His jocular response to his passenger's request for an unknown destination is boldly prophetic: 'I'll

51 These tales were published in *Fraser's Magazine*, in the issues for December 1830 and December 1831 respectively. Both are reprinted in James Hogg, *Selected Stories and Sketches*, ed. Douglas S. Mack (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1982).

drive you to hell if you have a mind' (*SC*, 119). Once beyond the boundary of the underworld, however, his brash pragmatism fails him. He attempts to assert his authority through a forceful statement of his own existence: 'My name is George Dobson, of the Pleasance, Edinburgh, coach driver, and coach proprietor too; and I'll see the face of the man d— who will say *nay* to me, as long as I can pay my way' (*SC*, 121). Unfortunately for George, the only currency of value in hell is his soul, and he is forced to pledge it to obtain temporary release. Dobson fails to exert any influence in a realm that is not his own, and even when he is back in his own world, with his house's clocks set back to prevent the keeping of the appointment, the power of hell follows and eventually claims him.

The metropolitan version of the rupture between reality and fantasy that takes place in 'George Dobson's Expedition to Hell' is one of the most powerful and destabilising in *The Shepherd's Calendar*. In 'The Laird of Cassway', another tale in which a significant experiential schism occurs, the proceedings take place in the grounds of a lordly mansion and have a similar distance from the occult half-light of the border glens. In this tale the eponymous aristocrat is magically transported hundreds of miles to intercede in a quarrel between his two sons. After experiencing a falling sensation, he opens his eyes to behold 'light, and apparently worlds, or huge lurid substances gliding by me with speed, beyond that the lightning of heaven' (*SC*, 196). Precisely where the Laird's journey takes him remains unclear, but he seems to travel through the very fabric of the universe to traverse space and time. Such a precise depiction of the mechanisms of temporal and spatial shifts is unusual in Hogg's tales. The country people who are the usual subjects of mysterious forces are never as explicit in their descriptions as is the Laird in this instance. Part of the importance of this story, therefore, is to provide a reliable eyewitness to the supernatural. According to the narrator, the tale had been published during the eighteenth century, and 'owing to the respectable source from whence it came, was never disputed in that day that as having had its origin in truth' (*SC*, 199).

The characters of George Dobson and the Laird of Cassway are distanced from the recognised hotbeds of rural superstition, and consequently give more arresting testimonials than the uneducated peasantry to the modern relevance of traditional beliefs. In order to achieve this quality of evidence, however, both characters must experience more violent challenges to their convictions than is usually meted out to the country folk, who are more attuned to the dangers of complacency in spiritual matters. The worldly and cynical Dobson and the assured and secure Laird are subjected to magical incursions of a much larger magnitude and correspondingly greater danger. Outside of the strict morality of the shepherd's cottage, these tales imply, truth is a far more slippery notion, and the unwary can have their cosy assumptions shattered at a moment's notice.

The tale of 'Mary Burnet' takes Hogg's use of traditional materials a stage further, going beyond mysterious but potentially explicable circumstances into what the narrator calls 'the antiquated and visionary tales of my friends, the Fairies and the Brownies' (*SC*, 200). In order to do so, the story goes back to 'the reign of James the Fourth, at the very time that fairies, brownies, and witches, were at the rifest in Scotland' (*SC*, 212). The reader is warned that 'the sophisticated gloss and polish thrown over the modern philosophic mind, may feel tainted by such antiquated

breathings of superstition', though such connection will also lend vitality to the soul of the reader, preventing it from stagnating into a mere 'cold phlegmatic influence' (*SC*, 200). Hogg repeatedly makes these kinds of assertions for his tales. His continued insistence on presenting such fiercely un-modern stories gives his words a resonance beyond mere hyperbole, and implies that fairy tales become increasingly necessary in a world grown cold to dissenting ideologies.

By foregrounding the practice of storytelling, 'Mary Burnet' becomes both a supernatural folktale and something of an anti-folktale. Unlike those in most of Hogg's other stories, the events related here are unequivocally supernatural. John Allanson invokes fairy powers to bring Mary Burnet to him, and she is subsequently lost to the elfin world, but returns years later to draw Allanson to his death—a series of events which leads even the cautious narrator to exclaim, 'What a beautiful moral may be extracted from this fairy tale!' (*SC*, 217). From the narrator's perspective, the story is one that can only be explained in supernatural terms and which takes place in a remote period of fairy influence. Many of the conventions of the fairy–folktale are present, and these devices help create a world of suspended reality. The motif of magical numbers is particularly powerful: Allanson's wish for Mary to appear is repeated three times; her parents' final meeting with her takes place on the seventh anniversary of her disappearance; and three times Allanson is confronted with fairy versions of Mary at Moffat fair.

The story also contains anti-folktale elements. These qualities emerge when the reader is invited to see beyond these mythic symbols and into their composition. With regard to Allanson's encounters at the fair, the narrator recalls that:

> Indeed, the first time I ever heard the tale, it bore that he tried *seven*, who all turned out to be Mary Burnets of Kirkstyle; but I think it unlikely that he would try so many, as he must long ere that time have been sensible that he laboured under some power of enchantment. (*SC*, 212)

In the context of a tale that involves so much magic and mystery, the narrator's insistence on what he thinks 'unlikely' immediately jars. What is being enacted here is the transformation of a traditional tale from the oral to the written mode. The numerous versions of the story that are in existence disappear as soon as one is committed to paper: the number of apparitions encountered by Allanson will be fixed at three from now on, and Mary Burnet will always be from Kirkstyle. Any such transcription must rob a folktale of much of its mystery by enforcing choice from a multitude of options.

