Phrenological Controversy and the Medical Imagination: 'A Modern Pythagorean' in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*

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Abstract: The periodical press in the early nineteenth century was a site of dynamic exchange between men of science and men of letters, and *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* was a particularly rich site of expression for medical ideas. This chapter explores the symbiotic relationship between the Blackwoodian prose fiction and the scientific and medical investigations of the Glaswegian surgeon and writer, Robert Macnish (1802–37), and in particular, his explorations of altered states of consciousness and phrenology. It is argued that his prose tales reveal the Blackwoodian 'tale of terror' to be an experimental template for the medical theorist and budding phrenologist, revealing problematic sites for medical hermeneutics in early nineteenth-century Scotland.

In August 1830 an editorial correspondent to the *Lancet* criticised a perceived breach of medical ethics in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*. Although the first chapter from the series, *Passages from the Diary of a late Physician* (1830–37), is said to bear the 'indubitable marks of *fiction*', the correspondent feared that the disclosure of '*the sacred secrets which are communicated to us in perfect confidence by our patients*' to the general public might lead to the distrust of physicians.[1] Samuel Warren (1807–77), the anonymous author of the series, responded by pointing out that the *Lancet* published case studies with a similar level of detail and was often found in the hands of the interested lay-person.[2]

The periodical press in the early nineteenth century was a site

of dynamic exchange between men of science and men of letters, and *Blackwood's* was a particularly rich site of expression for medical ideas.[3] Founded in 1817 as a Tory rival to the 'neo-Enlightenment liberalism' of the Whig *Edinburgh Review*, *Blackwood's* revolutionised the literary magazine through its 'innovative mixture of literary forms and discourses'.[4] At the same time, it germinated the modern gothic 'tale of terror' in which extreme psychological and physiological states are described in clinical detail.[5] The sensational tales of terrors in *Blackwood's*, with their emphasis on phenomenology and the value of first-person narrative, had much in common with a particular subset of medical case studies: those examining strange subjective experiences. Warren's series has been anthologised in *Tales of Terror in Blackwood's Magazine* (1995) and has recently received critical attention in relation to 'Gothic medicine', the rise of medical professionalism, and as a possible influence on the rise of detective fiction in the nineteenth century, but little attention has been paid to other Blackwoodian authors with medical backgrounds.[6] David Macbeth Moir (1798–1851), pen-named 'Delta', is perhaps the most well known Blackwoodian surgeon-author, but it is his close friend, Robert Macnish (1802–37), who best exemplifies the coalescence of the medical case study and the tale of terror in the emergence of a curious genre, which Moir termed 'medico-popular' literature.

Macnish was born into a multi-generational family of medical practitioners, and he carried on the family tradition, graduating with the degree of '*Magister Chirurgiæ*' from the University of Glasgow in 1820.[7] After an apprenticeship in the Highlands and a period of continued study in Paris, he was accepted into the Faculty of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow in 1825. However, Macnish led a double-life: alongside his medical career, he was also a prolific author, contributing regularly to *Blackwood's* and later to *Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country* under the pseudonym 'A Modern Pythagorean'. Macnish made a particular point of keeping his two lives separate, at least in the public eye. Perhaps justifiably, he expresses his unwillingness to appear as a character in the *Noctes Ambrosianae* dialogues of *Blackwood's* in a letter to William Blackwood in the summer of 1830:

> When I saw Professor Wilson in Edinburgh he spoke of introducing
> a new character into the Noctes viz. The Modern Pythagorean. Had
> I been a free agent in this matter I should have felt proud beyond
> measure in being placed there, but the people in this place are such an
> infernal set of apes that they look with an evil eye upon a medical man
> who has any thing to do with literature unless it be upon professional
> subjects.[8]

Macnish himself produced a substantial body of medical literature:
The Anatomy of Drunkenness (1827), *The Philosophy of Sleep* (1830), and
An Introduction to Phrenology (1836), all of which went through multiple
editions. However, these texts transcended professional interest, and
following the appearance of the first edition of *The Anatomy of Drunk-
enness* in 1827, Moir writes to Macnish:

> You have managed to hit off the subject in such a medico-popular
> way, as to render it not only instructive to the disciples of Hippocrates,
> but to Coleridge's "reading public" at large.[9]

One of the primary purposes of *The Anatomy of Drunkenness* was to
provide detailed phenomenological descriptions of intoxication, and
several of the cases cited by Macnish in *The Philosophy of Sleep* were
drawn from popular literary sources, including one first presented
in *Blackwood's* as a 'Remarkable Dream' addressed 'To the Editor of
Blackwood's Magazine'.[10] This chapter explores the symbiotic rela-
tionship between Macnish's scientific investigations – his explorations
of altered states of consciousness and phrenology – and his fictional
productions, published in the context of a literary magazine, which
promoted dialogic exchange between science, particularly medical
science, and literature in Romantic-era Scotland.

