

‘Perge, signifer’ – or, where did William Maginn stand?

DAVID E. LATANÉ, JR

After one meeting with William Maginn, Thomas Carlyle had a conviction: the ‘rattling Irishman’ was ‘without ill-nature, without earnestness, certainty of conviction or purpose in regard to *any* subject, except this one: *Punch is Punch.*’ Carlyle wasn’t talking, either, about the magazine, which made Maginn the subject of its first obituary after his death in 1842, but strong drink. Maginn, he wrote his brother John, ‘talks horribly of *drink*.’¹ Carlyle weighed in on Maginn because his need for a publisher had brought him within the orbit of *Fraser’s Magazine*, launched by Maginn in 1830. And *Fraser’s* is Maginn’s claim to fame. As Patrick Leary describes it, ‘Ultra-Tory in politics and antisentimental in literary taste, its slashing commentary on eminent political and literary figures quickly made it the most talked-about magazine in London.’² In addition to *Fraser’s* Maginn helped found the *Standard* newspaper, was one of the writers who brought *Blackwood’s* its early success, and wrote innumerable political leaders for several different papers that helped shape the course of the Tory party in the era of reform.

But Maginn, who not only talked but wrote profusely about the joys of intoxicating beverages, is generally remembered not for his writing or editing but for his bohemianism. As a writer, nothing so unbecame his reputation as the manner of his leaving life, destitute and drunk.³ Maginn’s raffishness and propensity to satirize friend and foe alike, combined with the sprezzatura public persona remarked by Carlyle, also led to the libel against Maginn that he was a ‘literary Swiss’, willing to hire his pen to whomever would pay – a grave charge that puts journalists on a par with lawyers.⁴ Champions of Maginn have laboured long against unheavenly twin accusations: alcoholism and insincerity.

1 Charles Sanders, Kenneth Fielding, et al. (eds), *The collected letters of Thomas and Jane Welsh Carlyle*, 30 vols. to date (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1970–), v, p. 217. Research for this essay was made possible by an NEH College Fellowship, 2000–01. 2 Patrick Leary, ‘*Fraser’s Magazine* and the literary life, 1830–1847’, *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 27:2 (1994), p. 106. 3 His death was caused by tuberculosis contracted in the Fleet debtors’ prison, and he continued producing high quality work in abundance until the last few weeks of his life. Most posthumous accounts, however, simply assert that he drank himself to death. 4 The source for this charge is most often the writings of Samuel Carter Hall, the teetotaling Cork contemporary of Maginn, who published as an old man several volumes of memories of the great men of his youth for a later Victorian readership. Miriam Thrall vigorously, though not completely con-

What did Maginn believe in other than punch? Where did he stand? My title comes from a remark in *Blackwood's* 'Noctes Ambrosianæ' – 'North' remarks to 'Odoherty,' 'Perge, Signifer', which in turn alludes to a passage in Livy: *Signifer statue Signum: Hic optime manebimus*⁵ – 'Plant here the Standard. Here we shall best remain.' The 'Signifier' or 'Standard-bearer' in *Blackwood's* slang was the 'Ensign', Sir Morgan Odoherty. This signature was taken by a number of writers, but gradually became a persona for William Maginn. Just as Odoherty was staunch but many-personed, Maginn has a surfeit of stands, and because the two nineteenth-century collections that are all the Maginn we have in book form are full of writings that he did not write, Maginn sometimes appears more inconsistent than he really was. Maginn doesn't so much flip-flop as constantly present a manifold or constellation of sometimes paradoxical viewpoints, ranging the gamut from the seemingly reactionary to the radical, sometimes aphoristic in style, often Rabelaisian, occasionally in the manner of Swift or Sterne. There are, however, constant stars in his constellations and most of them can be traced back to Ireland and Cork. While little is known about his family or childhood, clues exist in that record to his core beliefs.

