

**CONTESTED IMPRINTS:  
THE LETTERS OF *THE BLACK DWARF*  
IN LONDON TO THE YELLOW BONZE AT JAPAN**  
IMPRESSÕES CONTESTADAS: CARTAS DO ANÃO NEGRO  
EM LONDRES PARA O BONZO AMARELO NO JAPÃO

Georgina Abreu\*  
georginaabreu@ilch.uminho.pt

Together with William Hone's satires, the "Letters of the Black Dwarf in London to the Yellow Bonze at Japan" constitute some of the most original examples of what Marcus Wood (1994: 271) perceptively termed "the desire to glory and imaginatively exploit unrespectability". These letters were authored and published by Thomas Jonathan Wooler in *The Black Dwarf*, the radical periodical he edited between 1817 and 1824. The current paper contextualizes Wooler's literary and political intervention and analyses the sophisticated wit of the fictional "Letters of the Black Dwarf". It focuses on two moments of crisis in post-war Britain: the years of popular agitation that culminated in Peterloo, and the so-called Queen Caroline affair. In Wooler's "Letters of the 'Black Dwarf'" satire becomes an art form and journalism itself a politico-cultural act.

**Keywords:** Black Dwarf, radical print culture, satire, Thomas Wooler

Juntamente com as sátiras de William Hone, as "Cartas do Anão Negro em Londres para o Bonzo Amarelo no Japão" constituem alguns dos exemplos mais originais do que Marcus Wood (1994: 271) perfeitivamente denominou "o desejo de exaltar e explorar imaginativamente o desrespeito". Estas cartas foram escritas e publicadas por Thomas Jonathan Wooler em *O Anão Negro*, o semanário radical que editou entre 1817 e 1824. O presente artigo contextualiza a intervenção literária e política de Thomas Wooler e analisa o sofisticado humor das "Cartas do Anão Negro". Foca dois momentos de crise na Grã-Bretanha do pós-guerras napoleónicas: os anos de agitação popular que culminaram em Peterloo e o denominado Caso da Rainha

\* CEHUM, Universidade do Minho, Portugal.

Carolina. Nas “Cartas do Anão Negro” de Wooler, a sátira transforma-se numa forma de arte e o próprio jornalismo num ato político-cultural.

**Palavras-chave:** Anão Negro, cultura impressa radical, sátira, Thomas Wooler

## Introduction

Between 1817 and 1824 Thomas Jonathan Wooler (1786?-1853) authored, edited and published the radical periodical *The Black Dwarf, a London Weekly Publication (BD)*.<sup>[1]</sup> Born in Yorkshire, Wooler moved to London as a young man to make a living as a book seller and publisher. There, he associated with radical circles and distinguished himself in the *Socratic Union* and the *British Forum*, two of the net of informal debating clubs and societies that sprang up in 1816-7 in London to spread the radical word in those years of distress. According to McCalman (1988: 300), in 1813 (January to May) he edited and published *The Republican: A Weekly Historical Magazine*. In 1814, he may also have edited and published *The Reasoner*, a literary magazine (Epstein, 1994: 36) and in 1814-16, he edited the *Stage*, a theatrical journal. The *Stage* was Wooler’s first important weekly. Richard Hendrix (1976: 110) considers it “a superior journal of dramatic criticism”. For Calhoun and McQuarrie (2011: 119), Wooler was one of the most important radical intellectuals of the early nineteenth-century.

The *BD* became part of the strident occupation of the public sphere by radical journalists, editors, satirists and publishers such as William Cobbett, Richard Carlile, John Thelwall and William Hone. Moved by the belief in the construction of a new political reality, these and other radicals consciously and militantly used the printed word and image as a counter-power. It was an exciting politico-literary moment, in which press men looked at their reading public as active participants in the political discourse rather than mere “consumers” of that discourse. Under the constant threat of governmental persecution, they nurtured the emergence of a new print culture which challenged middle-class ideology and its patterns of control of the media. This was not Jürgen Habermas’s (1989) bourgeois public sphere although it also formed a “public” that proclaimed its independence from and even antagonism towards the aristocratic establishment. The difference lay in its bold, intentionally disruptive, character. William Hone thus

---

<sup>1</sup> The original spelling, punctuation and italicisation were kept in the quotations transcribed from the *BD* in this article. However, typos were corrected. Wooler was known for composing directly in print, dispensing a manuscript text. This may explain the relatively large number of typos.

saluted the emergence of this new print culture in his satire *The Political Showman – at Home*: “O Printing! How hast thou disturbed the peace!”

Hence a bold generation of writers, editors and publishers made the printed word a harbinger of change and a crucial element of “the heroic age of popular radicalism”, in Thompson’s (1991: 660) perceptive assessment. Radical writers and publishers did not shy away from conflict with the established authority, and courtrooms – the sites and symbols *par excellence* of the established power – were ostensibly and confidently used as arenas for political confrontation. The trials of William Hone and Thomas Wooler in 1817 became famous on that account. Wooler was charged with seditious libel only four months after the publication of No. 1 of the *BD*. Both Hone and Wooler were acquitted, greatly due to their brilliant self-defence. To capitalize on their victory and to declare the political presence of a new political discourse, the defendants themselves published the accounts of their trials.