Phrenological Struggles

The nineteenth-century popular "science" of phrenology was con-
cerned with gaining access to the hidden internal world of the mind by
reading the contours of the skull. Macnish relates his first encounter
with the father of phrenology, Franz Joseph Gall (1758–1828), in the

preface to *An Introduction to Phrenology* (1836):

> My first ideas of Phrenology were obtained from Dr. Gall himself,
> whose lectures I attended in Paris during the year 1825. Before that
> time, I, in common with almost all who are ignorant of the subject,
> spoke of it with great contempt, and took every opportunity of
> turning it into ridicule. The discourses of this great man, and various
> private conversations which I had the honour of holding with him,
> produced a total change in my ideas, and convinced me, that the doc-
> trines he taught, so far from deserving the absurd treatment which
> they then generally met with, were, in themselves, highly beautiful, as
> expositions of the human mind in its various phases, and every way
> worthy of attention. Much reflection, and many appeals to nature,
> since that period, have satisfied me of their perfect truth.[11]

During the early nineteenth century, crescendoing to a forte in the
early 1820s, the phrenologists were repeatedly battered by the wits
of the Edinburgh periodical press. The public debates between the
phrenologists and their opponents in the medical community did
not always come out in favour of the anti-phrenologists, and many
respected medical thinkers studied phrenology with great interest at
this time.[12] However, both the *Edinburgh Review* and *Blackwood's*, in rare
concurrence, systematically depicted the phrenological doctrines as
ridiculous.[13] The first number of the *Phrenological Journal and Miscellany
of Edinburgh* openly declares war on the periodical press and singles
out *Blackwood's* as 'the most persevering, and, of course, the most
absurd of the assailants of phrenology, and enemies of phrenolo-
gists.'[14] Following from Macnish's reverence for, at the very least, the
beauties of the phrenological doctrines in 1825, one might find his
eager contribution to *Blackwood's* between 1826 and 1830 to be a
conflict of interests.[15] However, the gestation period for Macnish's
phrenological conversion was extended.

From Macnish's first encounter with phrenology in 1825 until
1833, he grappled with the validity of the doctrine, as 'his mind was
sometimes haunted by misgivings, particularly when objections were
urged.'[16] In 1833 he resolved 'to adopt the most effectual mode of
putting Phrenology to the test' by sending a cast of his own head

for analysis by the Edinburgh Phrenological Society.[17] The experiment appears to have finally quelled all doubt.[18] Personal struggle was typical of students of phrenology, as George Combe (1788–1858), the leading populariser of phrenology in Britain, 'adopted a personal rather than an objective criterion of truth' and 'considered that each individual had to convince himself of the truth of phrenology by his own experience'.[19] During this period, Macnish produced his most successful literary pieces, the vast majority of which were published in *Blackwood's*.

References to phrenology in *Blackwood's* ranged from extended critique, satirical parody, to topical association of absurdity with phrenology (or 'turnipology' as it came to be known) in the *Noctes Ambrosianae*. In general, the argument against phrenology is based on its materialist and fatalist tendencies. However, in comparison with the concurrent critique in the *Edinburgh Review*, the Blackwoodian parodies amplify to absurdity the gothic aspects of phrenology – its association with skulls, antiquarians, maniacal murderers, and resurrection men. The anonymous 'Essays on Cranioscopy, Craniology, Phrenology, &c. By Sir Toby Tickletoby, Bart.' of August 1821 is perhaps the most extreme example.[20] In the *Phrenological Journal and Miscellany*, the essay is labelled a 'Wretched Joke' and, without exaggeration, its argument is summarised:

> A proper application of steel-caps or helmets, so constructed as to restrain the growth of the bad bumps, and favour the growth of the good, would make the whole human race perfectly virtuous and intellectual, – nothing but Socrateses, Newtons, and Howards in the world. For a full detail of this plan, *vide Blackwood's Magazine,* No liv, p. 74.[21]

Alternative systems, such as 'noseology', are also forwarded by the Blackwoodian satirists, and Macnish's short prose tale, 'The Man with the Nose', in which the impenetrable significance of a particularly spectacular nasal physiognomy throws a distressed landlord into a nightmarish trance state, carries on from this ludicrous satirisation of phrenology.[22] Phrenology was certainly fertile ground for the literary imagination regardless of whether an author affirmed the doctrines.

One of the key issues that attracted Macnish to phrenology was

the science's ability to create a strict correlation between external appearances and the innate character of an individual. Throughout his life he appears to have playfully contemplated numerous systems of physiological determinism. On 25 October 1833, he writes to his friend, John Leitch of Rothesay, regarding his recent move to London:

> Chestiology, Squeakology, Gruntology, Ventriloquology, 56-ology, Barkology, Crowology, Philology, Beeology, Brayingology, Bublijock-ology, Cacklingology, Planeology, Drawing of-Cork-ology, Holding-seventy-seven-pound-weight-above-the-head-or-little-finger-ology, &c. &c. &c. are at an end. You will astound the Cockneys in the Modern Babylon, and not less the fair sex, with your colossal powers of procreatingology.[23]

In *The Anatomy of Drunkenness* he looks to the phenomena of drunkenness to unveil the true inner character:

> In modern society, life is all a disguise. Every man walks in masquerade, and his most intimate friend very often does not know his real character. ... Intoxication tears off the veil, and sets each in his true light, whatever that may be.[24]

Further, physical characteristics, and in particular the nose, are said to reveal a person's alcoholic preferences. In the prose tale, 'Who Can it Be?', published in *Blackwood*'s in October 1827, Macnish attempts to rationally determine the identity of the gentleman strolling around the courtyard of the University of Glasgow from his outward characteristics using reasoning reminiscent of *The Anatomy of Drunkenness*:

> 'He must,' thought I, 'be a good liver. Such cheeks, such a nose, such a double chin is not to be obtained for nothing. …' At any rate, he must be a *bon vivant*, and has, peradventure, dined on oysters, devilled fowls, and macaroni, like myself. … That he likes a draught of London porter after dinner is, I should think, likely; that he likes wine is certain; spirits I do not believe he cares much about. What kind of wine does he prefer – Claret, Malaga, or Hermitage? Neither. These are too watery and Frenchified for the rich current of his blood. Old Port and Madeira are his favourites, take my word for it.[25]