His father, John Maginn, who was from an Ulster family that included both Catholics and Protestants, was appointed a schoolmaster at the Protestant Cathedral of St Fin Barre by Bishop Mann on 29 March 1777.⁶ He was for decades an assistant to the Revd Giles Lee in the Diocesan School. His wife was Anne Eccles, daughter of William Eccles, Esq. of the Scotch-Irish family of Ecclesville, Co. Tyrone. She was remembered in the family as 'a woman of humor as well as of judgment.'⁷ John Maginn, according to a newspaper obituary, was 'a tender and affectionate husband' and a 'fond an indulgent father' who 'with unremitting attention bestowed' on his children 'a finished education rarely to be found in any rank of society.'⁸ Their eldest child William was born 10 July 1794, and he became a locally celebrated educational advertisement for Giles Lee, John Maginn and the Diocesan School. Most of the surviving anecdotes about his childhood relate to his precocious ability with languages. Not emphasized in the biographies is that he formed a strong bond with his 'little platoon' – specifically Southern Irish protestants with a strong stake in the established Church of Ireland. William was originally intended for this Church, and both his brothers became its ministers. Maginn's platoon was under great stress during his years in Cork. As he pleaded in a private note to William Blackwood about 1821, 'do not admit any severe things on the Church of Ireland; for you really have no notion of how sore we are.'⁹ His childhood

vincingly, refutes it in her 'Enemies' chapter in *Rebellious Fraser's* (New York: Columbia UP, 1934), pp 208–28. ⁵ R. Shelkton Mackenzie (ed.), *Noctes Ambrosianæ*, 5 vols (New York: Redfield, 1855), i, p. 323. Livy, *Ammiani Marcellini historiae*, bk 16, par. 18. ⁶ William Maziere Brady, *Clerical and parochial records of Cork, Cloyne, and Ross*, 3 vols (Dublin: 1863–4), i, p. 271. ⁷ Thrall, *Rebellious Fraser's*, p. 165. Her source was Miss Elizabeth Maginn, William's great-niece. ⁸ *Southern Reporter* (Cork), 24 January 1819, p. 3. ⁹ Ann Kersey Cooke, 'Maginn-

would have been shaped in part by a prevailing siege mentality. He was born in the month of Thermidor of the terror in France, and between ages four and seven he lived through the 1798 rebellion and the uproars surrounding the union – both of which must have heightened his infant political consciousness – or at least his anxieties. In politics and religion, Giles Lee and his father combined Swift and Burke with broad Church doctrine. Lee preached a sermon in 1797 that argued '[m]an, in his present corrupted state, is incapable of perfect freedom: to be susceptible of such high perfection, the empire of reason must be invariably established – the dominion of passion be totally extinct.' For Lee, reformers and French revolutionaries were 'all those iniquitous projectors against the happiness and virtue of the human race.'¹⁰ Maginn's childhood was also shaped by his college tutors, for he matriculated at Trinity College in 1806 at age eleven. After placing first on the Hebrew examination given by the famously eccentric 'Jacky' Barrett, he was assigned to the tutelage of Dr Samuel Kyle, a Londonderry man. Kyle was a nurturing figure. Looking back on the Trinity of his youth, Kyle criticized 'little if any special attention [was] paid to individual Pupils – nothing paternal – nothing kindly –'¹¹ In Maginn's case, as one friend recorded, Kyle 'suffered the affections of the man to supersede the rigour of the tutor, and he may be said to have stood to him "*in loco parentis*"'.¹² As such, Kyle – along with Giles Lee – inevitably shaped Maginn's Protestant and Unionist positions in politics. In the rebellion of 1798, which split the college and resulted in a number of expulsions and prosecutions of students, Kyle had gone out with a loyal troop from the college to guard the bridges over the Liffey, and he would later in the House of Lords vote against the Reform Bill of 1832 because of the threat of the admission of more Catholics to Parliament. Kyle and Lee saw in the young William a brilliant scholar and a potential defender of the faith. In this they would be more disappointed than not – though Kyle remained close to Maginn and was one of the sponsors of the fund collected for his family after his death.

Maginn's father I believe influenced Maginn in a different direction. He was a naturally tolerant man, well known in Cork society for his warm friendships and rich 'vein of wit and humour'¹³ and the Maginns, who were acquainted with many in Cork City's growing Catholic middle classes, were in the thick of the astonishing flurry of Cork culture documented recently by Terry Eagleton in his essay 'Cork and the carnivalesque'.¹⁴ Though prepared for a fellowship by

Blackwood Correspondence' (MA, Texas Technological College, 1955), p. 111. Quotations from the Blackwood correspondence in the National Library of Scotland are, unless otherwise noted, taken from her 714 pages of transcriptions. I have checked the accuracy of many of these transcriptions against the manuscripts. **10** Giles Lee, *A sermon preached at Inniscarra, on the sixteenth of February, 1797, being the day appointed for a general thanksgiving; before the barony of Barrett's Cavalry* (Cork: A. Edwards, 1797), pp 6, 18. **11** 'Memoir' (TCD MS 10978). Quoted with permission of Trinity College Library. **12** 'The Late Dr Maginn, LLD,' *The Age* (London), 28 August, 1842, p. 5. **13** *Freeholder* (Cork), 26 January 1819, p. 3. **14** Terry