'Mary Burnet' gives the reader a glimpse of the way in which the printed word reconstructs folktale and myth, and an extension of this process can be seen at work in the story of 'A Strange Secret'. Here, the narrator is told a marvellous story delivered 'in that plain, simple, and drawling style, which removed all doubts of its authenticity'.[52] The supposedly supernatural events involving witchcraft and suspected infanticide are, however, only the starting point for the main body of the

52 Hogg, *Shepherd's Calendar* (1829), II, 49. This story only appears in the 1829 version of *The Shepherd's Calendar*, and is not included in Mack's edition which uses the *Blackwood's* texts.

story as the narrator takes on the role of antiquarian sleuth and begins to construct his own narrative. He collates the information given to him by several parties and adds his own conjectures to piece together what he hopes will become a complete narrative. The story expands into a melange of witches, shared dreams, and magical episodes. Hogg, however, is prepared to undermine his own careful placement of superstitious legend as valid cultural analysis. As the investigation progresses the marvellous elements of the tale begin to dissolve, and as the characters become increasingly determined to unearth the truth, successive mysterious ordeals fall by the wayside to expose a conventional tale of lost heirs and entailed fortunes. Under sterner examination, the 'Strange Secret' proves not to be so strange after all.

Hogg and the Collection of Short Fiction

In spite of the harsh editing it received in its collected version, *The Shepherd's Calendar* remains one of James Hogg's finest prose works and perhaps the best collection of traditional and regional tales from the Romantic period. Its stories combine to produce a positive vision of provincial existence that avoids both sentimentalisation and heroicisation of rural life. Stories such as 'Mr Adamson of Laverhope' and 'Mary Burnet', which demonstrate the importance and influence of folk mythology, are given a new impetus when surrounded by evocations of the various oral and literary stages that such tales go through. By contextualising the folkloric material in this way, Hogg also maintains its centrality and continued relevance to the rural mentality. Here, the tales are no longer strange beasts to be marvelled at in the captivity of antiquarian research, but organic elements woven into the structure of a community.

Hogg himself was aware of the superiority of the work within his own *oeuvre*, and speculated on the matter in a letter to William Blackwood, dated 20 October 1830:

> I wonder the Shepherd's Calendar has not sold. It is without all dispute my best prose work yet utterly unknown whereas the Winter evenings went through two large editions in the ugliest form in which ever work appeared. There *has* been some remissness or defect in the publishing for instance it has only been advertised in Maga in which it had mostly appeared and where advertising it did no good whatever.[53]

Hogg's explanation for the poor sales seems unconvincing. Many collected editions of tales published in the early part of the century were recycled from periodicals. Mary Russell Mitford's previous appearances in the *Lady's Magazine* failed to harm sales of *Our Village*, and the readers of *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, it could be argued, constituted Hogg's most likely audience. It seems more likely that the reading public, after showing little interest in the formal experimentation of the two *Three Perils* romances and *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, was inclined simply to ignore Hogg's new work.

Whatever the cause, *The Shepherd's Calendar* sold poorly, and as a result Hogg's long-cherished plans for a collected edition of all his tales were dashed, temporarily at least.

53 NLS, MS 4027, f. 198–99. 'Maga' refers to *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*.

The same letter to Blackwood cited above discusses this plan in terms that make it clear that Hogg had not given up on the project:

> I still hope that my 'Scottish Tales' published in 12 No's with a preface by Lockhart and some pains taken in the arrangement may be made available by and by but in the mean time I should have something going on to keep *the banes green*.[54]

The first volume of Walter Scott's handsome Magnum Opus collected edition appeared in 1829, and Hogg may have been seeking a similar testament for himself. However, a collected edition was never to be published by Blackwood, who was seeking a move away from fiction at this point. Instead, the concept was eventually taken up and issued as *Altrive Tales: Collected among the Peasantry of Scotland, and from Foreign Adventures* by the London publisher James Cochrane. The series was planned to run to twelve volumes, but Cochrane unfortunately went bankrupt after the first appeared in 1832. A posthumous collected edition of Hogg's prose was finally published in 1836–37, by Blackie & Co., as *Tales and Sketches, by the Ettrick Shepherd*, but the work was once again hampered by extensive bowdlerisation and imperfect editing. Hogg was often desperately unlucky when it came to publishing, and the *Altrive Tales* debacle merely closed the chapter on a frustrating career.[55] Despite these publishing setbacks, Hogg's long-standing desire to produce his tales in serial form underlines his confidence that a market existed for his stories. Indeed, his push for cheap, number publication indicates that Hogg was ahead of his time in his belief that a readership existed not only among the fashionable ranks but also among the expanding lower middle class of urban artisans: an important part of the audience that by the end of the 1830s would enable Victorian writers to greatly increase sales of fiction through serialised publication.

Allan Cunningham

Walter Ong describes the Romantic period as one in which collectors and writers 'worked over parts of oral or quasi-oral or near-oral tradition' in order to rehabilitate the artistic creations of 'primitive' cultures.[56] One of the most remarkable Scottish instances of this practice was Allan Cunningham's *Traditional Tales of the English and Scottish Peasantry*. Like Hogg, Cunningham's origins were in the rural Scottish lowlands and he too began his literary career by writing ballads after the traditional style. His tales are also interspersed with poetry, and both writers viewed the twin forms of ballad and tale as complementary mediums of popular narrative. *Traditional Tales* was published in 1822, the same year as John Wilson's *Lights and Shadows of Scottish Life*. However, Cunningham's work has far more in common with Hogg's

54 Ibid., f. 198.

55 For a more detailed discussion of Hogg's efforts to secure a collected edition of his works see Gillian Hughes's Introduction to *Altrive Tales* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003) and Peter Garside and Gillian Hughes, 'James Hogg's *Tales and Sketches* and the Glasgow Number Trade', *Cardiff Corvey*, 14 (Summer 2005). Online: Internet (September 2006): <http://www.cf.ac.uk/encap/corvey/articles/cc14_n02.html> .