While an element of jovial experimentation pervades Macnish's search for an empirical methodology of spectatorship, his prose tales also portray an anxiety regarding spectatorship in modern society. The source of this anxiety is a particularly Scottish influence on what Foucault famously termed the 'medical gaze': the problematic legacy of the Enlightenment discourse on sympathy.[26]

The Problematic Legacy of Enlightenment Sympathy

David Hume and Adam Smith formulated theoretical explanations of sympathetic engagement with the "other", while paradoxically stressing the innate inability of man, with all his bias and preconception, to truly enter into the mind of the "other", to become the idealised impartial spectator, while holding onto personal identity. In Hume's sympathetic exchange, the spectator views the signs of expressive feeling as exhibited by the other, and from these impressions, he forms ideas of the other's subjective experience. These ideas are compared with the spectator's vivid idea of selfhood, resulting in the '[r]eembodiment of the idea of the other as an impression of our own'.[27] According to Ian Duncan, Smith's theory of sympathy in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) (which is magisterially discussed in Craig Franson's contribution to the present volume) is a revision of the physiological immediacy of Hume's definition:

> But where Hume emphasises the involuntary, contagious force of sympathy activated by physical sensation, Smith invests sympathy with a disciplinary will gained on abstracting passion and reason from their chaotic origins in the body.[28]

This necessarily imaginative act is problematised by the fact that the enlightened individual would only project those emotions, which are socially acceptable to the spectator. Self-awareness and the resultant self-control are based upon the attempt, in the words of Burns, '*To see oursels as others see us!*'[29] The public persona – the mask of modernity – is a creation of this sympathetic abstraction.

Dugald Stewart (1753–1828), Professor of Moral Philosophy at the University of Edinburgh and 'the main interpreter of Scottish

Enlightenment thought to the generation of Scott and Jeffrey', returns to the physiological immediacy of Hume's sympathetic engagement in his definition of sympathetic imitation.[30] Sympathetic imitation is the innate tendency in mankind to mimic the natural language – the expressions, gestures, and intonations of voice – of those around him and thus enter into phenomenological similitude. Stewart refers to the involuntary nature of sympathetic imitation, but carefully amends that he does not mean involuntary in a literal sense, but rather as a '*proneness*' capable of counteraction through 'the exercise of cool reflection, accompanied with a persevering and unremitting purpose directed to a particular end.'[31] As with Hume's definition, Stewart's sympathy elides individuality through its assimilatory powers.

A Case of Sympathetic Spectatorship

The tale, 'An Execution in Paris', published in *Blackwood's* in 1828, evidences Macnish's awareness of the complex inter-relations between the individual and society, the spectator and the other, and, in a more specialised fashion, the phrenological anatomist and the anatomical subject. Based on Macnish's attendance at the execution of Louis Auguste Papavoine, child-murderer, in March 1825, the grotesquely minute details would appeal to the Blackwoodian readership. The narrator positions himself as a philosophical observer who is well aware of a certain voyeuristic barbarism accompanying the desire to witness a public execution, yet, nevertheless, is irresistibly drawn by an intense curiosity towards the uniquely French rendition of capital punishment:

> To my shame be it spoken, I wished to see an execution by the guillotine. There was a sort of sanguinary spell attached to this instrument, which irresistibly impelled me to witness one of its horrible triumphs.[32]

The term 'sanguinary' conjures the imagery of blood as poured forth by the guillotine's victims and also underlines the physiological nature of the narrator's irresistible attraction to the machine:

> When I thought of it, the overwhelming tragedy of the Revolution
> was brought before my eyes – that Revolution which plunged Europe
> in seas of blood, and stamped an indelible impression upon the whole
> fabric of modern society.[33]

The intensity of the visual imagery brought forth by the idea of
the guillotine – the phrase 'brought before my eyes' – indicates
the conversion of idea into impression. This 'indelible impression'
is felt not only within the individual body of the narrator, but also
within the metaphorical body of society, for which the crowd of
'eighty thousand spectators' stands as representative. The crowd of
persons, 'clumped into one dense aggregate of living matter', covers
every surface in Place de Grêve, which is 'literally paved with human
beings.'[34] The mass rumbles with incipient energy, contained only
at the boundaries immediately around the scaffold, where mounted
gendarmerie beat back 'the animated materials into the proscribed
area.'[35] The open space immediately around the scaffold is a privileged
place of spectatorship, reserved only for certain military men and
their guests, and our philosophical observer is 'led into the area, and
placed in front of the guillotine, not ten feet away from its dreadful
presence.'[36] The separation of the narrator's body from the heaving
living body of the crowd sets up a dialectic of resistance: a movement
towards 'the exercise of cool reflection' exposed by Stewart as the
antidote to sympathetic assimilation.[37] Within this privileged place of
intimate spectatorship, he discovers that 'this machine is by no means
so appalling to look at as the gallows':

> The same feeling of horror does not attach to it; nor is the mind filled
> with the same blank dismay, or the same overpowering disgust, which
> are universally felt on beholding the gibbet, with its looped rope, its
> horrid beam, and its deceitful platform, which, slipping from beneath
> the feet of its victim, leaves him dangling and gasping in the winds
> of heaven.[38]

The immediacy and relative humanity of the guillotine's actions, along
with the knowledge that the 'noble and good have shed their blood
in torrents beneath its edge', removes the element of disgrace associ-

ated with the gallows. Without these associations of disgrace and the 'sickening imagery' of 'prolonged physical suffering', the fancy is free to speculate on the 'noble and enduring agony of the spirit, previous to the fatal hour.'[39] The disembodied death allows the spectator to participate in Smith's version of abstracted sympathetic exchange with the intended victim of the guillotine, and the narrator's descriptions of Papvoine, who enters with an old Catholic priest, bespeak this type of self-projective imaginative sympathy:

> Though pale and death-like, and seemingly impressed with the marks of sorrow and bad health, he exhibited no signs of terror or dismay. His demeanour was quiet and composed; and to the exhortations of his spiritual advisor he appeared to pay deep attention. ...had he died in a better cause, it would have been impossible not to admire his steady heroism.[40]

His calm delineation of the 'signs' of the prisoner's natural language upon his entrance is in juxtaposition to the synchronised eruption of energy in the crowd:

> No sooner had the wretch entered the area appropriated for his fate, than a shout of deafening execration arose from the hitherto silent multitude. No preparatory murmurs of hatred and revenge preceded this ebullition of feeling. It sprung up simultaneously, and as if those from whom it proceeded were animated with one soul, and felt one pervading vengeance thrilling through their heart.[41]

The act of child murder is an unnatural crime, and 'one of all others the most heinous to a maternal heart', and as such, 'the natural fountains of woman's tears were no longer free to flow their wonted channel'.[42] The prevention of this natural bodily reaction in the females leads to an intensified unity with the male animalistic desire for revenge, and the 'bitter wrath' of the crowd is in direct contrast to the narrator's abstracted sympathy. However, at the critical point of the execution – the point at which Papvoine has 'committed himself to the hands of the executioner' – the crowd falls into a 'universal silence' of 'breathless awe', which 'was sickening to the last degree'. Reacting to the 'appalling' spectacle, the narrator's experience becomes

intensely physical, and his temporarily abstracted sympathy is, in fact, reembodied:

> While gazing upon the victim, my respiration was almost totally suspended – my heart beat violently, and a feeling of intense anxiety and suffocation pervaded my frame.[43]

Whether the narrator is engaging in embodied sympathetic exchange with the prisoner or with the crowd is uncertain. His physiological reaction descriptively parallels the breathlessness of the crowd, but the 'intense anxiety' may be the result of Humean self-comparison with the soon to be executed prisoner. Yet, according to the narrator's descriptions, the 'steady heroism' of the prisoner does not reveal any degree of anxiety. The anxiety is more probably the result of cognitive dissonance – his clear abhorrence of the crowd's expectant silence and the knowledge that he himself is also under the 'sanguinary spell' of the guillotine. Regardless, his wilful abstraction from the physiological immediacy of the bodily reaction is defeated, and he is thus temporarily assimilated into the throngs of the masses. However, at the moment the head is severed from the trunk, his stance as philosophical observer receives a new vitality. He is now able to look 'attentively to observe' the intimate details of the executed body – the self-projective sympathy that accompanied his examination of the natural signs of the living body dies as quickly as the severed corpse.[44] To his surprise, the trunk does not convulse at the instant of decapitation, but rather:

> lay from the first perfectly motionless, nor exhibited the slightest shudder – the least quivering – or the faintest indication that, the moment before, it was part of a sentient being, instinct with all the energies of life.[45]

The transition from 'perfect life' to 'perfect annihilation' is instantaneous, and the rapidity of this transition is reflected in the living crowd, which in 'an instantaneous movement' disperses after the fall of the blade.[46] The narrator, however, remains to view the transmutation of living flesh into scientific commodity – the head of Papavoine, after the blood is drained from the flesh, is sent to the Ecole de Médecine

to be examined.

Macnish draws a specific parallel between the witnessing of the execution and the examination of the anatomical body, as it is the 'same curiosity', which draws the narrator to both spectacles. At the examination, the 'celebrated Doctor Gall' is present among the scientific men, as he 'was employed in investigating the developments of the head, and pointing them out to several of his pupils.'[47] The crucial distinction of phrenology from past philosophies of mind was the externalisation of mental faculties onto the cranium, and thus, with phrenology, the human mind was rendered 'as open, accessible and easy to read, as the ages of the earth for a geologist working with volcanic rock.'[48] Phrenological methodology involved the collapsing of narrative and physical signs. For example, in the appendix to Macnish's *An Introduction to Phrenology*, a voyeuristically detailed account of a convicted murderer's conduct just prior to execution is collapsed onto the postmortem phrenological analysis of his skull:

> The great size of Combativeness and Destructiveness (both 20) uncontrolled by his Benevolence, (which ranks only so high as 11,) and called into fierce action by liquor, easily accounts for the murder. … His great Love of Approbation, and his large Order, sufficiently explain the foppish freak of arranging his hair in curls at such a time, as well as the marked neatness of his dress as he appeared upon the scaffold.[49]

The minute details of this phrenological examination recorded in *An Introduction to Phrenology* are in stark contrast to the single sentence devoted to the Gall's phrenological evaluation of Papavoine in 'An Execution in Paris'. While it is possible that Macnish simply no longer recalls the minute details of the evaluation or perhaps did not pay close attention at the time, this evasion may also be read as a negative commentary on phrenology (as well as perhaps the French pathological anatomy more generally). With the shocking rapidity of the decapitation, the transition from a sentient being, capable of eliciting sympathy and wrath, to an insentient object, the description of which holds no significant indications of an internal life, is instantaneous. This eludes the phrenologist, as the severed head in the hands of Gall,

drained of all its blood, is examined in the same way the phrenologist might examine a living head. Living phenomenological narratives, resistant to reductive physiological mapping, are revealed to be the pathway towards knowledge of the other in Macnish's most successful prose tale, 'The Metempsychosis'.