Kyle, Maginn was repelled by the 'cold morality and uncompromising theology' of the examiners, who failed to perceive the merit – or humour – of his Latin poem in which Æneas is made out to be a eunuch.¹⁵ He returned to his family in Cork, where his father had decided to make an amicable break with the Diocesan School and start, with his son's aid, his own school. Between 1811 and 1819 he assisted his father in this new classical academy (located in the family home), deepened his philological knowledge, wrote anonymously for the newspapers, and raked around town.¹⁶ Eagleton's description of him as a 'lusty orange apologist' with 'virulently anti-Catholic sentiments' is I think excessive.¹⁷ For one thing, the record we have of his writings prior to 1819, when he began his remarkable (and well documented) career with *Blackwood's*, is one in which variety of fun rather than virulence of politics predominates. For another, Maginn's friendships extended across all Corkonian classes, and he made few distinctions in his private life between Protestant and Catholic. In a small city a polylingual and fun-loving teenage schoolmaster stood out. As he wrote to Blackwood, '[a]s for me, you may tell any Cork man, any thing you like, true or untrue about me; for I am known by every body gentle and simple in this city.'¹⁸ In the 1820s, his catholicity of connection may be instanced by his ability to recruit for the ultra-Tory *Blackwood's* the young J.D. Murphy, from a wealthy Catholic family, a middle-class Catholic Whig lawyer, and the impoverished Catholic poet J.J. Callanan (hired later to teach in his school), as well as the expected Protestant apologists such as the Revd Horatio Townsend. Some have found it an 'enigma of his career'¹⁹ that Maginn could have so many Catholic friends and still hold his anti-Catholic political views. Getting along, however, was a habit inherited from his father, as well as a prudent business practice.

One other Cork influence should be mentioned. A very short distance from the Maginn family home was the printing shop of John ('Jack') Boyle, who published the liberal (and generally pro-Catholic) *Freeholder*. The paper, termed by B.G. MacCarthy a 'journalistic excrescence' did not campaign for causes so much as provide a venue for freewheeling and eclectic waggery.²⁰ As a writer, it was Maginn's grammar school, with a 'quiz' every day. He learned in the *Freeholder* the inveterate habit of satirizing both sides, and especially at the time of his wedding found himself the target of much good-natured fun in return. In an autobiographical story in *Blackwood's* just before he left Ireland, he has his narrator confess,

I have dirtied my fingers with ink, you say, and daubed other people's faces with them. I admit it. My pen has been guilty of various jeux d'e-

Eagleton, 'Cork and the carnivalesque', in *Crazy John and the bishop* (Cork: Cork UP, 1998), pp 158–211. **15** 'Late Dr Maginn', p. 5. **16** John Maginn died on 22 January, 1819, when Maginn was twenty-four. **17** Eagleton, 'Cork and the carnivalesque', p. 167. **18** 25 Feb. 1822, Cooke, 'Maginn-Blackwood', p. 255. **19** Davis and Mary Coakley, *Wit and wine: literary and artistic Cork in the early nineteenth century* (Dublin: Glendale, 1985), p. 26. **20** B.G. MacCarthy, 'Centenary of William Maginn, 1794–1842', *Studies*, 32 (1943), p. 348.

sprit, but let me whisper it, Jemmy, on *both* sides. [...] I write with no ill feeling; public men or people who thrust themselves before the public in any way, I just look upon as phantoms of the imagination, as things to throw off common-places about.²¹

Maginn regarded publishing 'quizzes' on both Whig and Tory as, in some way, an act that transcended politics, and in this regard it shows that his politics, while sincere, were subservient to this impulse. These 'quizzes', however, require someone else to take an action, to thrust themselves before public attention so that the quizzer may react. Maginn's positions may best be understood as reactionary, or to give it a more palatable spin, instinctively oppositional. I believe Maginn's 'Standard' was a fourfold one, and will examine his core beliefs of anti-whiggism, anti-papism, anti-humbug, and anti-political economy.