56 Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London and New York: Methuen, 1982), p. 17.

conception of the earthy power generated by the oral tales of the agrarian classes than with Wilson's syrupy stories of benign Providence.

Cunningham had relocated to London in 1810 while attempting to forge a literary career for himself. He had enjoyed some earlier success with verse collections under his own name, and was also involved in the publication of *Remains of Nithsdale and Galloway Song*, a collection of supposedly traditional Scottish ballads after the fashion of Scott's *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*. *Remains* was published to moderate acclaim in 1810, although Cunningham was initially credited by the work's ostensible editor, R.H. Cromek, only for having helped in the compilation of the songs in so far as he 'drew from obscurity' many of the pieces.[57] Cunningham later admitted to writing twenty-five of the fifty-six songs, but the full extent of his contribution to the volume remains unclear, as does whether he or Cromek was the greater dupe.[58] In a rather immodest letter to Archibald Constable written shortly before publication, Cromek made this declaration:

> I have now given—what I think was never given—the real history of the Scottish Peasantry; and as far as relates to the twin districts of Nithsdale and Galloway, I have ventured to describe at some length their manners, attachments, games, superstitions, their traditional history of fairies, witchcraft, &c., &c., taken down from the lips of old cottars.[59]

Experienced balladeers recognised immediately that the songs were not 'from the lips of old cottars'. On reading the work, Hogg claimed that he 'at once discerned the strains' of Cunningham (*MAL*, 73). Like many Scottish poets and ballad collectors, including Hogg and Burns, Cunningham was willing to blur the distinction between traditional materials and original compositions. This Ossianic propensity was demonstrated with *Remains of Nithsdale and Galloway Song* and it is also a key characteristic of his *Traditional Tales* collection.

Once in London, Cunningham began to write essays and tales for *Blackwood's* before moving to the *London Magazine*, where he became a longstanding contributor. His 'Traditional Literature' series opened with an essay on the subject of fireside oral storytelling, and the majority of contributions to the series consisted of a supposedly traditional prose narrative tale, which incorporated the usual ballads and songs. Cunningham's periodical pieces went through a variety of guises over the years, but, all told, the *London Magazine* ran one or two of his anecdotes, sketches, tales, ballads, and other folkloric material more or less every issue between December 1820 and the end of 1824. In his magazine submissions, Cunningham spent a lot of time and effort theorising the interaction between tradition and literature—mostly through the various framing devices and narratorial asides contained within the

57 R.H. Cromek (ed.), *Remains of Nithsdale and Galloway Song* (London: Cadell and Davies, 1810), Introduction, p. xxx.

58 For a detailed discussion of the publication of the work and the relationship between Cromek and Cunningham see Dennis M. Read, 'Cromek, Cunningham, and *Remains of Nithsdale and Galloway Song*: A Case of Literary Duplicity', *Studies in Bibliography*, 40 (1987): 175–87.

59 Cited in David Hogg, *The Life of Allan Cunningham* (Dumfries: John Anderson, 1875), p. 72.

stories. This process culminated with *Traditional Tales of the English and Scottish Peasantry*, a collected version of some of his *London Magazine* stories. *Traditional Tales* also re-ordered the magazine pieces, incorporated one new story, and included a new Preface.

Cunningham's stories are excellent examples in themselves of the uses to which traditional materials were put by Scottish authors, but it is the desire to organise and systematise the subject of tradition which is particularly interesting. Thomas De Quincey, who made Cunningham's acquaintance through the *London Magazine*, related the conjectures of the latter on the nature of Scots songs:

> He maintained that the Scottish musical airs must have an eternal foundation in nature—that is to say must have a co-eternal existence with the musical sense—for the following most extraordinary reason; nay, considering that his veracity was unimpeachable, I may say marvellous reason: namely, that he, Cunningham, had, without any previous knowledge of these airs, invented all or most of them *proprio marte*; so that, like the archetypal ideas in some systems of philosophers, one might affirm, upon his representation of things, that Scottish airs were eternally present to the ear of the Demiurgus, and eternally producing themselves afresh.[60]

Cunningham held similar ideas about the inherent qualities of popular tales, and he elaborates on this position in the Preface to *Traditional Tales*. The narrator of the tales describes his hopes for preserving the vigorous stories of humanity's youth:

> When our early written literature was filled with the thoughts, and the imagery, and the gods of the heathen, our oral or fire-side verse and prose was purely original and native, abounding with vivid presentiments of action and character, an imagery fresh and green, and frequent glimpses of a sweet and a gentle fancy.[61]

Such tales, he claims, have suffered at the hands of the 'diffusion of printed knowledge' (*ES*, I: vii), and threaten to disappear forever. Cunningham's narrator responds by situating himself as 'collector and embellisher' (*ES*, I: viii) of the tales, and he not only recognises, but takes pride in the duality of this role. His position corresponds to that which he envisages traditional tale-tellers to have held—those men and women whose deviations, exaggerations, and additions of local detail lent much of their charm and potency to the tales they related.

The Preface goes on to claim that this traditional material has about it an 'air of reality' (*ES*, I: ix), since all the tales enjoy the support of 'popular evidence' (*ES*, I: x). In a manner similar to that of some of Hogg's personae in *Winter Evening Tales*, the narrator brings modern empirical techniques to bear on old legends. He explains how some of the 'more remarkable superstitions' (*ES*, I: x) have been omitted for the sake of decorum, and how stories have been revised and refined for consumption by the 'higher classes of the community' (*ES*, I: ix). However, the delight that the narrator of *The Shepherd's Calendar* takes in tales whose origins

60 Thomas De Quincey, *The Collected Writings of Thomas De Quincey*, ed. David Masson, new edn, 14 vols (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1889–90), III, 155.