These were contesting, but also contested, imprints. The writers against political and social change were no less vociferous. The *BD* was frequently a target of attack in loyalist satires, as the following lines, taken from *The Loyal Man in the Moon*, attest:

In dirtier rags and tatters were the rest,  
And at the head of this unseemly tribe  
Came one whom they denominated scribe  
A vile Black Dwarf

The *BD*, whose first issue appeared on 29 January 1817 – the day after the famous attack on the Regent’s coach on its way to the opening of Parliament –, was perhaps the most original representative of this militant occupation of the public sphere. It started as a four pence, eight paged weekly publication. With a circulation of 12,000 copies at its height (Haywood, 2005: 10) – a figure possibly exceeded after Peterloo, according to Thompson (1991: 789) –, it became one of the most influential radical periodicals of the post-war period, competing with Cobbett’s emblematic *Political Register* in the criticism of the aristocratic ruling class, its institutions and ceremonial.

As Cobbett’s periodical continued publication during his absence in America between 1817 and 1819, it is reasonable to think that the popularity of the *BD* was due essentially to its originality. The strategic task of Wooler’s periodical – to expose political corruption and the injustice of the political and judicial systems – was not innovative. Its novelty lay elsewhere: in the forging of a new journalistic language based on the endless rhetorical possibilities of satire, as Conboy (2010: 67) amply demonstrates. This new

language is characterized by a complex range of different voices and texts mixing elements of “high” and “low” culture served by a fictional character, the Black Dwarf. The result is a combination of serious and popular, even populist, journalism fusing sophisticated wit and bombastic language, the satiric and the melodramatic. Canonical literary texts can be quoted in the *BD* – Shakespeare is very frequently quoted – and simultaneously marks of orality associated with popular culture proliferate. Rhetorical questions, literary quotations and direct speech, for example, can all be found in the same text, as in the *LBD* of January 6, 1819, entitled “A Pen and Ink Portrait of the Conduct of Sidmouth, Presented to Himself: and an Illustration in Commendation of the Recorder!” (vol. iii: 6-10). This variety of voices, this “literal heteroglossia” distinguishes Wooler’s from the more direct political discourse of Carlile and Cobbett.

It has been sufficiently shown that satire characterized the whole radical culture of these years, both oral and written,[2] but in no other radical periodical of this period has satire and irony become synonymous with textual experimentation. During the seven years of its publication, the reader was allowed the glimpse of a new journalistic possibility, where satire became an art form and journalism itself a politico-cultural act. This combination of the popular and the literary locates the roots of Wooler’s style in both elite and popular culture, as Epstein (1994) has shown, thus emphasising the instability of canonical categorization and placing satire at the centre (not in the margins) of Romanticism.

The scholarly attention that the *BD* has received is closely linked to understanding this instability and, especially, to discussing the critical advantage of casting a “satiric eye” over literary movements, namely romanticism. In this vein, Richard Hendrix usefully discusses Wooler’s exploitation of humour as a tool of political opposition in the *BD*, in his pioneering essay “Popular Humour and the Black Dwarf” (1976). The second essay in James Epstein’s *Radical Expression: Political Language, Ritual, and Symbol in England, 1790-1850* (1994) examines Wooler’s 1817 libel trial in order to explore the nature of radical discourse. Steven Jones (1997: 203) points out the “contradictory mixture of the satiric and the sincere”, underscored by the mixed performative character of the Black Dwarf, a mixture of “high” and “low” culture. Martin Conboy (2010) discusses the textual experimentation and carnivalesque use of parody and satire in the *BD*, viewing them as tools

---

2 See Michael Demson’s discussion of this role of satire in the late 1810s in his essay “Remembering John Cahuac: Post-Peterloo Repression and the Fate of Radical-Romantic Satire” (Demson, 2015).

for mocking both the abuses of power and the emptiness of much conventional journalism of the time. More recently Jing-Huey Hwang (2013) has focused on the “Letters of the Black Dwarf” and argued that the author uses the literary convention of the imaginary Oriental correspondent to question presumed British values and to affirm the universalism of truth and liberty.

With these contributions in mind, the present paper contends that the themes and the satirical discourse of the *LBD* remain meaningful today. The exposure of political corruption, the workings of the judicial system and the natural offspring of both – a society based on privilege – are as valid today as they were in the early nineteenth-century.<sup>[3]</sup> Particularly topical is Wooler’s description in the *LBD* of March 17, 1819 of the intellectual mechanisms of ideological domination:

The *masters* and *gaolers* of the state know that the mind must have some employment: and they furnish it with *trifles* in abundance, lest it should seek worthier matter for its exercise. Every year some dozen of tubs are thrown out of the whale – some dozen of really unimportant subjects are thrown out for the discussion of the public, and they are pursued with as much power as the fool follows happiness, and finds it beyond his grasp (vol. iii: 170).