Maginn's anti-Whiggism was constant. Maginn was raised to believe that the Whigs were wrong on the French Revolution, wrong on Napoleon, and wrong on Ireland. He found irksome the insincere or tactical use of the Irish issue by English Whigs, without any concern for the effect of their policies on people like him. *Edinburgh Review* writers such as Henry Brougham and Sydney Smith hammered in their journal about Ireland: 'the great mass of the population is completely subjugated and overawed by a handful of comparatively recent settlers,' Smith wrote in 1820, 'who have been reluctantly compelled to desist from still greater abuses of authority, – and who look with trembling apprehension to the increasing liberality of the Parliament and the country towards those unfortunate persons whom they have always looked upon as their property and their prey.'²² For people like Maginn who were Protestant but saw themselves as Irish through and through, and who lacked the options and protections of the rich, this 'trembling apprehension' was all too real. In the 1820s Munster was riven by agrarian violence, which Maginn documents in essays and in private letters, generally laced with his ironic humour. Comparing Irish radicals to London ones, he writes that '*our* Whigs display their spleen in burning houses & cutting up his Majesty's subjects – while *their* Whigs vent their ire in talk, and murder nothing but the King's English.'²³

Once in London, his antipathy to the Whigs as a jobbing club dedicated to getting place at any cost deepened – but his connections to the Tories were shaken as well, and not only by the defection of Peel and Wellington to the other side of the Catholic question in 1829. R.P. Gillies had met Maginn when he visited Scotland in 1823; later in London in 1827 he found a man more inclined to make sarcastic comments about both Whig and Tory.²⁴ His opposition to Whiggery shifted in England towards disgust with what he thought of

²¹ 'Pococurante', *Blackwood's*, 14 (1823), p. 134. ²² *The works of the Rev. Sydney Smith* (London: Longmans, 1869), p. 346. ²³ 24 Jan 1822, Cooke, 'Maginn-Blackwood', p. 243. ²⁴ R.P. Gillies, *Memoirs of a literary veteran*, 3 vols (London: 1851), iii, p. 169.

as their pandering, snobbery, and hypocritical advocacy of pseudo-radical views. Maginn gave carte blanche to William Blackwood to manipulate and revise his contributions; in 1825, however, he wrote in a letter ‘Whigs, be they Lords, or be they plebeians, I shall not praise directly or indirectly – and I only request that no panegyric on one of such persons be ever inserted in any article of mine on any account whatsoever – That is the only stipulation I make.’²⁵ By the 1830s Maginn’s vitriolic anti-Whiggism encompassed views that seem, at first glance, to be quite radical. He argued, for instance, that the best way to dish the Whigs would be for the Tories to push for universal male suffrage and he became more hostile to the aristocracy *per se*.²⁶

Punch, as Carlyle said, is Punch – that is, when it’s not Ireland, and the nature of Maginn’s Irishness has always been contested; some have never forgiven him the ‘Lady of Leith’ song that seems the archetype of the stage Irishman, or his role in transforming ‘blarney’ from a place name to an Irish characteristic.²⁷ Maginn thought that a ‘jug of punch’ was an ‘accurate and truly philosophical emblem’ for Ireland:

There’s the Protestant part of the population inferior in quantity, superior in strength, apt to get at the head, evidently the whiskey of the compound. The Roman Catholics, greater in physical proportions, but infinitely weaker, and usually very hot, are shadowed forth by the water. The Orangemen, as their name implies, are the fruit, which some palates think too sour, and therefore reject, while others think that it alone gives grateful flavor to the whole.

Asked ‘what’s the sugar?’ he replied, ‘Why, the conciliators dropped in among us to sweeten our acidity [...] very much at the risk of turning the stomachs of the company.’²⁸ Odoherly’s Ireland and punch analogy appeared in 1823, just as Maginn was making plans to go to the land of the sugar, England. He was only waiting for his brother John to finish at Trinity so he could take over the family business. Maginn had abandoned a career in the Church of Ireland, and his emigration is tinged by an awareness of the untenable nature of the Protestant Ascendancy. Terry Eagleton notes that a ‘governing bloc with its political back to the wall is likely to react rather more hysterically than those accustomed enough to being victimized, given the contrast with their previous condition.’²⁹ Maginn does show symptoms of this hysteria during the Rockite and Whiteboy

25 Cooke, ‘Maginn-Blackwood,’ p. 574. **26** James Sack notes that Maginn was by August 1831 suggesting the Tories add both ‘male and female suffrage to the £10 franchise component of the Whig bill’; see *From Jacobite to Conservative: reaction and orthodoxy in Britain, c.1760–1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993), p. 154. **27** Maureen Waters, *The Comic Irishman* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), p. 184. **28** *Noctes*, i, p. 189. **29** Terry Eagleton, *Scholars and rebels in nineteenth-century Ireland* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1999), p. 54.