61 Allan Cunningham, *Traditional Tales of the English and Scottish Peasantry*, 2 vols (London: Taylor and Hessey, 1822), Preface, I, iii–iv. Henceforth cited parenthetically as *ES*.

and meanings remain murky is missing. Cunningham instead brings a triumvirate of forces—'Truth', 'Imagination', and 'Tradition'—to bear on his stories. 'Truth' is the Holy Grail for the narrator. His tales must convey a meaning that accords with and builds upon the reader's ideas of human experience and natural order. This is achieved by a combination of the other two forces: 'Imagination', which draws its strength from the narrative technique, combines with 'Tradition', derived from the archetypal and universal quality of each tale, to shed light on the true nature of existence.

Like most short fiction writers who worked with popular, orally-derived material, Cunningham operates in a borderland between literature and tradition, and, from the perspective of modern folklorists, produced writing that seems to want respect for the authenticity of orality, and which belongs to a category which, in the words of Richard Dorson, 'may have been literature but was not folklore'.[62] Not always successfully, Cunningham tried to tread a line connecting entertainment and antiquarianism. His position was somewhere between Scott and Hogg, but he sometimes lost himself between these two poles—lacking the gravitas and gentlemanly erudition of the former, and the fizz and pointed irreverence of the latter. With Scott, the products of Scotland's oral history became cultural capital, which he was able to weave into the concept of rational historical progress that underpinned the Scottish Enlightenment. In turn, Hogg's uncanny stories celebrate traditions and folklore in a way that actively interrogates Enlightenment historicism, but Cunningham is rarely so bold.

In the story of 'Ezra Peden', Cunningham explores the tension at the heart of the oral tradition. The limitations, as well as the potential benefits, of producing literary versions of folkloric stories are made clear. The narrator proclaims early on in the tale that 'it is seldom that tradition requires any illustration; its voice is clear and its language simple' (*ES*, I: 4), but as the tale progresses the cherished notion of a tangible truth is exposed as more and more of an illusion. Ezra Peden, a Presbyterian preacher and 'spiritual champion' (*ES*, I: 9) of the people, is committed to ridding his parish of the pernicious influence of the fairies and their dark allies. Despite his formidable Christianity, he fails where no minister of John Wilson's ever could—at the deathbed of a grievous sinner, where he arrives too late to solicit repentance. The return of the dead man's ghost triggers a sequence during which the preacher apparently converses with spirits and ends up delirious in a nearby dell through unexplained circumstances.

As events progress, their nature and cause become more cloudy. Exactly what happens to Ezra Peden is never made clear. Like Hogg, Cunningham subjects the rigorous rationalism of the narrator to continued pressure from the supernatural content. 'Tradition' begins to emerge as an unruly force, which can work against the grain of antiquarian 'Truth' and the transcendent qualities of 'Imagination'. As the hoped for clarity fails to emerge, the narrator is forced to question his twin tools of Imagination and Tradition: 'something evil hath happened, said Imagination, scattering as she spoke a thousand tales of a thousand hues' (*ES*, I: 46). Imagination proves not to be the benign tool that the narrator had hoped for, channelling and

62 Richard M. Dorson, *The British Folklorists: A History* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968), p. 92.

clarifying Tradition's meaning. Instead, as in Hogg's tales, it opens up a host of disparate possibilities, none of which can be satisfactorily resolved.

The facts of many of Cunningham's tales initially appear transparent, but are revealed to be less certain under closer scrutiny. Ezra's complex tale of supernatural agency cannot be satisfactorily confirmed, but even ostensibly simple interpretations can become loaded acts of judgement. In 'The Selbys of Cumberland', the first-person narrator cannot even be certain which tree he is looking at: 'a solitary and stunted alder, or hazel bush, or mountain ash' (*ES*, I: 52). In another tale, 'Allan-a-Maut', the protagonist describes his transgression into unknown territory:

> I fell into a kind of reverie […] and a thick mist, which the coming sun seemed unable to dispel, aided me in totally mistaking my way; and I could not well mistake it further, for I found myself in a region with which I had formed no previous acquaintance: I had wandered into a brown and desolate heath, the mist rolled away in heavy wreaths before me, and followed close on my heels, with the diligence of an evil spirit. (*ES*, I: 286)

The characters of Cunningham's tales often seem to have wandered too far off the beaten track, and to have become lost in a dream-world where the senses become unreliable, and any assertion needs to be corroborated before it can be believed.

The regional affiliations of Cunningham's tales are, if anything, stronger than those of Hogg's. The stories are based in the villages on both sides of the Solway Firth, and the narratives move between northern England and southern Scotland. Although the Scottish tales have the closest links with the supernatural, in particular the fairy elements of traditional material, any connection to their English neighbours is stronger than the supposed national affiliations with the urban centres of their own countries. The opening passage from the tale of 'The Haunted Ships' illustrates this relationship:

> Along the sea of Solway, romantic on the Scottish side, with its woodlands, its bays, its cliffs, and headlands; and interesting on the English side, with its many beautiful towns with their shadows on the water, rich pastures, safe harbours, and numerous ships; there still linger many traditional stories of a maritime nature, most of them connected with superstitions singularly wild and unusual. (*ES*, II: 258)

The two shores, which form the focal point for many of the tales, share the sea that divides them, as well as 'the stamp of the Dane and the Norseman' (*ES*, II: 259) that colours many of the region's maritime legends. The glens of the Scottish Borders are a world away from the sophistication of Edinburgh, and share a spiritual ground with the mountains of Cumbria. Both sets of peoples are what Cunningham calls 'poetical peasantry' (*ES*, II: 10). They exhibit a common predilection for narratives and events that offer more than the sum of their parts and in some way connect to and elucidate abstract truths about the nature of existence. This allegorical desire in turn drives the superstitious nature of many of their tales, many of which contain similar figures and themes.