'The Metempsychosis': A Literary Experiment

In 1826 Macnish made his literary debut in *Blackwood's* with his prose piece 'The Metempsychosis', which earned him the nom-de-guerre 'A Modern Pythagorean'. The Pythagorean transmigration into another man's material body in the tale is a literary exploration that transcends the limits of scientific experimentation in order to address the ultimate philosophical and physiological question: Is the human mind dependent on the physical body? In the trappings of the body, one can never know the subjective experience of the other, and therefore, can never truly apply inductive methodology to the science of the mind. Sir Walter Scott, in his Blackwoodian review of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus* (1818), describes

> [a] more philosophical and refined use of the supernatural [...] not for the purpose of pampering the imagination with wonders, but in order to shew the probable effect which the supposed miracles would produce on those who witnessed them.[50]

Scott defines such an author's purpose to be

> to open new trains and channels of thought, by placing men in supposed situations of an extraordinary and preternatural character, and then describing the mode of feeling and conduct which they are most like to adopt.[51]

Macnish's tale most certainly departs 'from sober truth', but Stadt's struggle to come to terms with being trapped inside the body of another man is 'still to nature true'.[52]

According to the ancient Pythagorean tradition, life was necessarily extinguished from the physical bodies prior to metempsychosis.[53]

However, in Macnish's story the devilish instigator, 'a little meagre, brown-faced, elderly gentleman, with hooked nose and chin, a long well-powdered *queue*, and a wooden leg', takes this doctrine one step farther.[54] The elderly gentleman informs Stadt, a student of philosophy at the University of Gottingen, 'that two living bodies may exchange souls with each other'.[55] Stadt, who would rather credit 'Kenelm Digby's sympathetic powder, the philosopher's stone, the elixir vitae, animal magnetism, metallic tractors,' and 'judicial astrology', is, ironically, at this point already labouring under a metempsychosis.[56] During a paroxysm of drunkenness, the elderly gentleman has obtained a blood signature from Stadt, granting, for the sum of 50 guilders, a Mr Albert Wolstang, 'the use of my body, at any time he is disposed, provided that, for the time being, he gives me the use of his'.[57] According to the conscious testimony of Stadt, the transmogrification is strictly limited to the physical body: 'It was plain, that although I was Wolstang in body, I was only Stadt in mind; and I knew that in disposition I was as different as possible from Wolstang.'[58] If one takes Stadt's version of the events at face value, the answer would appear to be that the mind (or even perhaps the soul) and the body maintain an entirely separate existence. Stewart's embodied sympathetic imitation appears to be denied currency, as the most complete form of imitation imaginable does not result in phenomenological similitude.[59] However, from within the transmogrification, the reader cannot be certain that the metempsychosis does not influence Stadt's mental habits. We are entirely dependent on his report of the events.

Internal evidence indicates that the metempsychosis may indeed influence Stadt's behaviour. In an act of revenge upon Wolstang for stealing his body, he insults the Provost and Professor of Moral Philosophy, the aptly named 'Doctor Dedimus Dunderhead', to ensure that Wolstang be expelled from Gottingen. This conscious act, which of course backfires by blocking his own entry into the college whilst in Wolstang's body, accords with a previous action, which in contrast, lacks conscious motivation. Following the moment of metempsychosis, marked by 'a slight shudder' and a feeling of being 'taller, and heavier, and altogether more vigorous than the instant before', Stadt neglects to doff his cap to Professor Dunderhead.[60] This is a compulsory action for all students upon meeting 'this illustrious personage'

in the college, the neglect of which will result in expulsion.[61] Stadt's conscious realisation that he must indeed doff his cap and his physiological unresponsiveness emphasises a discord between his mind and his physical body:

> It may be guessed then what was my degree of stupefaction when I saw Doctor Dunderhead approach – when I heard his baton striking upon the ground, responsive to his steps – when I saw his large eyes, reflected through the spectacles, looking intently upon me – I say my stupefaction may be guessed, when, even on this occasion, my hand did not make one single motion upward towards my cap.[62]

A habitual action is disrupted – motor output does not respond to sensory input.[63] When Dunderhead challenges Stadt's breach of social decorum, Stadt simply muses that 'I never thought the Doctor so little, or myself so tall, as at this moment'.[64] Conscious reflection, clearly influenced by his new perception of corporeal height, appears to reinforce rather than correct the new pattern of behaviour. This behaviour, soon consciously perpetrated, better fits the profligate Wolstang than the respectable Stadt. Thus, although the mind and body are not identical, the physical body does seem to influence mental habits in this narrative. Macnish will later write in regard to mind/brain identity in *An Introduction to Phrenology* that, 'Of the mind as a separate entity, we can know nothing whatever, and we must judge of it in the only way in which it comes under our cognizance.'[65] Stadt's mind is manifested through its new instrument, and this appears to lead to behavioural changes. The only way in which we can judge of this transmogrification is exactly how it comes under our cognisance – as a literary narrative. 'The Metempsychosis' transcends scientific experimentation through the transmogrification of physical limitations into the hermeneutic uncertainties of narrative.

What Stadt does discover with a degree of certainly is that Wolstang, whom he 'had long thought rather highly of, was in reality a very bad character'.[66] His entrance into the social relations of Wolstang, rather than his entrance into his conscious mind, enables this discovery of character:

> Times without number I was accosted as an acquaintance by gamblers, pickpockets, usurers, and prostitutes; and through their means I unravelled a train of imposture, profligacy, and dissipation, in which he had been long deeply involved.[67]

The motivation for Wolstang's transmigration into Stadt's body becomes evident when it is revealed that Wolstang has committed an immense forgery. Conviction and execution inevitably approach unless the body of Wolstang flees the country.