Turning the people against the people is an effective demobilising strategy: “they [the ministers] are pleased to see that any nonsense is capable of diverting the people from the grand object of *reform*. (...) They are most of all delighted, when they see any part of the people opposed to another part” (vol. iii: 173). Wooler denounces manipulation, understood as one of the forms of discourse which are geared towards the reproduction of their power by dominant groups, as Teun van Dyjk (2006) has showed.

The examination of the *LBD* in this paper focuses on two years: 1819, the year that culminated with the events of 16 August in Manchester and 1820, the year of the lawsuit against Queen Caroline, commonly known as the Queen Caroline affair. These years represent the culmination of the treatment of two key thematic *corpora* in the *BD*: the criticism of the political system (with the

---

3 This may explain its (albeit ephemeral) revival in the 20th century. *The Black Dwarf* was the name of a political and cultural newspaper of the *New Left* published between 1968 and 1972, in the context of the social agitation of the year 1968. It borrowed its name from Wooler’s periodical and to assert the continuity numbered the first issue ‘Vol. 13 n° 1’. In 2008, John Hoyland, one of the members of the board of the *Black Dwarf* in 1968, wrote in the *Guardian* of 15 March 2008 an article about this editorial experience (and his controversy with Beatle John Lennon): <http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/2008/mar/15/popandrock.pressandpublishing?INTCMP=SRCH> (accessed 12/05/2015).

corresponding demand for parliamentary reform) and the critique of the judicial system (often intertwined with the former), with the Black Dwarf adopting for himself the role of “the officer of justice” (vol. iii: 34).

## 0. The fictional character the “Black Dwarf”

The fictional character that gave the name to the periodical was possibly inspired by Walter Scott’s tale *The Black Dwarf*, which had been published in Edinburgh at the end of 1816 in *Tales from My Landlord*. Although it shares some of the exoticism and “lowness” of Scott’s character, Wooler’s Black Dwarf is essentially a gregarious entity who writes letters. He writes letters to Japanese and other addressees (some imaginary, others real) reporting news and making political commentary about controversial issues of the day. The most iconic are “The Letters of the Black Dwarf in London to the Yellow Bonze at Japan” (*LBD*), written in the first person. The *LBD* appeared for the first time in No. 4 of the periodical.

The character of the Black Dwarf may also have had its roots in the pages of *The Republican: A Weekly Historical Magazine*, the journal that Wooler briefly edited in 1813. The similarities between the fictional reader, signing as Proteus, and the character of the Black Dwarf are striking. In a letter to the editor of *The Republican*, Proteus writes:

For having had the presumption to counterfeit the form of Jupiter, I was deprived of body altogether, and left only an airy sprite. In this state I have wandered for two thousand years, and have witnessed many odd things, which I may hereafter communicate; and I have recently turned politician. (...) But to my purpose – my unsubstantial nature has been of much service to me in my political pursuits. I have glided unseen into privy councils, and have often been an unsuspected witness of regal weakness, and imperial guilt (*Republican*, No. ix: 164).

Wooler introduces the character in No. 1, in a text entitled *Prospectus*. The Black Dwarf is assigned the task of exposing “every species of vice and folly”, sparing “neither the throne, nor the altar” from his intrusion. Dramatic effect is increased by the refusal to give concrete details – like the fictional reader Proteus, the Black Dwarf is also involved in an atmosphere of mystery and invisibility. Wooler presents him as a cultural and anthropological mixture of high and low – he refuses to unfold “whether he be an [*sic*] European sage or an Indian savage, whether he is subject to the vicissitudes of mortality, or a phantom of the imagination”. Echoing again the fictional reader Proteus, anonymity and invisibility make the Black Dwarf

politically dangerous. Journalism itself and the “mazes of the law” will not be spared. The Black Dwarf is thus presented as a threat to the political and cultural status quo, to “things as they are.” Readers today may without effort recognize the pertinence of the task assigned by Wooler to his fictional hero. The *Prospectus* constitutes Wooler’s editorial testimony.

An image of the Black Dwarf appears in 1818, as the frontispiece illustration to the first volume of the periodical. The image shows a satyr taking a little black dwarf by the hand and pointing to the symbols of power, as if inviting him to focus his critical attention on them. These symbols are judges’ wigs and a sceptre and a crown topped by a fool’s cap. Both figures show facial expressions of that delight in “unrespectability” which, according to Wood (1994: 271), characterized post-war radical satire. The illustration reinforces the contradictory nature of the entity presented in the *Prospectus* – the Black Dwarf is ugly, deformed, socially “low”, but also potentially dangerous.