The shared sea separates as well as unites. The 'safe harbours' of the English side have long been divested of the more occult varieties of the supernatural retained in the Scottish tales, and the Cumbrian stories invariably depend on the dynamism of the sea for their force. The Scottish glen of Annandale, the setting for the tale of

'Elphin Irving, the Fairies' Cupbearer', is described as the last refuge of the magical folk—making the inhabitants of the northern shore seem as unsafe from mysterious powers in their homes as the English are at sea. Both peoples, though, are marked out by the sway that violence holds over their lives. Cunningham suggests that death, when it appears in the uncontrollable, unaccountable, and unpredictable forms of the sea, extreme weather, or treacherous terrain, demands of rude peoples an explanation, and a corresponding belief that certain rituals will enable its avoidance. His tales argue that in places where people are subjected to the full force of nature, powers of prophecy, superstition, and connections to other worlds remain valid. The inhabitants cultivate 'curious oral communications, in which history, true and fabulous, and poetry, and superstition, are strangely blended together' (*ES*, II: 188). Cunningham's tales concur with the conviction of Hogg's short fiction that these communications can serve as vehicles of truth and understanding just as effectively as the moral philosophy of the urban Enlightenment, and the historical and sociological contextualisation of modern, novelistic fiction.

The Ideology of the Regional Tale

Along with writers of moral and didactic tales, authors of regional stories and collectors of traditions were among the quickest to realise the potential of short fiction. The prose tale retained a connection to the folktale and other oral modes, and was more malleable than the novel when it came to narratives that blurred the line between fact and fiction, history and myth. Stories could soak up the scraps of legend and lore which proliferated in small communities, and cater to the interest in folklore and popular history that burgeoned as the nineteenth century progressed. Such tales were recognised by writers, readers, and critics as inhabiting a separate realm to the novel. In a review of Gerald Griffin's *"Holland-Tide;" or, Munster Popular Tales*, the *Literary Gazette* exclaims on behalf of the reader, 'Well, if this had been in a novel, we should have said how untrue, how absurd!'[63] The tale, as the *Gazette*'s reviewer acknowledges, does not bear the novel's burden of verisimilitude, and therefore should not be subjected to the same method of enquiry. Such forgiving critiques were perhaps a mixed blessing for short fiction. The positive consequence was that tale writers were allowed greater freedom. Fantastic and supernatural material could appear in short fiction without being tempered to fit the wider imperatives of a longer narrative, and without the author being held to the stricter realist conventions of the novel in the way suffered by Scott after his depiction of the White Lady in *The Monastery*. The downside of this freedom to explore the fantastic was that much short fiction maintained a distance from the growing realism of the novel, and could in consequence seem a marginal and one-dimensional genre. Many writers of short fiction never approached supernatural or traditional material, but it nonetheless became a genre associated with ghosts and goblins, and with bygone narrative modes.

Regional and traditional tales often advocate a return to older forms of artistic expression and the poetic sensibilities associated with those forms. Many

63 *Literary Gazette*, 527 (24 February 1827): 114–15, p. 114.

tale collections offer a vision of a time when every fireside rang with songs of supernatural deeds and the storytelling faculty was distributed equally, rather than being limited to those who had the education and influence to publish books. In the introduction to Leitch Ritchie's *Head-Pieces and Tail-Pieces* (1826), the narrator outlines his hopes for reasserting the importance of the imagination in the face of dry, historically accurate stories. Ritchie echoes the Porter sisters' complaint that 'few in the nineteenth century will allow themselves the indulgence of credulity'[64] when he bemoans the decline in literature of sensation and imagination in the post-*Waverley* years: 'Matters of fact have come into fashion; and the nearer a romance approaches to history, the better chance it has of being read.'[65] He goes on to pledge to locate his own tales among the 'mysteries' upon which science can still shed little light. Ritchie was indebted more to the Romance than to the extant oral tradition which Hogg and Cunningham drew upon, and his tales can appear Luddite rather than radical in their questioning of the pervasive power of intellectual advancement. His comments do, however, indicate a sense of dissatisfaction among certain sections of the literary community with the prevailing forces of realism and historicity in the fiction market, and they articulate a desire to turn to a type of fiction which referenced pre-modern storytelling techniques.

The short fiction of the early nineteenth century brought marginalised modes of thought into dialogue with more modern philosophies, and in doing so it also sought to give a voice to disenfranchised peoples. In their tales, Hogg and Cunningham articulated the values of a section of society that did not necessarily share the ideals of urban Scotland. In Scotland, but also in the rest of the British Isles, regional stories provided an outlet for writers who wished to challenge in small ways the hegemonic ideas of nationhood and progress which often seemed to sweep aside the particular in the general quest for advancement. Changes to rural life, and the perceived decline in the oral tradition, created conditions whereby such tales could be received nostalgically and unthreateningly—a situation described by Penny Fielding when she states that 'by the mid-nineteenth century the oral was joining the pastoral in a sentimentalised past where it could more safely be contained'.[66] Critics and reviewers queued up to participate in this sentimental discourse. The *Monthly Review*'s article on Cunningham's *Traditional Tales* proclaimed: 'we are in the greatest danger of becoming the most matter-of-fact, logical, dull, unpoetical people. At this juncture of time, then, we feel enlivened and aroused by a work which revives in our minds the interesting images of former times.'[67] However, in the hands of writers like Hogg and Cunningham the use of popular material can be seen as less of an attempt to salvage the dying practices of a 'poetical peasantry', and more of an effort to thrust the nonconformities which that mode represents into a modern literary world. In the 1810s and 1820s, short fiction became a form of literature in which local traditions could be cherished, but tales and stories also acted as a forum in which ideas of history, progress, nationhood, and cultural authority could be fiercely contested.

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64 Jane and Anna Maria Porter, *Tales Round a Winter Hearth*, I, 69.