After a series of ludicrous interactions with Wolstang (including a temporary transmogrification back into his own body), Stadt finds himself in the curious circumstance of having to choose between signing away his soul to the devilish gentleman or transmigrating into his own dead body. He chooses the later, and in the climax of the tale, Macnish transmutes the expected horror of burial alive into a highly humorous situation. Parodying a previous Blackwoodian tale, 'The Buried Alive' (1821), by John Galt (1779–1839), rather than waking up in the grave, Stadt finds himself on the table of the university anatomy theatre. Stadt has been 'resurrected' by the grave-robbing anatomists.[68] Wunderdudt, the professor of anatomy, eventually explains to the bewildered Stadt that he had 'informed the resurrectionists in the service of the university' that he was in need of a fresh, young subject, but, upon finding that they had disinterred his 'excellent friend, Mr Frederick Stadt', he requested that they return the body to its rightful resting place.[69] Stadt is at first angry at the resurrectionists for disinterring his body that was to remain in its resting place 'till the last trumpet shall awaken me from slumber, and gather me together from the jaws of the tomb', and then in turn angry at Wunderdudt, for insisting that they bury his body once more, as then he might indeed have been buried alive.[70]

Rather than offering up the depths of his physical body to the anatomists, he offers up the depths of phenomenological experience through his narrative. Stadt does not reveal his entire narrative to the characters within the tale. He 'concealed everything connected with the Metempsychosis', but Doctor Dunderhead, made him 'give a long account' of his sensations 'at the instant of coming alive.'[71] In the tale these feelings are described in acutely physiological terms:

> At this moment I was sensible of an insufferable coldness. My heart fluttered, then it beat strong, and the blood passing as it were over my chilled frame, gave it warmth and animation. I also began by slow degrees to breathe. But though my bodily feelings were thus torpid, my mental ones were very different. They were on the rack; for I knew that the dreadful struggle was about to commence.[72]

Dunderhead is 'highly delighted' with Stadt's account and suggests 'that a description of the whole should be inserted in the Annals of the University.'[73] The living, sentient person on the anatomy table describes his experience of reanimation, thus allowing Dunderhead, the professor of moral philosophy, to study mind/body identity. Macnish appears to be contrasting the disparate roles of anatomy in studying the physiology of the body versus the philosophy of the mind. Although he forwards an embodied theory of mind, methodologically, one cannot study the mind in the same way one studies the physical body.

However, with a 'Doctor Dunderhead' as the eager collector of the narrative case, Macnish is clearly also playfully satirising the Blackwoodian tale of terror and its German roots. The inclusion of such cases in *Blackwood's* is in the tradition of the first psychological magazine, initiated by the German author and editor, Karl Philipp Moritz (1756–93). Moritz's *Gnothi Sauton, oder Magazin zur Erfahrungs-seelenkunde für Gelehrte and Ungelerte*, i.e. *Know Thyself, or a Magazine for Empirical Psychology for Scholars and Laymen*, published in ten volumes between 1783 and 1793, disavowed theoretical systems and was devoted to the collection of narrative case reports. As Sheila Dickson has explained, the *Magazin* included several examples of narratives which could provide 'detailed retrospective observation of personal symptoms and sufferings', but most often cases were presented by outside observers who collected and presented the case.[74] Contributors included 'lawyers, teachers and clergymen as well as physicians, and their writings covered a broad spectrum of topics: case reports of abnormal or unusual behaviour, the structure of language, pedagogy, "actions without consciousness of motives, or the power of obscure ideas", and the relationship between psychology and religion'.[75] The magazine was founded upon the idea that '[a] theory of mind will only

be available to us once a mass of data has been accumulated, in which human nature will be reflected'.[76] Macnish would later genuinely draw upon this 'mass of data' in *The Philosophy of Sleep*.[77]

Conclusion

Stadt's resurrection brings with it new knowledge of the doubleness of human nature. To become a believer in Pythagorean metempsychosis is to accept that the external signs of the physical body may not reveal the significance of the person within the flesh. While such a belief is in direct contradiction to his future avowal of phrenology, duplicity and even multiplicity of self was foundational to the Blackwoodian view of authorship. As Peter T. Murphy has written regarding the *Noctes Ambrosiana*e, 'the *Blackwood's* experiments force us to acknowledge that the published self is a curiously unstable thing, almost impossible to control and almost impossible to bring home to some person with a body.'[78] In the anonymous 'Essays on Phrenology, &c.', published in *Blackwood's* in December 1821, Combe's attempt to 'bring home' the confessional narrative of the murderer, David Haggart, to his body, is mocked. The satirist appeals to the natural language associated with a large organ of self-esteem and secretiveness (both apparently exhibited by Haggart) as described by Combe in his *Essays on Phrenology* (1819). His implication is that such incongruous characteristics cannot be displayed by one discrete fully integrated person:

> Now, let the reader combine these appearances, and suppose them, for a moment, united in one individual. What would he think, say, or do, if he were to meet in Mr. Blackwood's or Mr Constable's shop, a gentleman carrying his head so high as to recline backwards, with a cold, repulsive air, haughty as a king, an emperor, or a transcendent genius, and yet with a sly look, a peculiar, sidelong, rolling cast of his eyes, and a stiffened approach of the shoulder to the head? What if he were told, that is Mr. Combe, the great phrenologist, or Christopher North, the Supreme Editor, or the Great Unknown? How Mr Haggart, having both organs in perfection, contrived to manage the matter, we do not know, nor, in a scientific point of view, do we care.[79]

The dual identities of many public figures of the day (Sir Walter Scott/ The Great Unknown, Professor John Wilson/Christopher North, George Combe the Writer to the Signet/George Combe the great phrenologist) evidences the necessarily duplicitous nature of identity in the public sphere of mass print culture.