The Black Dwarf is Wooler’s literary-satiric *persona*. There are many examples of this symbiotic relationship in the periodical. One is found in the Black Dwarf’s account of “his” indictment together with Major Cartwright and others, at Warwick Assizes, on 3 August 1819. In reality, Wooler was brought to trial and found guilty for having “combined and conspired” on 12 July 1819 to elect a person to be representative of the inhabitants of Birmingham.[4] Using the distinctive tone of irony, the Black Dwarf writes:

I am not, I find, to go to court at St. James’s; but to one opened periodically at Warwick. They consult my preference of the country in this warm season, and indulge me with a journey to that ancient and respectable town, where I shall no doubt be taken proper care of, and every attention will be paid to my comfort, and consolation (*LBD*, August 11, 1819, vol. iii: 524-5).



Fig. 1 – Frontispiece illustration to vol. i of the *Black Dwarf*, 1818

© Trustees of the British Museum

4 See *BD* of 18 August 1819 (vol. iii: 533-5).

In the composition of the *LBD*, Wooler uses the literary convention of the fictional Oriental commentator informing the correspondent at home about the occurrences of his stay in Britain. In this correspondence, the Black Dwarf addresses himself to the Yellow Bonze as “thy minutive friend”, “thy little friend”, “thy little black disciple” (vol. iii: 469; 524), a self-represented “lowness” that the reader finds difficult to collate with the Dwarf’s highly informed political discourse. This ambiguity mirrors – and at the same time capitalizes on – the radicals’ own political and cultural marginality *versus* their recognized erudition. As Steven Jones (1997: 204) notes, it is by dramatizing the instability of representation itself that the satiric performance of the Black Dwarf acquires powerful meaning.

Satiric meaning is also dramatized through the representation of otherness. The Black Dwarf defines himself as a foreigner and an outsider. He makes repeated comments on this condition. At the beginning of the year 1819, he writes: “I have just closed another year’s residence among these strange people” (vol. iii: 6). In another *LBD*, dated January 27, 1819, he adds that “there is no goodness in them [the British]”. However, he is careful to clarify that he speaks “only of the great”: “thou knowest I would not record in my pages, the errors of the little world! I aim at nobler quarry than my equals. Let children shoot at sparrows” (vol. iii: 49). In this way, Wooler reminds the reader of the motto of the periodical.[5]

These words also reveal Wooler’s latent scepticism about the political commitment of the British people to the cause of parliamentary reform. This scepticism distinguishes him from other radical journalists. On announcing the end of the *BD* in December 1824, the tone of the “Final Address” could hardly be darker: “in ceasing his political labours, the *Black Dwarf* has to regret one mistake, and that a serious one. He commenced writing under the idea that there was a PUBLIC in Britain, and that public devotedly attached to the cause of parliamentary reform. This, it is but candid to admit, was an error” (*BD*, vol xii, 21).

The representation of England and the English in the apparently naïve Oriental correspondence of a mysteriously “low” character also allows for a certain distanced look, a detachment which, by conveying an idea of impartiality of judgement, increases the Dwarf’s critical authority. This estrangement is illustrated by the following excerpt, which questions the belief in the political status of the English as free-born:

5 ‘Satire’s my weapon; but I’m too discreet / To run a-muck and tilt at all I meet: / I only wear it in a land of Hectors, / Thieves, supercargoes, sharpers, and directors.’ – Pope.



I was for some time perplexed to find out where the English slave markets were held; and wandered about in vain to discover them. When I enquired, I was answered indignantly, there were no such places. But this I knew to be false; for I saw innumerable crowds of slaves every where, and I judged correctly that there must be some place of transfer, where the dealers resorted (*LBD*, April, 28, 1819, vol. iii: 267).

Japan, the imaginary homeland, is not the object of political or even ethnographic elaboration. It is used essentially as a term of comparison between the accepted barbarity of the East and the alleged superiority of English and western values. The Dwarf's angry reaction at the bloody events of the 16th August at Manchester, known as Peterloo, begins precisely by comparing Japan and England:

The drought of the season has been allayed at Manchester by a shower of gore. (...) Talk not to me of the horrors of Japan, of Morocco, or Algiers! What is it to me, whether the human victim be sacrificed to the great idol, Juggernaut, or to the cruelty of an eastern despot, or an English Boroughmonger? (*LBD*, August 25, 1819, vol. iii: 550-1).

The conclusion is that “civilization is worse than barbarity: for it deceives our hopes, and blasts the expectations it has raised” (vol. iii: 551). The allegorical representation of otherness in its various forms and styles constitutes the nucleus of Wooler's literary talent.

The self-voiced “low” status of the Black Dwarf, intended for denouncing the political and cultural marginality of the radicals themselves, also had its perquisites – it constituted a valuable opportunity for radicals to denounce the attempts at stifling their voices. During the famous trials of William Hone and Richard Carlile (vol. iii: 219-22), Wooler uses the *LBD* to warn the prosecutors of radical authors and publishers about the counter-productive effects of the inevitable publicity given to radical texts. The *LBD* illustrate the capacity – and the rhetorical energy – of radical print culture to use satire and irony as instruments of discursive confrontation with the *status quo*.

