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T. G. WAINEWRIGHT'S ART CRITICISM AND METROPOLITAN MAGAZINE STYLE

David Stewart



THE EARLY DECADES OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY are coming to be recognised as a peculiarly uncertain time, socially, culturally, and artistically. London is centrally important to this understanding: the rapidly expanding metropolis, bigger than any city had been before, was the site of a new sense of cultural and social flux, which proved at once vibrant and disorientating.¹ The expanded audience for art that was traditionally the domain of the upper classes alone made it difficult in the urban environment to maintain the distinction between the aesthetic realm and the confusing mass of metropolitan sights and sounds. Certain forms of artistic representation crystallised this sense of uncertainty. The art gallery was a social space devoted at once to high art, yet unnervingly continuous with the spectacular, ephemeral entertainments on show throughout the city. This provoked adverse comment by many—art was being debased by its audience—but other writers sensed a liberating force in the very confusion they recognised. Thomas Griffiths Wainewright, though best remembered as a poisoner and a forger,² both exhibited his art in the city and acted as art critic for the *London Magazine*, and his criticism offers a unique insight into the way art was consumed in the period. Periodical publications, particularly the new literary magazines, were, like the galleries, intriguingly poised between audiences and their different modes of consumption. Wainewright's accounts of visiting the popular galleries take advantage of the interstitial nature of both of these forms; his art criticism, rather than trying to create a separate sphere for the aesthetic, recognises that for both magazines and art galleries in the 1810s and '20s, the aesthetic is always part of the metropolitan atmosphere. Wainewright and others like him recognised the confusing, indistinct nature of modern social, cultural, and intellectual life, but rather than trying to preserve distinctions (whether between classes or between artistic forms), they created a form of writing capable of celebrating metropolitan heterogeneity.

Art and the City's Shows

London in the early nineteenth century was expanding at an unprecedented rate, and, with the defeat of Napoleon in 1815, it became the central city of a

newly dominant British Empire. The city was a source of national pride, but it was also recognised as the site of a newly confusing social scene. Some excellent recent work has drawn out some of the aesthetic, political, and literary implications of the rise of a new social class, the indeterminate class defined by Marjorie Levinson as occupying a 'neither/nor' social position.³ Gregory Dart has drawn attention to the fact that this class and the reactions it provoked was a London phenomenon:

[With] the decline of artisanship and the rise of new forms of communication, commerce and bureaucracy, an entirely new species of worker comes into being, what we might call the semi-professional class. It comprised a heterogeneous assortment of people, taking in clerks, trainee lawyers and industrial apprentices on the one hand, and shopkeepers and craftsmen on the other. What bound them together was the fact that they were all, in their different ways, difficult to place within traditional (that is, eighteenth-century) categories.⁴

What Dart recognises is not simply that there was a newly mobile social class with aspirations towards the pursuits and the lifestyle of a higher class, but that this new class was interstitial, uncertainly placed, difficult to identify. As the people Dart describes flooded into the city, it became apparent that the old class categories no longer applied: aspirational cockneys prompted ambivalent responses because it was so difficult to tell if they were high or low, if they were vulgarly pretentious or dandies with a taste for low life.

The periodical in the 1820s which sold itself to this class better than any other was Henry Colburn's *New Monthly Magazine*. Aimed at an audience of middle-class women, men, and their families, it caught the desire for respectability, gentle humour, and pleasant poetry in the emergent middle classes and soon achieved a high circulation. An article by Thomas Colley Grattan captured some of the continuing sense of instability that the existence of this class and their entertainments, including widely affordable periodicals like the *New Monthly*, produced. The piece offers itself as the account of a Londoner returning to his native city after seven years' absence, surprised to be rudely treated by a housekeeper:

I was sadly puzzled to know the meaning of his housekeeper's want of ceremony. I looked at myself right and left, saw that my coat was good, a watch in my fob, and various other indications of gentility, all as they should be;—but my English readers will scarcely credit, that it was three hours afterwards before sundry such receptions reminded me that a single knock at the door was an official announcement that the hand which struck it was plebeian; and that all ranks are now-a-days dressed so much alike, that the man who has not the dandy knack for tying his cravat, may vainly hope to escape being occasionally confounded with his servant.⁵

'Gentility' has been reduced to a system of signs, which is why a gentleman might be 'confounded with his servant', and the class to which the *New Monthly* was directed was peculiarly sensitive to the possibility of such mistakes. Grattan makes light of the potential for social confusion, but the possibility of getting it wrong was forcibly felt in the period. The city was making differentiation worryingly uncertain.

Richard Altick in *The Shows of London* provides an important account of how social confusion began to affect the consumption of art. Discussing the exhibition of Wilkie's *Chelsea Pensioners Receiving the Gazette Announcing the Battle of Waterloo* at Somerset House in 1822, Altick notes how the audience for art had expanded: 'attracted by the subject, men and women representing all but the lowest walks of life, including the very classes whom the shilling admission charge had originally been designed to exclude, crowded Somerset House day after day'. This prompted adverse comment, even dismay at 'the intrusion of anonymous visitors without social credentials'.⁶ Art was being democratised. William Galperin has shown how the visual nature of new nineteenth-century art forms such as the panoramas and dioramas—forms aimed deliberately at a wide range of social groups—haunted Romantic art with alternative ideas of consumption.⁷ Fine art exhibitions were, it was feared, just one more show for the metropolitan crowd, and it was difficult to say what distinguished gazing at the latest pictures from gazing at the glittering shop fronts. Anna Jameson complained of

the loiterers and loungers, the vulgar starers, the gaping idlers, we used to meet there—people, who, instead of moving among the wonders and beauties [...] with reverence and gratitude, strutted about as if they had a right to be there; talking, flirting; touching the ornaments—and even the pictures!⁸