If Macnish is exploring his own phrenological struggle in his Blackwoodian prose pieces, he is doing so through the projected image of not himself, the respectable surgeon of Glasgow, but of his Blackwoodian persona, 'A Modern Pythagorean'. Macnish expresses concern over the possibility that his own literary doppelganger might in fact be brought home to his body. However, this discrete categorisation of selves does not hold up to close scrutiny. In his medical writing, Macnish draws upon his literary talents, and his fictional tales fruitfully engage with medical science, and more generally, the science of the mind. Further, Macnish's prose tales make visible the issues surrounding medical hermeneutics in early nineteenth-century Scotland (with the sympathetic exchange, anatomical examination, and narrative interpretation each posing their own set of problems) as well as the role of the Blackwoodian tale of terror in serving as an experimental template for the medical theorist and budding phrenologist.

Acknowledgments

Notes

1   'Blackwood's Magazine v. the Secrets of the Medical Profession', *Lancet*, 14 (1830), 878–9: 878.
2   S. Warren, 'Passages from the Diary of a late Physician. Chap. III. Note to the Editor, Intriguing and Madness, The Broken Heart', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 28 (1830), 608–23.
3   On science and medicine in the nineteenth-century periodical

press more generally, see G. Cantor, *et al.* (eds), *Science in the Nineteenth-Century Periodical: Reading the Magazine of Nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). On *Blackwood's* as a periodical well-known for its medical content, see J.D. Tougaw, *Strange Cases: The Medical Case History and the British Novel* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 51; J.A.V. Chapple, *Science and Literature in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Macmillian, 1986), 5; L. Rothfield, *Vital Signs: Medical Realism in Nineteenth Century Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 9.

4   I. Duncan, *Scott's Shadow: The Novel in Romantic Edinburgh* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 27.

5   See, H.P. Sucksmith, 'The Secret of Immediacy: Dickens' Debt to the Tale of Terror in *Blackwood's*', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 26.2 (1971), 145–57.

6   R. Morrison and C. Baldick (eds), *Tales of Terror in Blackwood's Magazine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); M. Kennedy, 'The Ghost in the Clinic: Gothic Medicine and Curious Fiction in Samuel Warren's "Diary of a Late Physician"', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 32.3 (2004), 327–51; H. Worthington, *The Rise of the Detective in Early Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Basingstoke, Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 46-102. Warren was, in fact, a lawyer rather than a physician by trade, but he claims to have had some early medical training. See C.R.B. Dunlop, 'Warren, Samuel (1807–1877)', in *DNB* <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/28792> [accessed 1 March 2010].

7   D.M. Moir, *The Modern Pythagorean; A Series of Tales, Essays, and Sketches, by the late Robert MacNish, LL.D. with the Author's Life by his friend D.M. Moir*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: Blackwood; London: T. Cadell, 1838), Vol. 1, 9.

8   R. Macnish to W. Blackwood, 10 July 1830, National Library of Scotland, MS 4028, ff. 17–18.

9   Moir, *op. cit.* (note 7), Vol. 1, 51–2. On the general popularisation of medical knowledge in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, see Roy Porter, 'The Spreading of Medical Enlightenment: The Popularization of Medicine in Georgian England, and its Paradoxes', in R. Porter (ed.) *The Popularization of Medicine, 1650-1850* (London: Routledge, 1992), 215–31.

10   'Remarkable Dream', *Blackwood's*, 19 (1826), 736; R. Macnish, *The Philosophy of Sleep* (Glasgow: M'Phun, 1830), 109–11.

11   R. Macnish, *An Introduction to Phrenology, in the form of question and answer, with an appendix, and copious illustrative notes* (Glasgow: John Reid & Co.; Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd; London: Whittaker and Company, 1836), v.

12   M.H. Kaufman, *Edinburgh Phrenological Society: A History* (William Ramsay Henderson Trust, 2005), 1–16.

13   See, J. Strachan, "The mapp'd out skulls of Scotia': *Blackwood's* and the Scottish Phrenological Controversy', in D. Finkelstein (ed.), *Print Culture and the Blackwood Tradition, 1805-1930* (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 49–69.

14   'Introductory Statement', *Phrenological Journal and Miscellany of Edinburgh*, 1 (1823), iii–xxxi: xvii–xviii.

15   Roger Cooter goes so far as to stipulate that Macnish 'annoyed the Edin phrenologists by his writing for the anti-phrenological Blackwood's Edin Mag'. R. Cooter, *Phrenology in the British Isles: An Annotated, Historical Biobibliography and Index* (Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, 1989), 222.

16   'Biographical Sketch of Robert Macnish, esq., LL.D.', in *The Anatomy of Drunkenness. By Robert Macnish, LL.D., Author of 'The Philosophy of Sleep,' and Member of the Faculty of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow. With a Sketch of the Author's Life*, new edn (Glasgow; London: W.R. M'Phun, 1859), 22.

17   *Ibid.*, 22.

18   Moir, *op. cit.* (note 7), Vol. 1, 270.

19   G.N. Cantor, 'The Edinburgh Phrenology Debate: 1803-1828', *Annals of Science*, 32.3 (1975), 195–218: 215.

20   In *A Bibliography of Articles in Blackwood's Magazine 1817-1825* (1959), Alan Lang Strout postulates that 'Mr. Vary' may have contributed this article, as well as the below discussed 'Essays on Phrenology, &c.'. The present author has been unable to identify any information about this contributor.

21   'Introductory Statement', *op. cit.* (note 14), xxvi.