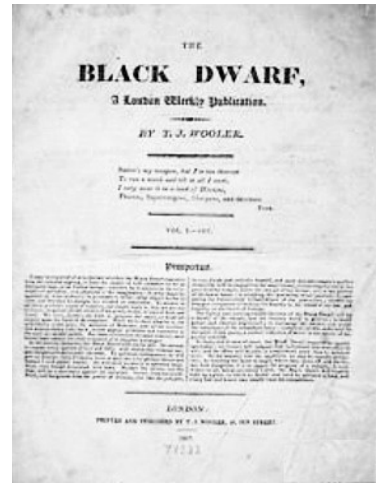


Fig. 2 – Frontispiece to *The Black Dwarf*, No. 1, 29 January 1817

## 1. The “Letters of the Black Dwarf”

The critique of the application of justice, a theme to which Wooler returns in almost every issue of the *BD*, assumed particular relevance in the *LBD* in 1819 and 1820. The first *LBD* of 1819 (vol. iii: 6-10) is an extensive attack on Lord Sidmouth, the Home Secretary. The event was the application of capital punishment for the passing of forged bank notes. The style is a mixture of irony and sarcasm. The Black Dwarf tells his “much valued friend” that, adopting the British custom of giving New Year’s Gifts, he is going to present Sidmouth with “a pen and ink portrait of his love of *justice*, his nice *impartiality*, and the *feelings*, of which he makes such a beautiful display” (vol. iii: 7).

Three men, Weller, Cashman and Driscoll had been hanged for this crime. Lord Sidmouth had been applied to for pardon, but he did not grant it. After the intervention of George Canning, however, he granted pardon to a woman, Margaret Williams, “an old offender, and most mischievous character”, who had been sentenced to fourteen years transportation, for knowingly receiving stolen goods (vol. iii: 7). The conclusion of the comparison of these two cases is obvious: “Weller, Cashman, and Driscoll, had no parliamentary friends. No minister to speak for them! They had only the public prayers in their favour, and my friend Sidmouth has lived for little else, but to insult the public” (vol. iii: 9).

The condemnation of poor people, including women, to the capital sentence for passing false notes, often unknowingly, was raising considerable protest in the press and public opinion in general. Crowds gathered during that month around William Hone’s shop to view George Cruikshank’s *Bank Restriction Note*, a satirical print denouncing this shocking practice. One of the arguments against the ruthless sentence was the poor quality of the notes, which facilitated forgery. The Black Dwarf compares the English bank notes to the American ones and concludes that the existence of poor quality bank notes is in itself “a crime”.

The reader, however, is led to understanding that the injustice of the judicial system is not limited to the application of justice. The root of injustice lies in the class-based making of the law, as well as its expense. In the *LBD* of March 24, 1819, the Black Dwarf writes: “the laws here are only to protect *the rich*. (...) the safety of the rich is the constant object; which is no wonder, as *the rich* make *the laws*, and may very naturally be expected to make them *for themselves*” (vol. iii: 186). It is precisely when the *LBD* examines the judicial system and sees it as the basis of an unequal polity and society that the *BD* acquires perennial meaning.

Two arguments lead the campaign against the injustice of the political system and its corollary – the need for parliamentary reform: 1) the existing system is corrupt and 2) it is against human rights. The former argument is discussed in a letter to the Yellow Bonze, dated March 10, 1819. The Black Dwarf refers to the corruption of the representational system by comparing the price of a vote in Nottingham, Coventry, Hull, York, etc. to the price of mutton in the market, adding that “the sale is as openly effected” (vol. iii: 156). The representational system is discussed in another *LBD*, dated March 3, 1819, where the Black Dwarf uses irony to denounce the property qualifications needed for voting rights:

The rich and great seem to contend that walking erect on two legs, and possessing the “human face divine”, is not sufficient to form a man. There must be an additional qualification of so many hundreds a year, at least; and if they should be thousands, they constitute a man of a higher order (vol. iii: 130).

The injustice of the representational system is symbolized by the existence of the so-called rotten boroughs:

Were I the patron of a borough, I would shortly teach the nation the degrading condition in which it is placed by the system. I would return a couple of Ourang-Outangs to the honourable House. For a guinea, any parish clerk would certify they were good protestants, as by law required – very little teaching would be requisite, to enable them to kiss the book and pay their fees; and, lo. I should have a couple of legislators for a trice (vol. iii: 157).