The social make-up of London, the uncertain composition of the audience for art, was at the centre of this concern: would readers *read*, would audiences appreciate, or unthinkingly consume? The traditional audience for art was still there, but the fear was that it, along with art itself, would be swallowed up by the expanding crowd, and that artists and artworks would start to be shaped by the habits of the new audience. Lucy Newlyn has shown how the anxiety over reading audiences and how they read was frequently phrased in terms that were 'culinary and appetitive, frequently combining metaphors of chopping up, recycling, and rendering down with ideas of hunger and lack of refinement'.⁹ Works of art had become objects to be consumed, used, and thrown away—ephemeral entertainments for the vast metropolitan crowd. Benjamin Haydon asked 'is it not a disgrace to this country that the leading historical painters should be obliged to exhibit their works like wild beasts, and advertise them like quack doctors!'¹⁰ An attempt to retain a clear distinction between the aesthetic sphere and the mountebank shows of the metropolis was threatened by this kind of uncertainty.

Other literary forms, however, found this social and aesthetic confusion liberating rather than oppressive. Gregory Dart has shown how important 'a certain degree of indeterminacy, even vagueness' is to Pierce Egan's immensely popular *Life in London*,¹¹ and part of the appeal of that book is that it provides a key to the different social codes, the languages of slang, dress, and manners that defined each class.¹² The novel is an eloquent expression of the joys of cultural confusion: the life of London consists, Egan suggests, not in experiencing high or low life alone, but in mingling with all shades of the social spectrum. Egan recognises that his book will find a home across a range of social groups: 'my readers of the higher class of society may feel, or seem to think, that I have introduced a little too much of the *slang*; but I am anxious to render myself perfectly intelligible to all parties. Half of the world are *up* to it: and it is my intention to make the other half *down* to it'.¹³ Egan's readers are inducted into worlds which seem to exclude outsiders who do not speak the language of 'the fancy' or of the opera house by a wealth of footnotes explaining the latest fashionable slang terms, and this extends across the social spectrum. Those of the 'higher class of society' should know the slang of the boxing ring; those lower should know the codes of the fashionable drawing rooms.

Egan takes his heroes to the Cock Pits, the opera house, and even for a 'lounge' at the Royal Academy's Exhibition (*LL*, 32). The 'life' of London is various, unceasing, and socially diverse; and in this atmosphere the hero, Corinthian Tom, finds 'his mind so overwhelmed with passing subjects, that reflection was quite out of the question' (*LL*, 44). The 'rapid succession' leaves him unable to think of the 'merits or demerits' of the shows he attends (*LL*, 88): the metropolitan mind gazes, but does not digest what it gazes upon, whether it is an ephemeral entertainment or a Gainsborough at the exhibition. This epitomises a concern Wordsworth raised in 1807: 'these people in the senseless hurry of their idle lives do not *read* books, they merely snatch a glance at them that they may talk about them'.¹⁴ By placing so many diverse entertainments within the reach, geographically and financially, of such a wide social spectrum, the metropolis produced a miscellaneous but uncomprehending mode of consumption that was applied to books and paintings as well as less elevated shows. Thomas Love Peacock expresses the anxiety raised by these flashy metropolitan modes of consumption when comparing modern periodicals with those of the previous century:

The stream of knowledge seems spread over a wider superficies, but what it has gained in breadth it has lost in depth. There is more dictionary learning, more scientific smattering, more of that kind of knowledge which is calculated for shew in general society, to produce a brilliant impression on the passing hour of literature, and less, far less, of that solid and laborious research which builds up in the silence of the closet, and in the disregard of perishable fashions of mind, the strong and permanent structure of history and philosophy.¹⁵

Periodical productions partake of this malaise. By offering surveys of the intellectual life of the country in condensed weekly, monthly, or quarterly form, periodicals produced, contemporaries feared, a new type of reader, one who could give the impression of being well read without doing the hard work. This is not simply a concern about intellectual laziness, but a concern about social definition. A wide and comprehensive knowledge of Greek, Latin, French, German, and English texts suggests not simply a fastidious and intellectually curious mind, but membership of a class that has the leisure to read deeply and widely, a class of whom a classical education is expected. In a metropolitan social world where individuals are increasingly difficult to place, knowledge became an important tool of categorisation.

Francis Jeffrey was more lenient on contemporary readers:

It is easy, indeed, to say, that the age has become frivolous and impatient of labour [...] to us, the phenomenon, in so far as we are inclined to admit its existence, has always appeared to arise from the great multiplication of the branches of liberal study, and from the more extensive diffusion of knowledge among the body of the people.¹⁶

In an age when there is so much to read, the areas of study that require the greatest application and dedication (Jeffrey is reviewing an edition of Dugald Stewart's *Philosophical Essays*) are neglected in favour of miscellaneous knowledge. For Peacock, this diffusion leads to superficial knowledge, designed for show, and Jeffrey is inclined to agree:

So many easy and pleasant elementary books,—such tempting summaries, abstracts and tables,—such beautiful engravings, and ingenious charts and *coups d'oeil* of information,—so many museums, exhibitions and collections, meet us at every corner,—and so much amusing and provoking talk in every party, that a taste for miscellaneous and imperfect knowledge is formed, almost before we are aware, and our time and curiosity is irrevocably devoted to a sort of Encyclopedical trifling.¹⁷

Jeffrey recognises that this is part of the metropolitan experience (entertainments are found at 'every corner') and that such an experience accommodates legitimate forms of knowledge as well as the dubious 'summaries'. Reviewing Thomas Campbell's seven-volume *Specimens of the British Poets*, a 'collection' of poetry, Jeffrey exempts it from the defects to which the genre is liable. Campbell

sets before us, in a great gallery of pictures, the whole course and history of the art [of poetry], from its first rude and infant beginnings, to its maturity, and perhaps its decline. While it has all the grandeur and instruction that belongs to such a gallery, it is free from the perplexity and distraction which is generally complained of in such exhibitions; as each piece is necessarily considered sepa-

rately and in succession, and the mind cannot wander, like the eye, through the splendid labyrinth in which it is enchanted.¹⁸

Jeffrey's sense of the literary 'gallery of pictures' posits an ordered reading experience, necessary, as he recognises, to overcome the 'great multiplication' that marked modernity. Jeffrey argues that Campbell's *Specimens* prevent spectacular, disordered reading (the 'glance' that provoked Wordsworth) by training its readers in what is best, and, by means of his introductory essays to each poet and the sense he gives of a coherent literary history (the 'wonderful progress [...] and history of the art'), a sense of what to read and how to read it. Yet, 'Encyclopaedic trifling' remains a threatening aspect of contemporary culture. The 'gallery' of poets, presented in printed form, is set above the 'tempting summaries' of the present age and the endless 'museums, exhibitions and collections' of the modern city: Campbell's reader will not be distracted by metropolitan amusements. For Wainewright, I will argue, the idea of the gallery functions quite differently: 'perplexity and distraction' are central to his experience of writing the city.

Magazines, Education, and the Crowd

Part of the charm of the *London Magazine* in its early years was the sense of community it fostered by means of inter-contributor banter, of which Thomas Griffiths Wainewright was one of the most adept exponents: as Joel Haefner has commented, his articles often functioned as 'advertisements for the magazine'.¹⁹ One of the most revealing of these debates was that between the magazine's fine arts writer, Wainewright, and William Hazlitt, the drama correspondent. Wainewright had, in the persona of Janus Weathercock, been building an identity as a leisured, dandyish connoisseur through the early numbers of the magazine, and Weathercock in the June number had been irked by Hazlitt's taste for low life and plain speaking:

Now, Mr. Drama of the LONDON seems determined to show his readers that his stomach [is] hearty—that he can relish bread and cheese, and porter, which certainly are very fine things in the country, and—when we can get nothing else, —and so far, all this is very well. But surely, in the centre of fashion, we might be now and then indulged with more elegant fair,—something that would suit better with the diamond rings on our fingers, the Antique Cameos in our breast pins, our cambric pocket handkerchief breathing forth Attargul, our pale lemon-coloured kid gloves. —Some chicken fricaseed white for instance; a bottle of Hock, or Moselle, and a glass of Maraschino.²⁰

Continuing his gentle mockery, he paints a portrait of Hazlitt:

He affects a liking for *Tatnam*-court-road, rather than for Albemarle-street. He pretends a dislike for lords in the abstract, and would have us imagine that he preferred the noisy rebels in the gallery.

He makes honourable mention of a certain Miss Valency, who, our hair-dresser informs us, is a bouncing Columbine at *Ashlays* or some of *them* places.' He entertains serious thoughts of the Royal Cobourg Theatre—which we find, by reference to the picture of London, is situated in the borough of Southwark!—faugh!²¹

Weathercock is an exquisite who deplores all vulgar tastes: his is a fashionableness maintained by a system of exclusions. This prompted Hazlitt to respond quietly in a *Table Talk* essay: 'to condemn because the multitude admire is as essentially vulgar as to admire because they admire'.²² In a more immediate response to Janus Weathercock in the *London*, however, he is at once playful and cutting: 'We are never afraid of being confounded with the vulgar; nor is our time taken up in thinking of what is ungenteel, and persuading ourselves that we are mightily superior to it'.²³ Hazlitt brings out the central ambiguity of Wainewright's dandified posturing. He insists on the distinction between what is fashionable and what is vulgar because he is conscious of his own insecurity. Wainewright's posturing was convincing enough to fool Hazlitt's grandson and Wainewright's only editor:

he is realised to me as an individual who, having had no regular literary training, takes up his pen for a time, as he might his billiard cue, dashes off an article or so, when or while he is in the humour, or a few *vers de société*, and then throws up the hobby of the hour to choose a new one.²⁴

Hazlitt, rather more perceptively, identified him as a 'newspaper hack'.²⁵ Wainewright became notorious as a forger and a poisoner precisely because his inheritance was insufficient to support his pseudo-aristocratic lifestyle, even when supplemented by paid journalism. The dandified amateur is himself a member of that socially unfixed class that wrote for, and, one assumes, read, the *London*.