65 Leitch Ritchie, *Head-Pieces and Tail-Pieces* (London: Charles Tilt, 1826), Introduction, p. v.

66 Fielding, *Writing and Orality*, pp. 41–42.

67 *Monthly Review*, 99 (November 1822): 246–52, p. 247.

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Conclusion

Short Fiction in the 1830s

Dickens and Short Fiction

Historical surveys of literature always impose a rather blunt cut-off point. The preceding chapters have attempted to elaborate on some of the most significant movements and influences between 1800 and 1830, and at this juncture it seems appropriate to look ahead briefly to the progress of short fiction over the next decade. The 1830s have consistently resisted simple assessment by historians of literature. These interregnum years are habitually viewed as an uneasy bridge between the Romantics and the Victorians, and the decade is characterised by a slew of newly-minted fictional genres—the silver-fork novel, the Newgate novel, the military-adventure novel, the social-problem novel—some of which continued to develop through the remainder of the nineteenth century and some of which remained period-specific. The 1830s witnessed the passing of the old guard, with the death of Walter Scott in 1832, and the apprentice years of many of the great Victorian novelists, including Dickens and Thackeray. For short fiction, in broad terms, the watchword during the 1830s was expansion. Tales and stories, along with fiction in general, went through a phase of increased production and diversification, as the industry geared up for the comparatively vast publishing runs and new titles of the Victorian period. With both the novel and short fiction in flux, the periodical press became an increasingly important outlet. Meanwhile, the twin strains of moral–didactic fiction and traditional literature continued to help shape the history of short fiction.

One work which draws together several threads from the earlier decades is *Sketches by Boz*. Dickens's series began in the *Monthly Magazine* in 1833 and continued in various periodicals until the first collected edition was published by John Macrone in 1836. *Sketches by Boz* was a popular success—though not on the scale of *The Pickwick Papers*, which began its serialisation shortly after the collected publication of *Boz* in 1836. Dickens, however, was not paid for his earliest magazine submissions, and the history of the publication of *Boz* bears out the conviction of many short fiction-writers from the 1810s and 1820s: namely, that publishing in magazines was all very well, but to actually make a living it was necessary to persuade a publisher to issue a book-length collection. The runaway success of *Pickwick*, and the subsequent history of publishing novels in serial form, blurred the distinction between a series of magazine or newspaper pieces and a book-length narrative, but short fiction remained on the margins of this publishing practice.

Dickens was always alert to the best way to increase the profit on his writing, and *Sketches by Boz* brought periodical short fiction closer to the mainstream of literary publishing than any previous collection by rapidly transforming an assortment of contributions to periodicals into an eminently saleable collection with a coherent

internal logic. Boz's 'sketches' cover a variety of modes, from impressionistic exercises in humorous journalism to sentimental narratives of social deprivation, and their separation into 'sketches', 'scenes', 'characters', and 'tales' in the collected editions can seem rather arbitrary at times. Nonetheless, even the earliest pieces demonstrate the capacity to be organised into a series. As Kathryn Chittick argues: 'Looking back at those first hesitant efforts for the *Monthly*, the desire to introduce continuity is apparent.'[1] In part through his own exertions and in part through the increased willingness of the book trade, Dickens was able to transfer his short fiction from periodical to book collection far more easily and lucratively than earlier writers (James Hogg, most notably). Dickens understood that the key to making a living from short fiction was to make each story pay as many times as possible. If an author could secure payment for magazine publication, and follow this up with a collected book edition, then returns could be maximised. Some later writers, such as Anthony Trollope, went even further and attempted (not always successfully, in Trollope's case) to publish their stories first in American magazines, then British magazines, and finally as a book collection.

Dickens grew up reading the collections of many of the writers covered in the earlier chapters of this study, and *Sketches by Boz* helps distil some of their legacies. There is a large debt to Mitford's *Our Village*, particularly in the 'Seven Sketches from Our Parish', and there are echoes of the didactic story-writers of the early part of the century in the combination of stern social realism and moral imperative which characterises stories such as 'The Black Veil' and 'The Drunkard's Death'. Essayists, such as Lamb and Hazlitt, who blurred the lines between reportage, anecdote, and narrative, were undoubtedly an influence on Dickens's more journalistic sketches. *Boz* also reinforces the impact of Washington Irving's short fiction. Dickens was an avowed admirer of Irving, and his sketches have a connection to the miscellaneous qualities of *The Sketch Book* and *Bracebridge Hall*, as well as the genial, observational style of Geoffrey Crayon (not to mention the tendency of both Boz and Crayon to slip into metonymic reveries). Both writers shared several fascinations: tracing the topography of London, producing pen-sketches of singular persons, and recording local and national traditions and characteristics.[2] Without Irving's *Sketch Book*, it is difficult to imagine the shape that Dickens's earliest literary work would have taken.

Short Fiction and the Anthology

A broad increase in short fiction publication during the first half of the 1830s can be traced from the titles contained in the third part of *The English Novel* bibliography series, which covers the years 1830–1836. Nearly 150 collections of short fiction can be found for these six years—approximately twice the number published

1 Kathryn Chittick, *Dickens and the 1830s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 57.

2 For an extended discussion of the connections between the two writers see Malcolm Andrews, 'Dickens, Washington Irving, and English National Identity', *Dickens Studies Annual*, 29 (2000): 1–16.

during the whole of the 1820s.[3] By the 1830s, publication of fiction was expanding rapidly, though somewhat unevenly, and short fiction was taking up an increasingly important position in the overall market. Tale collections had already engaged the attention of major writers, but the one-off piece of short fiction was also becoming increasingly profitable. Stories continued to be used as filler material for the three-decker convention, and an increasing quantity were being published in magazines and gift-books. The 1830s also witnessed a marked increase in another publishing phenomenon: the anthology of short fiction.