'outrages' that attended the economic distresses of 1821–3, but as he also somewhat sardonically commented to William Blackwood, the outrages 'are a matter of no moment in the end, but during their operation they are terrifying, & afford fine commonplaces for antiliberal speakers & writers.'³⁰ He was himself an antiliberal manipulator – he apparently worked in 1821 to encourage Catholic priests to oppose emancipation. His jaundiced remark, I believe, shows another problem with Cork for Maginn: the same debate and the same conflicts had been played over his entire life, and there was no end in sight. He was bored with it all. In a slashing review of collections of Irish songs published in England, Maginn remarks '[i]t would, perhaps, be a good thing to go over some of the political speculations on Ireland in the same manner, but I never liked Irish politics, and now I particularly detest them.'³¹

He also I believe detested Irish politics because he recognized the bleakness of his cause, and that's one reason why he rejected Blackwood's repeated requests to take charge of the 'Irish' material for the magazine. 'As for Catholic Emancipation,' he replied, 'ask any body but an Irish Protestant for an article about that.'³² Numerous factors account for his emigration to London, but the unrest in Munster was top of the list, especially once his marriage was planned to the daughter of a Church of Ireland clergyman, Ellen Bullen. They were wed in January of 1824 and the couple left Cork almost at once for the metropolis.

They found however that Cork went with them. Ellen socialized almost entirely with Irish friends, and Maginn's sister Margaret lived with the family for several years. Thackeray remembered how 'Maginn used always to have a half dozen tipsy fellows in his train, to whom he gave money and clothes.'³³ The Maginns welcome mat was out for almost anyone from Cork, regardless of religion or politics. He also moved easily among the Irish poor in London, partly to hide from creditors and their bailiffs, but also by choice. Maginn was fluent in Irish, and he was also able to 'talk St Giles's' slang.³⁴ He reiterates his preference for drinking with coal-heavers over club-men so frequently that one concludes he was sincere.

Despite these tolerant ways, Maginn's most sustained newspaper work began in an explicitly anti-Papist way, when he joined another Trinity College LLD, Stanley Lees Giffard, in editing the new Tory daily, the *Standard*. Giffard took his MA from Trinity in the same year that Maginn completed his BA, but it is unlikely, given the differences in age, that they were intimate at that time. Giffard's father was a Castle secret agent and 'vitriolic' enemy of Catholic emancipation.³⁵ According to one historian of the press, Maginn chose the title, the

30 26 Nov. 1821; Cooke, 'Maginn-Blackwood', p. 199. 31 'Odoherly on Irish songs', *Blackwood's*, 17 (March 1823), p. 321. 32 1821?, Cooke, 'Maginn-Blackwood', p. 111. 33 William Makepeace Thackeray, *Selected letters*, ed. Edgar F. Harden (New York: New York UP, 1996), p. 147. 34 'The election of editor for *Fraser's Magazine*', *Fraser's Magazine*, 1 (1830), p. 507. 35 Hereward Senior, *Orangeism in Ireland and Britain, 1795–1836* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966), p. 72.

motto from Livy, and wrote the prospectus for the new venture.³⁶ The motto was dropped after the first issue, because the association of 'Signifer' with Maginn misleadingly pointed to 'The Doctor' as the prime mover and editor-in-chief. The goal of Giffard and the wealthy Tories behind the venture was always clear: to plant the *Standard* on the shaky ground of opposition to Catholic emancipation, and the tenor of their position is enunciated in all capital letters in a leader of 17 September 1827. Arguing against the proposition that emancipation would tranquilize Ireland, the paper booms: 'THE PAPISTS OF IRELAND HAVE NEVER BEEN TRANQUIL BUT WHEN KEPT DOWN BY SUPERIOR POWER' (p. 3).