In 1823, Thomas De Quincey began a series of five 'Letters to a Young Man Whose Education Has Been Neglected' in the *London Magazine*. He sets out a rather daunting program of study aimed precisely at 'semi-professionals' without a classical education. He recognises in the articles the difficulties of reading in an age when so much printed matter is produced, and of the dangers of swift reading that aims only at the 'showy emptiness, of pretence, of noise, of words'.²⁶ Wainewright parodies such programs in two 'Letters from a Roué' which propose 'to enlighten you and your readers—to show you some of our *institutions*—"to give you a peep into our knowledge box"'.²⁷ The Roué addresses his Letters from White's and lays down the codes of dress, manners, and language appropriate to such clubs and to the society in which Roués mix. The club itself is an important signifier of exclusivity: 'I have mentioned *White's*. You must know it—but some of your readers may not. It is now the leading subscription house in St. James's-street,—the Royal Exchange of the west, where men of *birth* "do congregate"'.²⁸ Wainewright toys with his readers

here. De Quincey prescribes a difficult but possible course of education: the language of the classically educated gentleman can be learned. Wainewright's Roué also recognises that society creates its divisions, its stratification into high and low, by making language, dress, and social customs into a system of signs: the cockney identifies himself by not knowing when to remove his hat or how to ride to hounds. The Roué teasingly suggests that the code can be learned, while continuing to maintain that White's is open only to men of 'birth': social distinction is part of a joke. De Quincey preserves the distinction between 'high' and 'low' entertainment, but Wainewright, I will argue, uses the magazine and its uncertain audience to destabilise the possibility of maintaining such distinctions.

Wainewright again turns educator in his art criticism for the *London*. His criticism is distinctive because it is as much concerned with the buying and selling of prints as it is with commenting on the art displayed at the latest exhibition. His articles often finished with a list of the best of the current crop of prints available at Colnaghi's, Woodburne's, and the other popular print dealers. In the October 1821 number, he first extols the virtues of Giulio Romano, then gives a list of the best prints from his paintings and where to buy them: 'The Hours leading out the Horses of the Sun; in a very high taste of poetry: famous by the criticism of Sir Joshua' is available at '2s. 6d. or 3s.', while 'Jupiter suckled by the Goat Amalthea, and fed with Honey by the Nymphs' is three or four shillings, but 'if you can spare the cash, I advise you to buy Bonosone's print, (without name,) taken, as I should imagine, from a drawing: you will find it at either Woodburne's or Colnaghi's, to a certainty, for 1l.11s. 6d. or 2l. 2s. od.'²⁹ There is something disconcertingly direct in the manner in which he gives prices.³⁰ Art is conceived of as a reproducible commodity, desirable because it is fashionable (whether the criticism of Sir Joshua is well founded is not at issue—Wainewright admired Reynolds but preferred Fuseli—what is important is that Sir Joshua makes prints *famous*), and yet, because of the modest cost of prints, it is a pursuit available to a wide social spectrum. In response to the articles under the name of 'Cornelius Van Vinkbooms' called 'Dogmas for Dilettanti,' 'Senex' (either Wainewright himself or his *London* cohort J. H. Reynolds) poses as a provincial lover of the fine arts, and remarks that 'I read your dogmas the first among the articles in the LONDON MAGAZINE, and that I learn enough from them to set me up as a connoisseur [*sic*].'³¹ The periodical can educate, but the dilettantes it produces are rather dubious: they only 'set themselves up' as connoisseurs. The love of art becomes a social skill, something one can develop with 'cash' and the guidance of the periodical press.

Metropolitan Form: Magazines and the Gallery

Wainewright reported on the latest exhibitions for the *London*, and he soon developed a distinctive prose method to deal with what Jeffrey called the 'perplexity and distraction which is generally complained of in such exhibitions'.

The first article, 'Sentimentality on the Fine Arts' (February 1820), is an account of an illustrated edition of Goethe's *Faustus*, and it is dull in comparison with his later work because it does not focus on the things that make metropolitan art consumption distinctive: it is contained, linear, conclusive, and without the dandified personality that Wainewright came to assume. By the end of the first volume of the magazine, however, the personality of Janus Weathercock had become so strongly defined that he seemed three-dimensional, and he frequently carried on conversations with his audience.³² His 'Dialogue on the Exhibition at Somerset-House' does criticise the art works on show, but the type of criticism he offers is quirkily individual:

Jonas Wagtail. Yes! and the flesh is in a very beautiful tone of colour,—and what a pulpy, marrowy touch he had!—but here are several more that you must see.—Here's a most capital landscape, by Constable, which deserves very great attention, and this is Fuseli's (No. 25.) Incantation, in which you will find—

Janus Weathercock. Plenty of food for an entire day's recreation, which I intend to devote to it, and to the Cathedral scene, yonder. (No. 131.)³³

The 'Dialogue' carries on at this pace: it marks the works worthy of attention but is at once distracted by more enticing objects and hurries on. Wainewright's digressive style exemplifies the nature of viewing in the modern metropolis. When not talking to an imagined friend, he is talking to his dog, to his editor, or, most commonly, to his reader: consuming art, he recognises, is a social activity, and the effect this has on criticism is significant.