In the General Introduction to *The English Novel, 1830–1836*, Peter Garside describes how changes in the fiction market between the 1820s and the 1830s included a rise in 'compilations of shorter fiction, usually presented as edited by one person'.[4] These compilations, or anthologies, contained stories by many of the authors who have been mentioned in the course this study, some of whom were by this stage renowned in the field of short fiction. Anthologies of short fiction were of course published prior to the 1830s, and collections of European tales and anthologies compiled from Gothic bluebooks were particularly prominent during the 1810s and 1820s.[5] However, such collections seldom included contemporary short fiction and earlier editors were often hesitant about the status and scope of their projects. The Preface to one compilation from the 1820s, *Tales of All Nations* (1827), argues nervously for the merits of 'a book which is the work of many hands', and describes how 'some objections have been offered to the class of works to which the present volume may be said to belong, on the score of the difficulty of obtaining a series of papers from different pens of equal merit and interest'.[6] By the 1830s this caution had evaporated. Authors of short fiction had increased in number and many were now well known to the public. The practice of soliciting contributions from renowned authors had been established by the annuals and gift-books. A new market now existed for collections of tales gathered from a variety of sources, and the book trade of the 1830s shifted to accommodate these writers and their chosen genre.

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3 This data has also been extrapolated from Peter Garside, et al. (eds), *The English Novel, 1830–1836*. Some 146 collections of short fiction were found for the six years. This figure includes miscellanies, didactic–religious titles, fiction which deals with local history, topography, and travel, as well as memoirs and fictionalised (auto) biographies, but excludes 36 programmatic titles by Harriet Martineau (appended to the main listings), 37 juvenile titles, and one uncertain reconstituted/unseen title. The figures for the 1820s are derived from the Corvey Collection, and are detailed in a note to Chapter 1, p. 34n.

4 Garside, et al. (eds), *The English Novel, 1830–1836*, General Introduction.

5 Two examples of European translations are *Popular Tales and Romances of the Northern Nations* (1823) and *Tales of the Dead* (1813), a translation of *Fantasmagoriana* (1812)—the French collection of supernatural tales read aloud by Byron to his coterie at Lake Geneva—which itself claimed to be translated from a German work. For further details of trade Gothic in the periodical press and anthologies, see Franz J. Potter, *The History of Gothic Publishing, 1800–1835: Exhuming the Trade* (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), Chapter 4.

6 *Tales of All Nations* (London: Thomas Hurst and Co., 1827), Preface, pp. i–ii. The editor of this work is unknown, though the Preface is signed 'H.A.S.'.

The anthology has enjoyed a long and varied history, but the compilation of stories by established, contemporary authors burgeoned in the late 1820s and 1830s. The lurid *Legends of Terror! And Tales of the Wonderful and Wild* was published in 1826, and was followed by a new series in 1830, which was subtitled, somewhat outrageously, as *Being a Collection of Legendary Tales, National Romances, & Traditional Relics, of Every Country, and of the Most Intense Interest*. With its tales packed into magazine-style double-columns and numerous illustrations, *Legends of Terror!* was clearly aimed at a general readership. It incorporated popular legends and folktales, and also reprinted stories by authors such as Walter Scott, Washington Irving, James Hogg, Gerald Griffin, Thomas Crofton Croker, and Allan Cunningham, as well as several tales from *Blackwood's*.[7] Some of the stories in this collection are provided with clear attributions. 'Wandering Willie's Tale', for instance, is acknowledged to be taken from *Redgauntlet*, but is re-titled 'A Night in the Grave; or, the Devil's Receipt!'. Other tales are not attributed: 'Rip Van Winkle' appears as Irving's work, but 'The Spectre Bridegroom' is also included anonymously.

In 1830, a more sober collection titled *The Story-Teller* inaugurated the anthology boom of the 1830s. This work drew together stories from *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, the *New Monthly Magazine*, the *Ladies' Museum*, and *Arliss's Pocket Magazine*, as well as translations from the French and German. A similar compilation, *The Tale Book*, was published in Paris in 1834, containing pieces by Washington Irving, Walter Scott, Jane Porter, one of the Banim brothers, and Leitch Ritchie.[8] Other anthologies were defined by particular national orientations. *The Club-Book* (1831) was a collection of stories by predominantly Scottish authors edited by Andrew Picken, and included tales by James Hogg, John Galt, and Picken himself. *Stories of American Life* (1830) and *Lights and Shadows of American Life* (1832), both edited by Mary Russell Mitford (perhaps in conjunction with James Athearn Jones) have already been discussed in Chapter 3. Irish stories by various authors were collected in Samuel Lover's *Popular Tales and Legends of the Irish Peasantry* (1834).

Many anthologies modelled themselves on the popular gift-books or annuals. Like the annuals, these collections were published towards the end of the year, and were often illustrated, though they omitted the poetry and essays which formed a large part of the content of gift-books. The Preface to *Christmas Tales*, published in 1825, claimed that the work was a compilation of unpublished run-off material intended for the *Forget-Me-Not* annual. Other anthologies of short fiction which were modelled on the annuals included *The Sisters' Budget* (1831), edited by Marion and Margaret Corbett; *The Continental Annual, and Romantic Cabinet* (1832), edited by William Kennedy, and *The Encyclopædia of Romance* (1833), edited by Henry Martineau.[9] These collections aimed at variety and novelty, and usually included

7 See *Legends of Terror! And Tales of the Wonderful and Wild* (London: Sherwood, Gilbert, and Piper; and Hunter, Edinburgh, 1826). *New Series* (London: G. Creed, 1830).

8 The contributing authors are given on the title-page, though Leitch Ritchie appears as 'Leigh Ritchie'. *The Tale Book*, 2 vols (Paris: Baudry's European Library, 1834).