In the early nineteenth century the rents and pensions given indiscriminately to members of the aristocracy constituted some of the most crying examples of a corrupt political system. In the *LBD* dated February, 24, 1819, the Black Dwarf exposes the extra payment of £10,000, made by Parliament to the Duke of York for the supervision of his father (George III) during his illness, after the demise of Queen Charlotte. Instead of taking the money out of the royal revenue, it is taken from the pockets of the people, symbolised by John Bull:

Only think of it, and be satisfied, John Bull. If you will have princely keepers, you must pay princely prices. (...) It avails nothing to say, you have bought the Duke already – You did not buy him to superintend an insane father, and he cannot afford to indulge his filial piety, and to discharge what one of you common people, would deem a sacred duty, for less than ten thousand a year. (...) He will not rob his father – but he has no objection to put his hands into your

pockets. Nay, nay do not close up your purses. Open them wide, and fill the empty, expecting hands of the Duke (vol. iii: 126).

Heavy taxation is also denounced in a *LBD*, dated January 27, 1819:

It is only “*pay! pay! pay!*” and this is the land of perfect liberty. But *pay you must!* at every corner some agent of the system, stands with his plate in his hand, with a commission to pick your pocket, if you do not *voluntarily* contribute to fill it. All the government parrots speak no other word. Pay, is with them the *alpha* and *omega* of the system! (vol. iii: 49).

This is a recurrent subject, with the Black Dwarf emphasising governmental indifference to the sufferings of the people under the current crisis: “to ask to the ministers (...) to *lighten* the burdens of the people, is now such a well-known act of folly, that no one ventures to propose such a ridiculous affair” (*LBD* 17 March 1819, vol. iii: 170). Though paying taxes is part of the exercise of citizenship, many would identify with these words nowadays.

In 1820-1, the country was agitated by the so-called Queen Caroline affair. This affair refers to the lawsuit against Queen Caroline on a charge of adultery. George IV had become king in January 1820 and could not bear the idea of his estranged wife becoming Queen Consort. The press played an important role in this case. Public opinion was beginning to find its place as a political player, and public opinion almost unanimously supported the queen. The king was highly unpopular and regarded as unfit to accuse his wife of adultery, due to his own manifest adulterous behaviour.

The radical press took up the cause of Queen Caroline, reluctantly at first. At the end of June, the *BD* was still scoffing at the royal quarrel: “all national interest in public business is suspended because a man and his wife cannot agree” (vol. iv: 895). This reticence may explain the tone of playful irony, almost conciliatory, used in the *LBD* of 14 June, entitled “A Queen to be Disposed of – a Wife to be Given Away”:

Oh, my yellow friend! We are in a most pitiful plight. We are sadly in want of a little Eastern law, concerning the disposal of wives! How does thy royal master contrive to keep quietness among so many; when one here, is not only sufficient to disturb the royal harem, but to employ the statesmen and lawyers of the country into the bargain? (...) A plague upon these women! They plague men beyond endurance (vol. iv: 797).

However, the decision of the queen to return to England to face the accusation changed the public perception of the case, and the radical press enthusiastically took up the cause of Queen Caroline. Wooler interpreted the return of the queen as subversive female intervention: “it was rebellion against the lord of the creation Man! for a woman to be thus borne in triumph past the threshold to which she had sworn obedience” (vol. iv: 801). The discussion of gender relations constitutes a forward-looking aspect of the treatment of the queen’s case in the *BD* and in the radical press in general.

But the touchstone of Wooler’s rendering of the Queen Caroline affair is the discussion underlying the method of prosecution of the queen. The decision of Parliament to prosecute the queen through a Bill of Pains and Penalties in the House of Lords is considered “undue power”, a perversion of the law and a violation of the constitutional rights of the accused queen. “If a Queen standing in the way may be removed by any means, it will form a dangerous example of the mode of disposing with royalty, which may not stop with the removal of a Queen”, warns the Black Dwarf in a Letter of 28 June to the Yellow Bonze (vol. iv: 880). He is very sanguine about this method of prosecution: “It is execrated as an accusation – it would be detested as a law” (vol. v: 77). The Black Dwarf/Wooler argues that everyone, regardless of social or economic status, has the right to be given a statement of the charges, knowledge of the evidence gathered against them and who the witnesses for the accusation are. He contends that the injury done to the greatest represents an injury done to the community and that “legitimate freedom depends upon the unalterable basis, and impartial administration of equal laws” (vol. v: 397). This polemic reaffirms Wooler’s legal knowledge and underscores the role of radical periodicals as forums of political intervention in the public sphere.