For Wainewright, the magazine text should aspire to the condition of chit-chat. What he calls, quoting *Blackwood's Magazine*, his 'chitty-chatty and off-hand' method comes into its own at the art exhibition.³⁴ One of the best examples is his account of 'The British Institution' (April 1821). It begins: 'My money paid—my book bought—here goes for the "feast of Belshazzar."—Sir, you must wait a full hour—it is the fashion'. He notices painting after painting, pausing at some, dashing past others, always noting (in brackets) the number of the painting as it appeared in the catalogue. 'Now to something pleasant: give me an ounce of civet, good apothecary!' he exclaims on seeing a 'pretty fragrant Landscape by Miss Landseer', and immediately adds 'there is a Portrait next to it (11, Cupid) by Jackson', but 'I must hurry on, otherwise I would compliment more at large'. The pace is frenetic, and he stops only when he runs out of space: 'gentle reader, "my pen is at the bottom of the page," as Beppo says, and I dare be sworn thou art glad of it'.³⁵ What he offers is not criticism of the exhibition, but an account of the experience of attending it. No work exists in itself, but is seen as part of a show: Jackson is 'next to' Landseer, and Wainewright's account of the exhibition is linear only in the sense that it records what he sees in the order that he sees it. This is breathless, spectacular commentary, unlikely

to leave much in the memory but a sense of exhilaration: and it is wholly appropriate to the type of exhibition he is commenting on.

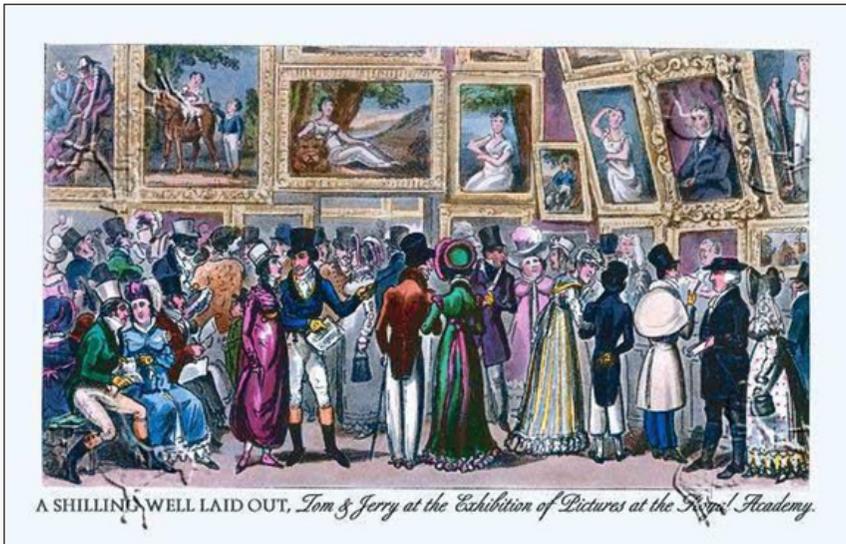


FIG. 1. ROBERT AND GEORGE CRUIKSHANK, FROM *LIFE IN LONDON* (1823)



FIG. 2. GEORGE CRUIKSHANK, FROM *COMIC ALMANACK* (1835)

Two prints by the Cruikshanks (see Figures 1 and 2) suggest the way in which viewing art had become a social spectacle, open to a wide range of social groups. The first, made for Egan's *Life in London*, shows a colourful, fashionable crowd, enjoying the latest spectacle in a louche, but orderly fashion.³⁶ The art

itself seems secondary to the conversations the crowd enjoy, and the presence of Egan's somewhat unreflective heroes suggests that the art on show might be consumed in a less than discriminating fashion, that the exhibition, as C. S. Matheson has argued, may have more value as a social spectacle than as an intellectual pursuit. There are elements of the 'disorientating, modernistic blurring of the senses' that Martin Myrone has identified as a feature of the nineteenth-century gallery experience,³⁷ but the scene retains its order by virtue of its fashionability: a black face talking to a Turk in the crowd suggests a degree of social diversity, but the wrong classes are largely kept out. A later print presents a wholly different scene of art appreciation: whereas Tom and Jerry mingled with the finely dressed, here viewing art has become the occupation of the crowd. In both pictures, paintings fill the walls, but the later picture gives a sense of the confusing, distracting inundation of objects to view. The consumers, too, are of a much more diverse social range: there are some top hats, but their owners are caricatures with none of the elegant lines of the other scene; a child gawks upwards while her father stands open-mouthed; a fat man mops a sweaty brow; an elderly woman has her toe trodden on, and members of the crowd gape at the artworks as they might the freaks at Bartholomew Fair. The emphasis is on disorder, confusion, social uncertainty; art has become wholly obscured by the behaviour of the crowd.

Hazlitt, too, had his doubts about the nature of these large exhibitions: 'it is throwing down the barriers which separate knowledge and feeling from ignorance and vulgarity, and proclaiming a Bartholomew fair show of the Fine Arts'.³⁸ Art, Hazlitt feared, by being viewed by this new class of consumer, would begin to reflect the confusing atmosphere of the contemporary metropolis. The art world was being transformed by the increasingly obvious presence of a new class of consumer, and it is this social mixture as much as the chaotic hanging of paintings that lies behind Wainewright's sense of riotous confusion. His account of the Exhibition of the Royal Academy has this digression:

We are now in the great room, reader, where, if you have no objection, we will sit down behind this gay party, who seem to be dealing about their remarks as freely as you and I do. 'Whose is that?' 'Fuseli's.'—'La! What a frightful thing! I hate his fancies of fairies and spirits and nonsense. One can't understand them.' (Speak for yourself, miss!) 'It's foolish to paint things which nobody ever saw, for how is one to know whether they're right? Isn't it, Mr D——?'³⁹

This seems to echo conventional condemnation of the undereducated middle classes that Cruikshank satirises, but Wainewright is not able to dismiss this type of art consumption so easily. He recognises that they give their opinions as freely as 'you and I', meaning Janus Weathercock and the gentle reader. Mr Fine Arts and his disciples may claim the superiority of their 'remarks', but

the claim is insecurely based, because the judgments of the 'gay party' and Wainewright's own take the same form: 'remarks'.

