| Christine | Woody | cmwoody@widener.edu | Widener University |
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Proposal: Overdetermined and Under-determined Authorship: Methods and Progress in Identity

Christine Woody

Widener University

Performing Indeterminacy:

Named names and impersonated persons in *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*

In this paper I propose to explore how the satirical series *Noctes Ambrosianae*, running in *Blackwood’s Magazine* beginning in the 1820s and collectively authored for its first 20 numbers, plays with an open secret about the indeterminacy of authorship in the Romantic period. This series presents a sort of behind the scenes view of the production of the periodical, except, crucially, that view is entirely constructed, being a performance of what writing for the periodical might be like, rather than true access to its production history. Looking specifically at how the text handles two crucial figures of Scottish authorship in its historical moment—Walter Scott and James Hogg—I will argue that this series supports the claim that authorship is being cultivated as an intentionally indeterminate category within the context of this collectively authored series and persona/pseudonym-driven periodical. Scott is mentioned almost constantly in the series, his authorial status highlighted and reinforced through a multiplication of nicknames—some standard, like the Author of Waverley, some obscure, like the Great Magician. Hogg, meanwhile, appears “in person” in the series, although not always actually written by the author James Hogg. Hogg is encountered not through his honors and titles but through his works—which are excerpted, critiqued, and insulted by the other characters—and his behaviour—often comprised of drinking, singing, and occasionally passing out. The reader is left to reconcile which version of an author is real, and to confront the fundamental instability of authorial brands and personae as staged by this periodical. Methodologically, this argument draws from insights gained through the process of encoding this text for a digital edition, and my presentation will touch on why digital humanities methods can enrich our approach to texts that challenge the named authorship model.