Although the discussion is carried out in a variety of discursive forms and tones, satire is the privileged form in the *LBD*. One of the most imaginative satiric texts is the long letter entitled “Trial of a King, in the Similitude of a Dream” (vol. v: 285-300). The Black Dwarf tells a dream he had of the trial of a king for immoral conduct. The mix of comic and grotesque elements in this text exposes the “risible incongruity”, which for Donald (1996: 29) accounts for different layers of satiric meaning. In this text, these layers lie between the voiced principle of public/royal responsibility and the actual reality of immoral behaviour. This is the duality through which authority is undermined:

It [the trial of the Queen] must impress thee with a very high opinion of the purity of the English court. (...) From the arguments of the Crown Lawyers I was glad to perceive that royalty itself ought to be subjected to a strict account; and that it was a just ground for the deposition of royalty, if any moral guilt could be substantiated against the wearer of a crown. The case of the Queen, I was well aware, was no proof of the doctrines; for I saw her when accused by her enemies (...) deprived of her rights (...). But the idea pleased me. There was something so grand in the idea of Justice calling royalty to account that I dwelt involuntarily upon the theme, and I trembled for every crowned head in Christendom, if they should be subjected to the operation of the principle (vol. v: 288).

As the narrative unfolds, the ironic tone gives way to fantastic, grotesque imagery. Through a flash-forward, the scene is suddenly placed in 1868, the third year of the imaginary reign of Edward VII:

The spectre of the late Lord Chief Justice passed once or twice before my eyes, and methought the unsubstantial vision grinned horribly a ghastly smile (...). Then came Sir Vicary Gibb, who appeared delighted beyond measure as he read the speech of the worthy successor, Sir Robert Gifford, against her Majesty. (...) on a sudden, the scene changed. I was still, however, in a court of law (...). But it was no longer a Queen that was upon trial, it was a King! (vol. v: 290).

This text is an example of how criticism can be couched in ironic praise and rhetorical indirectness. In effect, Edward VII is brought to trial because he “had incurred the indignation of his subjects for various acts of licentiousness which the purity and refinement of the age could no longer tolerate”[6] (vol. v: 290), but the reader gradually learns that what is described is not justice being served, but a world turned upside down. At the trial of Edward VII, the presumed champions of justice are the former accusers of the Queen, who follow the precedent established by the prosecution in 1820. In that impossible, unreal world, George IV is a model king, ruling over public officers who act upon the strictest moral principles:

His most gracious majesty was a pattern of every virtue – chaste, sober, temperate, frugal, and more attentive to what his people could spare, than what his wants might require, he diffused universal happiness and content around him. No titled wittals, no splendid prostitutes, no noble knaves were seen at his court (vol. v: 293).

---

6 In the following year, William Hone would write a letter ‘To the King’ (Hone, 1821d: 9) containing a similar idea – if a Queen may be displaced for immoral conduct Parliament may also depose a king for injurious example to public morals.

Through the identification established with the parodied figure, this becomes the “real” one, instead of merely a secondary, imitative character. For Grimes (2003: 180), this type of tension created between the original and the parodied, in which the parodied text assumes the role of representation of reality, constitutes the subversive power of satire. Radical satiric discourse was not only oppositional discourse it was disruptive intervention in the public sphere.

Satire could also be used as a device of resistance. In the edition of 13 December 1820, when it was becoming clear that the king was regaining popularity and loyal addresses had begun to find their way into the press, the irony and mockery were no longer the instruments of joyful attack. In the letter “To the Wise Men of Gotham, Resident in the Ward of Cheap, in the City of London”, by “The Brown Ape to Thomas Helps, and his Associates” (vol. v: 835-6), satire may be imaginative discourse, but it is also a disillusioned one.

The “Brown Ape” from Borneo writes to Thomas Helps to express the congratulations of the apes of Borneo to the English apes, for their authorship of loyal addresses. Animalization was a common satirical device used to debase the object of satirical attack. It is used here to demean the authors of addresses against the queen. The English apes are “lineal descendants of a colony of enterprising apes from Borneo” who embarked for Europe “in the company of some rats from Java, some centuries ago” (vol. v: 835). The English apes now live among the “Bulls” – a “discontented race” who do not appreciate the comfort, morality, benevolence, safety, just laws and the mild and paternal government that they have. The English apes are thus not part of the English people. To the apes of Borneo “all this is so very clear, and satisfactory, and so much like our own way that”:

When it was read in our assembly, every ape leaped from his seat, and emptying his mouth of the nuts collected in the morning’s march, burst out into an exclamation of “Aye! This will do! Europe will soon be as civilized as Borneo, and apes shall rule the world”. (vol. v: 835-6).

## 2. Conclusion

Satire played its part as an instrument of critique in the *LBD*. However, the literary character of these *Letters* also illustrates the textual experimentation and sophistication of style carried out in the *BD*. Wooler perceived that satire could contribute to the expansion and politicisation of the public

sphere, but, more than that, he also showed that this could be carried out through literature – through the creation of comic-grotesque allegories, originating in the apparently naïve viewpoint of a social and literary outcast, even a pariah – the Black Dwarf. In this way, a new journalistic possibility was offered to a new, politically marginalized readership that could without effort identify with this character – a literary *persona* whose discourse symbolises all that is marginal, low, and unstable. Perhaps Wooler also wanted to fictionalize the instability of accepted notions of literature and polity and prove that instability may rhyme with perpetuity.