In a paper in which he gives 'Reasons against Writing an Account of "The Exhibition"' (June 1822), he notes:

There are 1049 *works*, as they are termed, occupying in their intitulation 49 pages 4to. To give anything like an account of a quarter of these would fill three of our Magazines. Let us count the notes of admiration in our catalogue—173! too many by 100! How many double crosses?—57! Still uncompassable!⁴⁰

Vast exhibitions for vast audiences inevitably create a sense of the unmanageable, of the mind struggling to contain the totality. The dominant response is one of bewilderment prompted by endless multiplication, of too much to view and not enough time to view it all in a thoughtful manner. In a moment of humility, Wainewright confesses:

Things that spring up under my nose dazzle me. I must look at them through Time's Telescope. Elia complains that to him the merit of a MS. poem is uncertain;—'*print*,' as he excellently says, 'settles it.'—Fifty years' toning does the same thing to a picture. It is very possible, that Sir Thomas Lawrence and Phillips, and Owen, are as good in their way as Vandyke (and they have certainly less affectation).—Wilkie may be better than Teniers, and Westall be as much the originator of a style as Correggio. I really believe our posterity will think so; but in the mean time I am dubious and uncomfortable.⁴¹

The compelling immediacy of the metropolitan spectacle, in which the reviewer is placed amid a mixed crowd of consumers, inevitably compromises his judgments. No-one can be sure of the value of the metropolitan aesthetic experience, but for Wainewright, this is its charm.

Wainewright frequently recognises he is given to 'skipping from one thing to another'⁴²:

In vain I resolve and resolve—*this* shall be on Mr. Angerstein's collection—*this* on Rafaëlo!—*this* on modern embellished books!—and so on. No sooner is my pen filled with ink, but my conceit (I have not the vanity to affect a fancy, much less an imagination) goes round like a whirligig, and then shoots away in the very direction it should *not*. Our dear Editor is quite accustomed to this chance-medley *method*.⁴³

Wainewright invents a style that is distracted, digressive, vivid, but inconclusive. This is his characterisation of another of his journalistic personae, Egomet Bonmot:

He is *the* strangest medley, *the* maddest wag it was ever our fate to cope withal! [...] Every thing by fits, and nothing long, he changes

about—not with the phases of the moon, but the minutes on the clock;—and one revolving hour shall find him critic, fiddler, poet, and buffoon. *He cannot last long.* We are something like adepts in diagnostics, and repeat that he cannot last long. The *materiel* must wear out with the friction of such violent changes.⁴⁴

Like the metropolitan spectacle he comments on, his style is ephemeral. He regrets this, but he is also unrepentant. He intends to write about art, and to write in an artistic manner (one that would assure him of permanence), but life keeps breaking in. The metropolitan world around him demands a prose style that can express the social and aesthetic bewilderment that it produces: Wainewright's style is brilliantly adapted to do this, even at the cost of his posthumous reputation.

The Roué articles, however playfully, suggest that the magazine can be socially educative, that a new form like the magazine article can impose order on a metropolitan scene that it recognises as perplexingly uncertain. In another article he voices the concerns of his age about the packaging of knowledge: 'the vital aim of a *Review* was, and is startlingly obvious; viz. to furnish a little compendious way to the Stagyrite's chair, for those who lack the ability or the will (which is pretty much the same thing in effect) to travel the regular rutty road.' But, after a lengthy parenthesis on the way the public uses reviews, he returns to his original topic: 'Where was I? Oh! ah! "nature of Magazines." Yes! well,—I leave you to ponder over my query, satisfied that I have awakened you to a very weighty and necessary preliminary to improvement'.⁴⁵ Typically, he defines what he takes the nature of magazines to be by performing a definition: magazines, for Wainewright, are defined by digression, exclamation, personality-filled parentheses, incompleteness. The way in which Wainewright uses art criticism in the *London* is perfectly attuned to the metropolis of the early nineteenth century. He recognises that the consumption of art is a social activity, and his idea of aesthetic value is affected by this. By refusing to distinguish art from commerce, or art from vulgar spectacle, Wainewright represents the value of art as continuous with the joys of dandyism and the excitement of the crowded and confusing exhibition. Wainewright's prose is deliberately inexact, incomplete, flashy, spectacular. It is this that ties it to its immediate circumstances, and, as he so adeptly diagnosed, has ensured that it would not '*last*', but it is this that makes it so redolent of the metropolitan scene he presents.

Wainewright and his editor John Scott colluded in an early article titled 'Janus's Jumble'. The article consists of an uninterrupted digression, and halfway through there are several rows of asterisks where Weathercock's 'Account of the Exhibition at Somerset House' should be.⁴⁶ The account appears at the end of the magazine, with a footnote suggesting that Janus had left his manuscript at the club, and that a waiter handed it in to Scott. It is a typical magazine fiction, but one that Scott as Editor pretends to find a little troubling:

these incoherencies and chasms afflict us (the Editor) sorely. The extraordinary author has either not written, or forgotten to transmit, the continuation of his conversation with Mr. Bohté, and almost the whole of his chapter on the exhibition. We can only, therefore, make out, that the conversation in question suggested the visit to Somerset House, and that the visit to Somerset House suggested notices of the pictures,—which if we can get hold of in any decent time, shall be crammed in wherever we may be able to find room—either under the head of Fine Arts, or the more appropriate one of *Commercial Report*.