9 The prefaces to *Christmas Tales*, *The Continental Annual*, and *The Encyclopædia of Romance* all indicate that they were abortive attempts at producing an ongoing series of anthologies, but no further numbers can be found. See also the entries for the latter two titles in *The English Novel, 1830–1836*: 1832: 53 and 1833: 48.

stories of romances, adventure stories, tales of terror, and translations of European stories in order to appeal to a wide range of tastes.

Several of the new breed of compilations, however, sought to distance themselves from the polite and sentimental miscellany of the gift-books by stressing their literary credentials. Andrew Picken's introductory essay to *The Club-Book* carefully situates the work as an exercise amongst like-minded literary figures (as the title implies), and the editor is anxious to make it clear that he wishes his collection to challenge the conventions of the fashionable market:

> [*The Club-Book*] is meant to differ as well from the numerous race of pretty picture-books of winter, with their lady-like poetry, and their refined romance, as from the general performance of our novelists,—wherein, by great art and pains-taking, and often sorely against the will of both reader and hero, they contrive to draw out the lengthened sweetness of those valuable productions, to the exact measure of bibliopolical prescription.[10]

By railing against the 'bibliopolical prescription' of the three-volume convention, Picken is able to distinguish between the concise and economic qualities of short fiction and the long-windedness of the standard novel. The anthology (and collected short fiction in general) was capable of making these criticisms while simultaneously taking on the novel on its own ground—in three volumes duodecimo.

Despite the fact that many compilations chose to regard themselves as distinct from the supposedly meretricious annuals, the process of selecting particular stories by prominent authors gave anthologies the same *raison d'être* as the 'pretty picture-books of winter': the wish to mark themselves out from what could by now be thought of as a morass of short fiction by cherry-picking only the best examples. In the same essay, Picken goes on to bemoan 'the difficulty in the present hackneyed state of this sort of literature, of writing short tales which may obtain the attention of those who have not the leisure or taste for three-volume undertaking'.[11] The process of anthologising acknowledges that a variety of readerships are in place, with differing desires and differing notions of quality. To select and to collect also implies that a literary genre has reached a certain level of success and that enough examples exist to necessitate editorial decisions of inclusion and exclusion: in effect to canonise the genre.

Leah Price has argued for a new criticism of the anthology as a genre—one which views the practice of anthologising less as a corrupting and simplifying influence on literature and more as a cultural device with a power and ideology of its own:

> A criticism which reduces anthologies to their evaluative function can do little more than catalogue binary oppositions: including or excluding particular texts, over- or under-representing a given category of authors, acknowledging or ignoring new writing. Anthologies are more than a referendum. They determine not simply who gets published or what gets read, but who reads, and how.[12]

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10 Andrew Picken (ed.), *The Club-Book*, 3 vols (London: Cochrane and Pickersgill, 1831), I, iii–iv.

11 Ibid., I, xii.

12 Leah Price, *The Anthology and the Rise of the Novel: From Richardson to George Eliot* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 3.

Anthologies also help to define genres. Short fiction is well suited to the demands of the anthology—like some forms of poetry, and unlike the novel, it does not need abridgement for inclusion. The compilations of the 1830s were central to establishing the generic credentials of short fiction, defining the form as both literarily distinct and relevant. They helped crystallise the aesthetics of British short fiction by bringing together a wide variety of examples from the early decades of the century, and by helping to formulate the beginnings of a canon.

Conclusion

A close examination of the short fiction published during the early decades of the nineteenth century reveals a diverse literary genre which was flourishing to a hitherto unknown degree. My suspicion is that if extensive archival studies were undertaken for the 1830s, 1840s, and 1850s a similarly rich seam of British short fiction, both in periodicals and in book collections, would emerge. This is not to say that the canonical short-story writers of the mid-to-late nineteenth century (Kipling, Stevenson, Wells, et al.) did not bring a new depth and polish to the genre, simply that they were operating within a more sophisticated and well-established short fiction market than has previously been acknowledged.

This study proposes that the development of short fiction was based to some extent on the emergence of a new market for collections of tales which could compete directly with the novel. The opening paragraphs of this study discuss the modern critical neglect of short fiction published during the early decades of the century. In particular, I wish to return here to two previous citations: to Wendell Harris's statement that since short fiction prior to the mid-Victorian period had 'neither an apparent mission nor an attractive market, there was little incentive for the sharpening of tools', and also to Charles May's argument that the short fiction of the early nineteenth century is defined by an attempt by 'the romantics' to first 'demythologize' and then 'remythologize' the folktale.[13] In opposition to both, I would argue that short fiction in the early nineteenth century was, to a large degree, defined by its market.

The aesthetic and formal experimentation that characterised the genre for the remainder of the century sprung in part from the new avenues offered by the periodical press and in part from the desire of publishers and authors to emulate the success that Washington Irving enjoyed with *The Sketch Book* within the conventional novel market. Many authors seized the opportunity of this potential readership to make short fiction into a vehicle for a powerful re-imagining of the place that a brief narrative held in literary culture: be it with the intention of providing readers with a sense of moral improvement or regional identity, or simply to relate stories of adventure, romance, horror, or amusement. This study has sought to disclose those versions of early-nineteenth-century short fiction that lie somewhere between the brusque negativity voiced by Harris and the woolly Romanticism of May's appraisal. The hope is that an approach based on investigative bibliographic research as well as

13 Harris, *British Short Fiction*, p. 21; and May, *The Short Story: The Reality of Artifice*, p. 5. These quotations are given in Chapter 1, pp. 5 and 8.

on readings of key texts has brought to light unrevealed aspects of a thriving, though immature and nebulous, genre. This genre was one that would go on to change and develop at a rapid pace throughout the next two centuries to become one of the most challenging and definitively modern forms of literature.

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