22   [H. C. C.], 'Noseology, a Dissertation on the Intellectual Faculties, as Manifested by Various Configurations of the Nose', *Blackwood's*, 5 (1819), 157–160; R. Macnish, 'The Man with the

Nose', *Blackwood's*, 20 (1826, Part I), 159–63.

23 Moir, *op. cit.* (note 7), Vol. 1, 311–12.

24 R. Macnish, *The Anatomy of Drunkenness* (Glasgow: M'Phun, 1827), 13.

25 R. Macnish, 'Who Can it Be?', *Blackwood's*, 22 (1827), 432–7: 432–3, 435.

26 M. Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*, A.M. Sheridan (trans.) (London and New York: Routledge, 1989).

27 Duncan, *op. cit.* (note 4), 268.

28 I. Duncan, 'Hume and the Scottish Enlightenment', in S. Manning *et al.* (eds), *The Edinburgh History of Scottish Literature, Volume Two: Enlightenment Britain and Empire (1707-1918)* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 71–9: 76.

29 R. Burns, 'To a Louse, On Seeing one on a Lady's Bonnet at Church', in J. Kinsley (ed.), *The Poems and Songs of Robert Burns*, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), Vol. 1, 193–4: 194.

30 Duncan, *op. cit.* (note 4), 270; D. Stewart, *Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind*, 3 vols (London: John Murray, 1792-1827), Vol. 3, 153–244.

31 *Ibid.*, 170.

32 R. Macnish, 'An Execution in Paris', *Blackwood's*, 24 (1828), 785–8: 785.

33 *Ibid.*, 785.

34 *Ibid.*, 785.

35 *Ibid.*, 785.

36 *Ibid.*, 786.

37 Stewart, *op. cit.* (note 30), Vol. 3, 170.

38 Macnish, *op. cit.* (note 32), 786.

39 *Ibid.*, 786.

40 *Ibid.*, 787.

41 *Ibid.*, 787.

42 *Ibid.*, 787.

43 *Ibid.*, 787.

44 *Ibid.*, 788.

45 *Ibid.*, 788.

46 *Ibid.*, 788.

47 *Ibid.*, 788.
48 D. Stack, *Queen Victoria's Skull: George Combe and the Mid-Victorian Mind* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2008), 46.
49 Macnish, *op. cit.* (note 11), 171.
50 W. Scott, 'Remarks on Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus; A Novel', *Blackwood's*, 2 (March 1818), 613–20: 613.
51 *Ibid.*, 614.
52 *Ibid.*, 613.
53 C.H. Kahn, 'Pythagorean Heritage', in *Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans: A Brief History* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2001), 139–72.
54 R. Macnish, 'The Metempsychosis', *Blackwood's*, 19 (1826), 511–29: 513.
55 *Ibid.*, 515.
56 *Ibid.*, 515.
57 *Ibid.*, 520.
58 *Ibid.*, 519.
59 For the converse situation, see Andrew Picken's later tale, 'The Confessions of a Metempsychosis', *Fraser's Magazine*, 12 (1835), 496–502.
60 Macnish, *op. cit.* (note 54), 511.
61 *Ibid.*, 512.
62 *Ibid.*, 512.
63 Sir Charles Bell first described the distinction between the motor from the sensory nerves in 1811. See, A. Richardson, *British Romanticism and the Science of the Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 7.
64 Macnish, *op. cit.* (note 54), 512.
65 Macnish, *op. cit.* (note 11), 1.
66 Macnish, *op. cit.* (note 54), 522.
67 *Ibid.*, 522.
68 In a later article for *Fraser's Magazine*, Macnish exposes upon 'The Philosophy of Burking', *Fraser's*, 5 (1832), 52–65. For background on resurrection men, see R. Richardson, *Death, Dissection, and the Destitute* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987).
69 Macnish, *op. cit.* (note 54), 528.

70 *Ibid.*, 526.

71 *Ibid.*, 529.

72 *Ibid.*, 526.

73 *Ibid.*, 529.

74 S. Dickson, '"Unerhörte Begebenheiten" in Karl Phillipp Moritz's Journal of Empirical Psychology (1783-1793)', *Journal of the Pacific Ancient and Modern Language Association*, 48.1 (2013), 1–24: 15.

75 M. Shepherd, 'Psychiatric Journals and the Evolution of Psychological Medicine', in W.F. Bynum, S. Lock and R. Porter (eds), *Medical Journals and Medical Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 1992), 188–206: 190.

76 M. Bell, *The German Tradition of Psychology in Literature and Thought, 1700-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 93.

77 Sir Alexander Crichton (1763–1856) was the first to provide English translations of many of Moritz's cases in *An Inquiry into the Nature and Origin of Mental Derangement* (1798), and in his chapter on trance, Macnish utilises a case from the 'Psychological Magazine' (Crichton's short-hand translation for Moritz's magazine), which appears to have been extracted from Crichton's text. See Alexander Crichton, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Origin of Mental Derangement. Comprehending a Concise System of the Physiology and Pathology of the Human Mind and a History of the Passions and their Effects*, 2 vols (London: Cadell and Davies, 1798), Vol. 2, 87–9; Macnish, *op. cit.* (note 10), 228–30. On Crichton's translation, see R. Hunter and I. MacAlpine, *Three Hundred Years of Psychiatry, 1535-1860: A History Presented in Selected English Texts* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), 559.

78 P.T. Murphy, 'Impersonation and Authorship in Romantic Britain', *English Literary History*, 59 (1992), 625–49: 635.

79 [Mr. Vary], 'Essays on Phrenology &c', *Blackwood's*, 10 (1821, Part II), 682–91: 687.