Scott recognises that Wainwright's distinctive mode of art criticism, for all its aspiration to the aesthetic realm, has as much to do with the 'Business' department of the magazine as it does with its literary and artistic reports because Wainwright refuses to distinguish between the connoisseur and other kinds of consumer.

As one of the *London's* chief writers, Wainwright helped to define the magazine's characteristic style. His 'incoherencies and chasms', the affected dandyism, the flashy, ephemeral style contributed to an understanding of magazine writing that was eminently metropolitan. His articles, rather than educating his readers or attempting to enforce social categorisation, instead capture the indeterminate, confusing spirit of the modern city. Magazines, like the great galleries Wainwright visited, are neither high nor low, nor aimed solely at the degraded sampling of 'culture' that the semi-professional class was thought to demand, but constituted a new genre designed to reflect variety, miscellaneity. Magazines were divided into sections which appeared to categorise knowledge: the 'Theatrical Report' was distinct from the 'Fine Arts', and both were distinct from business and commerce. Yet these categories, as Scott recognised, were never wholly separate: magazines best reflected the new metropolitan experience, the defining characteristic of which was that it placed the idea of distinction under threat. Charles Lamb was the *London's* best-paid contributor, and when the magazine's sales started to drop off, the *London's* editor turned to him for advice. Lamb responded:

What is gone [*sic*] of the Opium Eater, where is Barry Cornwall, & above all what is become of Janus Weathercock—or by his worse name of Vink-something? He is much wanted. He was a genius of the Lond. Mag. The rest of us are single Essayists.

You must recruit. You will get too serious else. Janus was characteristic. He talked about it & about it. The Lond. Mag. wants the personal note too much. Blackwd. owes everything to it.⁴⁷

Wainwright has been forgotten as an essayist, but, as Lamb recognises, it is the prose style that he developed, rather than that of more canonical periodical writers like Lamb, Hazlitt, and De Quincey, that best defines what is modern and distinctively metropolitan about the magazines which became so popular

in the years after Waterloo. Wainewright's style, by placing the modern city within the magazine, was able to capture the vivid, fleeting nature of the experience of London in a way that proved compelling to contemporary readers. Rather than attempting to cope with the perplexing uncertainty of modern culture, Wainewright revels in its indeterminacy, creating a form of writing poised between permanence and ephemerality, the aesthetic and the crowd that consumed art, a form of writing peculiarly well adapted to reflect the culture of his time. 

NOTES

1. Recent work has argued for the importance of London to the emergence of Romantic literature and culture, notably Marilyn Butler's 'Hidden Metropolis: London in Sentimental and Romantic Writing', in *London World City, 1800–1840*, edited by Celina Fox (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1992), pp. 187–98, and *Romantic Metropolis: The Urban Scene of British Culture, 1780–1840*, edited by James Chandler and Kevin Gilmartin (Cambridge: CUP, 2005).
2. For an account of Wainewright's turbulent career as a gentleman, artist, writer, forger and poisoner, see *Essays and Criticism by Thomas Griffiths Wainewright*, edited by W. C. Hazlitt (London: Reeves & Turner, 1880), pp. ix–lxxxii and Andrew Motion's recent biography/novel, *Wainewright the Poisoner* (London: Faber & Faber, 2000). Nick Groom has recently traced the influence of Wainewright as an emblem of depraved self-indulgence and forged identity in Victorian literature—see "I am nothing": A Typology of the Forger from Chatterton to Wilde, in *The Victorians and the Eighteenth Century: Reassessing the Tradition*, edited by Francis O'Gorman and Katherine Turner (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 203–22. Oscar Wilde's 'Pen, Pencil and Poison' has added much to Wainewright's notoriety: it is an unsurprisingly amusing take on Wainewright, though Wilde does deserve credit as one of the very few to make any comment on Wainewright's career as either critic or artist—see *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, edited by Vyvyan Holland (London: Collins, 1948), pp. 993–1008.
3. See Marjorie Levinson, *Keats's Life of Allegory: The Origins of a Style* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), p. 5. Richard Cronin has drawn out some of the literary implications of the awareness of this class in *The Politics of Romantic Poetry: In Search of the Pure Commonwealth* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), especially pp. 181–99.
4. Gregory Dart, "'Flash Style': Pierce Egan and Literary London, 1820–28', *History Workshop Journal*, 51 (2001), 181–25 (pp. 184–85). In an article dealing with the attacks on the 'Cockney School' that appeared in *Blackwood's Magazine*, Dart recognises that concerns about the status of writing and art were connected to the experience of the metropolis: 'concerns about the culture of the nineteenth-century city were blended with a series of anxieties about modern journalism'—see 'The Cockney Moment', *Cambridge Quarterly*, 32.3 (September 2003), 203–23 (p. 206). Julian Wolfreys's fascinating study of London in literature sees the city itself as indeterminate and uncertainly defined. London, for Wolfreys, is an expression of modernity, 'a city in the act of becoming, a city always in the process of self-transformation'—see *Writing London: The Trace of the Urban Text from Blake to Dickens* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), p. 7.
5. *New Monthly Magazine*, 5 (Dec 1822), 503–04.