## References

### PRIMARY

- The Black Dwarf, A London Weekly Publication by T. J. Wooler*. Vol. i. 1818. London: Benjamin Steill (January-April 1817) Thomas J. Wooler (May 1817-24).
- The Black Dwarf, A London Weekly Publication by T. J. Wooler*. Vol. iii. 1819. London: Thomas J. Wooler, pp. 6-10, 7, 9, 34, 49, 126, 130, 156, 157, 170, 173, 186, 219-222, 267, 469, 524-525, 550-551.
- The Black Dwarf, A London Weekly Publication by T. J. Wooler*. Vol. iv. 1820. London: Thomas J. Wooler, pp. 797, 801, 880, 895.
- The Black Dwarf, A London Weekly Publication by T. J. Wooler*. Vol. v. 1820. London: Thomas J. Wooler, pp. 77, 285-300, 288, 290, 293, 835-836.
- The Black Dwarf, A London Weekly Publication by T. J. Wooler*. Vol. xii. 1824. London: Thomas J. Wooler, p.21.
- The Republican: A Weekly Historical Magazine*. No. ix. Sunday, March 7, 1813. London, p. 164.
- The Black Dwarf Archive*: <https://www.marxists.org/history/england/black-dwarf/index.htm>
- The British Museum Collection Database: [https://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection\\_online/collection\\_search\\_guide.aspx](https://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_search_guide.aspx)

### SECONDARY

- CALHOUN, C. and McQuarrie M. (2011). The reluctant counterpublic. Calhoun, C.. *The roots of radicalism. Tradition, the public sphere, and early nineteenth-century social movements*. New York University and Social Science Research Council, pp. 117-141. Retrieved from [https://www.academia.edu/9300855/The\\_Roots\\_of\\_Radicalism\\_Tradition\\_The\\_Public\\_Sphere\\_and\\_early\\_19th\\_Century\\_Social\\_Movements](https://www.academia.edu/9300855/The_Roots_of_Radicalism_Tradition_The_Public_Sphere_and_early_19th_Century_Social_Movements).
- CONBOY, M. (2010). *The language of newspapers socio-historical perspectives*. London and New York, NY: Continuum International Publishing Group.



- DEMSON, M. (2015). Remembering John Cahuac: post-Peterloo repression and the fate of radical-romantic satire. *The politics of Shelley: history, theory, form*. Retrieved from [http://www.rc.umd.edu/praxis/shelley\\_politics](http://www.rc.umd.edu/praxis/shelley_politics).
- DONALD, D. (1996). *The age of caricature: satirical prints in the age of George III*. New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press.
- EPSTEIN, J. (1989). Understanding the cap of liberty: symbolic practice and social conflict in early nineteenth-century England. *Past & Present*, 122 (1), 75-118.
- EPSTEIN, J. (1994). *Radical expression: political language, ritual, and symbol in England 1790-1850*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- GRIMES, K. (2003). Verbal Jujitsu: William Hone and the Tactics of Satirical Conflict. Jones, S. (ed.). *The satiric eye: forms of satire in the romantic period*. New York, NY: Palgrave, pp. 173-184.
- HABERMAS, J. (1989). *The structural transformation of the public sphere. An inquiry into a category of bourgeois society (studies in contemporary German social thought)*. Burger T. and Lawrence F. (eds.). Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press.
- HAYWOOD, I. (2005). Radical journalism. Leader, Z. and Haywood, I. (eds.). *Romantic period writings 1798-1832: an anthology*. London: Taylor & Francis Books, pp. 5-30.
- HENDRIX, R. (1976). Popular humour and the Black Dwarf. *Journal of British Studies*, 16 (01), pp. 108-128.
- HONE, W. (attrib.). (1821). *To the King, From the Author of 'The King's Treatment of the Queen*. London. Printed by and for W. Hone.
- JONES, S. (1997). The Black Dwarf as satiric performance. Or, the instabilities of the public sphere. Behrendt, S. (ed.). *Romanticism, radicalism and the press*, Detroit, Mi: Wayne State University Press, pp. 203-214.
- MCCALMAN, I. (1988). *Radical Underworld: prophets, revolutionaries and pornographers in London 1795-1840*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- THOMPSON, E. P. [1963] (1991). *The Making of the English Working Class*. London: Penguin.
- VAN DYJK, T. (2006). Discourse and Manipulation. *Discourse & Society*, 17 (2). London and New Delhi: Sage Publications, pp. 359-383.
- WOOD, M. (1994). *Radical Satire and Print Culture 1790-1822*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

#### LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

*The Black Dwarf*, A London Weekly Publication (BD)

Letter(s) from the Black Dwarf in London to the Yellow Bonze at Japan (LBD)

#### LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Fig. 1 – Frontispiece to vol. i of *The Black Dwarf*, 1818.

Fig. 2 – Frontispiece to *The Black Dwarf*, No. 1, January 1817, vol i, 1818.