It is not possible to separate Maginn's leaders from Giffard's on the *Standard*. Maginn recalled that 'Giffard was supposed to write from a real fanatical feeling against the Papists; – I was charged with satirizing them and Peel for fun and the love of mischief. Besides I was accused of writing much that I did not write. In fact I was accused of having made the libels that Giffard really wrote'.³⁷ *Fraser's* commentary on Ireland shows Maginn's mature thinking much more clearly. There he accepts the new reality: the constitution has been changed, the Catholics have been enfranchised, and no return to the *status quo ante* is possible; Maginn's introduction to the first issue simply states 'we shall not moot a question which [...] is as useless in practice as the famous schoolboy controversy of ancient times, whether Hannibal ought to have marched upon Rome after the battle of Cannæ'.³⁸ In his own writings for *Fraser's* and in the political writings of David Robinson, the London essayist he imported from *Blackwood's*, anti-papism is mixed with an insistence on the historical context: 'England is chargeable,' Robinson writes in *Fraser's*, 'with a course of either vicious or guilty policy towards [Ireland] from the first year of her subjugation.'³⁹ Maginn's own forceful plea for humane Poor Laws for Ireland in 1833 shows his sympathy for the 'little cotters, who have been induced to take cabins and potato-gardens,' many of whom later swarmed to London to avoid starvation.⁴⁰

Maginn returned to Ireland for the last time in the Summer of 1839, where he visited his brothers John, rector at Castletown Roche, and Charles, just ordained. Commenting on Maginn's Protestant family background, MacCarthy notes that '[h]e did not need to leave Ireland to become an expatriate Irishman'; his political opinions on Ireland remained rooted in the Church of Ireland, and in Munster Protestantism, but he took a perverse pride that Daniel O'Connell had once referred to him in a speech as 'that hoary-headed libeller, Dr. Maginn.'⁴¹

³⁶ Frederick Knight Hunt, *The fourth estate: contributions towards a history of newspapers, and the liberty of the press*, 2 vols (London: D. Bogue, 1850), ii, p. 240. ³⁷ Edward Kenealy papers, Huntington Library, HM 38640. This item is reproduced by permission of The Huntington Library, San Marino, California. ³⁸ 'Our "Confession of Faith"', *Fraser's Magazine*, 1 (1830), p. 4. ³⁹ 'Ireland and the Progress of the "Repeal Question"', *Fraser's Magazine*, 9 (1834), p. 253. ⁴⁰ 'Poor-laws for Ireland', *Fraser's Magazine*, 7 (1833), p. 285. ⁴¹ MacCarthy, 'Maginn-Blackwood', p. 349; Kenealy, p. 93.

Maginn might be considered an antitype of Scrooge. Both Ebenezer and Maginn come to the conclusion that society is comprised chiefly of 'humbug'. But where Scrooge hordes in response, is mean with others, and is personally surly, Maginn spends, freely loans money, and engages in ubiquitous cheerfulness. In Cork he gave deadpan presentations to various improving societies, while sending them up in the pages of the *Freeholder* and *Blackwood's*. While Cork's secular improving societies provided prime specimens of humbug, he ridiculed the humbuggery of both Catholic and Orangeman in his correspondence and in the pages of *Maga*.⁴² Maginn's reaction to his perception that the world's all humbug is often through the hoax; the hoaxer, after all, has greatest fun when humbugs are caught taking themselves for real. Once in London, Maginn earned his living at first via Theodore Hook's *John Bull* Sunday newspaper. In Cork he had lampooned the pretensions of the provinces; in London he saw them magnified.

In July of 1824 he launched the *John Bull Magazine*, advertized as 'edited by a Committee of plain People, who dip into all sorts of books, frequent all sorts of company, drink ale with their cheese, and ask twice for their soup if they want it. Prospectuses being decidedly Humbugs, none will be given.'⁴³ His abettors were probably Theodore Hook and William 'Tiger' Dunlop, a scalawag Scottish half-pay Army doctor and future Canadian founding father. The sensational first issue featured a forged bit of the Byron *Memoirs* titled 'My Wedding Night', which immediately placed the magazine outside society's pale; friends such as John Gibson Lockhart were appalled. In the same issue a series titled 'The Humbugs of the Age' began with an extraordinary attack on Thomas de Quincey. Maginn defines lawful and unlawful humbug in his opening:

There are some humbugs with which we have no patience. If we see a quack-doctor vending gin and rosemary-oil, under the name of the balsam of Rakasiri – or a mock-patriot bellowing loudly in a cause for which he does not care a pinch of snuff – or a pseudo-saint turning up the whites of his eyes, and rolling them about in all the ecstasies of hypocrisy, at a conventicle – or a poor anxious author sitting down to puff himself up in a review, got up for the occasion – or twenty thousand more things of the kind, we can appreciate and pardon them all. The quack mixes – the orator roars – the saint prays – the author puffs – for a tangible and intelligible reason, money. This is the lawful object of humbug. Even with those who go through similar operations for fame, which is a secondary scope of the humbuggers, we are not very angry if that fame be for anything worth looking after. But the sort and description of humbugs which we cannot tolerate, even in thought, are

⁴² See for instance the postscript to 'Letters of Timothy Tickler, Esq. No. IX' in *Blackwood's*, 14 (1823), p. 312. ⁴³ Advertisement in the *Examiner*, 27 June 1824, p. 414.

the fellows who, on the strength of some wretched infirmity, endeavor to puff themselves into notice, and not satisfied with being thought worthy of being objects of charity and compassion, look about the company, into which they introduce themselves, for wonder or applause.⁴⁴

Even after he had been convinced to pardon De Quincey, Maginn continued to humour professional humbug but react viscerally to what we might call psychologically needy humbuggery. He warns the new readers of *Fraser's* in 1830, 'I have written for all sorts, kinds, manners, and persuasions of periodicals, and I find them all pretty much the same – very considerable damned deal of humbug in the internal regulation of their affairs.'⁴⁵ The targets of *Fraser's* sustained literary attacks – Edward Bulwer, Alaric 'Attila' Watts, Robert 'Satan' Montgomery – could all be said to fall into the second category of humbugs who lusted after 'wonder or applause'. In the war on publisher 'puffing' that Maginn and *Fraser's* famously waged, the professionals at Colburn and Bentley never received the harshest treatment.

Maginn's most personal writings for *Fraser's* were undoubtedly filler he supplied at the back, written over the bottle in the publisher's back parlour with the printer's devil at his elbow. In one such production, 'Rumbling Murmurs of an Old Tory over the Fate of his Quondam Friends' he returns to the voice of the plain man who drinks ale with his cheese:

And having all my life a particular hatred of humbug, quackery, lying, and deceit, it is quite needless to say that I hate, in politics, Whigs, *i.e.* Jacobins in a cloak – in religion, Socinians, *i.e.* Deists in a cloak – in philosophy, useful knowledgers, that is, blockheads in a cloak – and in all branches of human concernment rats, that is to say, rascals, who, to do them justice, seldom wear any cloak, but walk forth stark naked in all the majesty of scoundrilism.⁴⁶

Maginn's particular hatred is of course partial; his chief weapon against the humbugs was, after all, the outrageous spoof.

One of the most dependable and consistent beliefs – if that's the right word for it – of the adult Maginn derives from the 1790s – that one should be skeptical of all 'projectors'. It is this antipathy that partially accounts for Maginn's shameful support for the West Indian planters, since the leading abolitionists were so closely associated with Bentham's projectors on the one hand, and evangelical killjoys on the other. In both cases Maginn found the enthusiasm for abolition abroad combined with a seeming indifference either to the suffering

44 'Humbugs of the Age. No. I. – The Opium Eater', *John Bull Magazine* 1 (1824), p. 21. 45 'Election', *Fraser's*, 1 (1830), p. 507. 46 'Rumbling murmurs of an Old Tory over the fate of his quondam friends', *Fraser's*, 3 (1831), p. 649.

or the pleasures of the lower classes at home, and faulted the latter. David Levy has recently shown how *Fraser's* was thus able to obtain a 'progressive' reputation among scholars more concerned with the abuses of the factory system and the poor law despite its reactionary stance on slavery.

Miriam Thrall, in *Rebellious Fraser's*, her 1934 book that is still the sole monograph to treat Maginn in depth, notes that prior to the 'mighty remonstrances of Carlyle, Maginn's articles against utilitarian policies were unparalleled in audacity.'⁴⁷ In 1832, the magazine was rededicated and its politics redirected towards the reformers: 'we despise those political economists who swallow the jargon of Malthus or Macculloch with good faith, and pure ignorance of the consequences of the doctrines they preach.'⁴⁸ The *Fraser's* attacks on political economy, the New Poor Law, Malthus, etc. were, however, not really proto-serious Victorian; they were more frequently written in high glee. For Maginn – in contradistinction to Carlyle and those in his wake – the gravest sin of the economists was their ridiculous earnestness. Bentham's follower John Bowring, for example, was the target of a barrage of bizarre quizzes. Like Maginn, Bowring was polylingual, and an LLD, but unlike Maginn he put his signature constantly before the public. His translations from unfamiliar languages quickly became the fodder for Fraserian hoaxes. In 'Poetry of the Magyars' of 1830, a manuscript slips out of the review copy that shows Bowring describing a meeting of 'they who sit at Jerry's table' as if it were a 'Noctes Ambrosianæ':