6. Richard Altick, *The Shows of London* (Cambridge, MA and London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1978), p. 406. For excellent recent criticism on the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century art exhibitions at the Royal Academy, see *Art on the Line: The Royal Academy Exhibitions at Somerset House, 1780–1836*, edited by David H. Solkin (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 2001).
7. See *The Return of the Visible in British Romanticism* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993) and Gillen D'Arcy Wood, *The Shock of the Real: Romanticism and Visual Culture, 1760–1860* (New York: Palgrave, 2001).
8. Quoted in Altick, *Shows of London*, p. 406.
9. Lucy Newlyn, *Reading, Writing and Romanticism: The Anxiety of Reception* (Oxford: OUP, 2000), p. 325.
10. Benjamin Robert Haydon, *Correspondence and Table Talk*, 2 vols (London: Chatto & Windus, 1876), II, 293.
11. Dart, “Flash Style”, p. 182.
12. Gary R. Dyer has related the use of ‘flash’ or ‘cant’ language in the criminal classes to literary language in the period, recognising the way in which its deployment by writers like Egan excludes certain types of reader, and recognising that such codes applied to all classes—see ‘Reading as a Criminal in Early Nineteenth-Century Fiction’, *Wordsworth Circle*, 35.3 (Summer 2004), pp. 141–46.
13. Pierce Egan, *Life in London; or, the Day and Night Scenes of Jerry Hawthorn, Esq. and his Elegant Friend Corinthian Tom, Accompanied by Bob Logic, the Oxonian, in their Rambles and Sprees through the Metropolis* (London: Sherwood, Jones & Co., 1823), p. 84. *Life in London* was published in monthly instalments in 1820, and first published in book form by Sherwood, Neely & Jones in 1821. Subsequent references are to the 1823 edition, abbreviated *LL*.
14. *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Middle Years—Volume I*, edited by Ernest de Selincourt and Mary Moorman (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), p. 150.
15. Thomas Love Peacock, ‘An Essay on Fashionable Literature’, *The Halliford Edition of the Works of Thomas Love Peacock*, edited by H. F. B. Brett-Smith and C. E. Jones, 10 vols (London: Constable & Co., 1924–34), VIII, 261–91 (p. 267).
16. *Edinburgh Review*, 17 (Nov 1810), 168.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 169.
18. *Edinburgh Review*, 31 (March 1819), 468.
19. Joel Haefner, ‘The Two Faces of the *London Magazine*’, *Charles Lamb Bulletin*, 44 (Oct 1983), 69–81 (p. 75). Haefner’s article is the only recent study of Wainewright’s prose (Wainewright’s later career as a poisoner is rather better documented), and he perceptively places Wainewright in his *London Magazine* context. For Haefner, Wainewright’s ‘anarchic presentation of personality’ is one extreme of the magazine’s style, with the ‘intellectually ethical [...] reasoned, logical’ style of the editor John Scott at the other extreme.
20. *London Magazine*, 1 (June 1820), 631.
21. *Ibid.*, pp. 631–32.
22. *The Collected Works of William Hazlitt*, edited by P. P. Howe, 21 vols (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1930–34), VIII, 160.
23. *London Magazine*, 2 (July 1820), 89.
24. Wainewright, *Essays and Criticism*, p. xxxii.
25. Hazlitt, *Collected Works*, XX, 148.

26. *London Magazine*, 7 (Mar 1823), 331. De Quincey recognises that 'under our present enormous accumulation of books, I do affirm, that a miserable distraction of choices [...] must be very generally incident to the times' (p. 328).
27. *London Magazine*, 3 (Apr 1821), 420.
28. *Ibid.*
29. *London Magazine*, 4 (Oct 1821), 424.
30. W. C. Hazlitt remarks 'he occasionally offends us by his Dibdinian way of puffing current ware, and recommending to his reader to send to some shop to secure a copy of something or other'—Wainewright, *Essays and Criticism*, p. xxiv.
31. *London Magazine*, 4 (Nov 1821), 538.
32. See *London Magazine*, 1 (June 1820), 700–04.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 703.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 657.
35. *London Magazine*, 3 (Apr 1821), 437, 438, 438, 440, and 444.
36. See C. S. Matheson, "A Shilling Well Laid Out": The Royal Academy's Early Public', in *Art on the Line: The Royal Academy Exhibitions at Somerset House, 1780–1836*, edited by David H. Solkin (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 2001), pp. 39–53. Matheson discusses this print by Cruikshank in the context of the developing nature of the Royal Academy, arguing that by the time of *Life in London's* publication, 'the Royal Academy figures as part of the warp and woof of London itself, its patrons mobile rather than obedient, and the exhibition an experience to be performed rather than internalized' (p. 52).
37. Martin Myrone, 'The Sublime as Spectacle: The Transformation of Ideal Art at Somerset House', in *Art on the Line*, edited by Solkin, pp. 77–91 (p. 79).
38. *Annals of the Fine Arts*, 5 (1820), 294.
39. *London Magazine*, 4 (July 1821), 71.
40. *London Magazine*, 5 (June 1822), 551.
41. *London Magazine*, 4 (July 1821), 69.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 74.
43. *London Magazine*, 6 (Nov 1822), 446.
44. *London Magazine*, 1 (June 1820), 657.
45. *London Magazine*, 5 (May 1822), 468.
46. *London Magazine*, 1 (June 1820), 629.
47. *The Letters of Charles Lamb, to Which Are Added Those of his Sister Mary Lamb*, edited by E. V. Lucas, 3 vols (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1935), II, 323.

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