Then Jerry grows enamoured of his pot
 Of Barclay's best, and opening wide his gullet,
 Like Chops of Channel or Tom Thumb's big giant,
 He gulps down what would full swill Glumdalglitch;
 And when his face glows like the setting sun
 [...]
 He cries aloud, being quite inebriate: –
 [...]
 Say, am I not a cleverish fellow?⁴⁹

A Rabelaisian Jeremy Bentham provokes mirth, presumably, on the face of it. Bowring was enrolled in the company of constant target of jokes as 'Our Man of Genius, Tydus Pooh-Pooh' – a late example, almost certainly Maginn's, may be found in some verses ascribed to Bowring in *The Age* in 1836: 'Sir, I say 'tis not right in "ridiculous" light / Should be render'd my genius so tow'ring; / If the Commons' bad taste made their fun so ill-placed, / It must not be said *I'm*

⁴⁷ Thrall, *Rebellious Fraser's*, p. 122. ⁴⁸ 'Our first double number, and the reason why', *Fraser's Magazine*, 6 (1832), p. 626. ⁴⁹ 'Poetry of the Magyars', *Fraser's Magazine*, 1 (1830), p. 169. John Heraud also wrote part of this article.

"*Butt Bowring*".⁵⁰ In Bowring's case all Maginn's 'anti's' converge, but it is with delight rather than rage that he picks up his pen. To the smugness of the Whigs, projectors such as Bentham and Bowring add the grave sin of sobriety.

Which is not to say that Maginn was not genuinely moved by the plight of the poor in the industrial age, or outraged by the theorists who seemed to countenance such conditions. When Maginn moved to London he did not leave the Irish poor behind, and in his debt-ridden last decade he often hid from bailiffs in the slums of St Giles. He felt the political economists, removing religion from their calculus, could never come to grips with the nature of Ireland. At the end of his life Maginn found himself within the bounds of the Fleet Prison and in close company with its most celebrated denizen, Richard Oastler, the so-called 'Tory Radical' and leader of the anti-Poor Law movement whose imprisonment for debt was part of a campaign to silence him. The two men sat together in the evenings and wrote, the more earnest Oastler penning his *Fleet Papers*, and Maginn turning out leaders for the *Argus* newspaper, sometimes taking Oastler's advice on factory questions. (He also probably wrote the articles advocating Oastler's release in both the *Standard* and *The Age*.) Maginn predictably astonished Oastler with the depth of his learning, as well as his witty facetiousness. In his fond obituary notice of Maginn Oastler proclaimed that 'Dr. Maginn's politics were in unison with my own – they were all of the Saxon school.'⁵¹ The Saxon school: that would have amused Maginn immensely; Saxon was one of the few languages he did not speak.

Maginn's twenty-five year career is extraordinarily rich and difficult to categorize. Given a target to lampoon, he almost always lampooned, though he was famous for his lack of personal malice. Maginn's reaction to his times represents one strategy among the supporters of the Established Church in Ireland – to confront change with rhetorical fireworks, mixed with an ironic appraisal of the chances of success at turning back Whig and Radical reform and rising Catholic nationalism. With the more proactive (and ultimately influential) strategy of the evangelical movement, which gained ground among members of the Church of Ireland, he had little sympathy. Throughout his life there are glimpses of an extraordinarily intelligent mind that has a hard time escaping from his sense of the absurd. I believe he regularly glimpsed Hardy's 'purblind doomsters' from 'Hap' dicing with fate, but instead of writing grim poems he sauntered up to ask if they'd like a drink and a drisheen. But first, I would argue, he would have ascertained that they were not Whigs, or Irish political bores, or Benthamites, or the second sort of humbugs.

⁵⁰ 'The Lament of Tydus Pooh-Pooh', *The Age*, 21 February 1836, p. 61. ⁵¹ Richard Oastler, untitled obituary for Dr Maginn, *The Fleet Papers*, 2 (1842), p. 295.