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Review of Faith Binckes and Carey Snyder, eds,  
*Women, Periodicals, and Print Culture in Britain,  
1890s–1920s: The Modernist Period*

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# Reviews

**Faith Binckes and Carey Snyder, eds, *Women, Periodicals, and Print Culture in Britain, 1890s–1920s: The Modernist Period* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019). 476 pp. ISBN 9781474450645**

This edited book is one of a five-volume series, ‘The Edinburgh History of Women’s Periodical Culture in Britain’. With an explicit focus on women, the series is a much-welcomed addition to scholarship in the field. The current volume aims to contribute to three realms: ‘feminist periodical studies, modern periodical studies, and “new modernist studies”’ (p. 2). In its wide-ranging scope of coverage of various magazines and key contributors, the volume admirably demonstrates both the multiplicity of the print culture at the time and the latest scholarship in the field. Including both well-known and lesser known modernist little magazines, and also commercial and low- and middle-brow publications, the volume significantly extends beyond ‘literature’ into the wider socio-historical contexts and issues, constituting a more diverse and comprehensive view of women’s print culture and readership.

Regarding the subtitle ‘The Modernist Period’, the editors remark upon the difficulty of defining modernism: ‘The category of “modernism” is present not only because it continues to be an organizing concept (and a less-than-moribund “brand”) but because it was an important touchstone for many of the women writers we examine’ (pp. 9–10). The dates of 1890–1929 ‘are not an attempt to suggest that any “era” can be said to officially conclude at a given point’ (p. 10). Yet, the time covered overlaps with two other volumes in the series — on the Victorian period (1830s–1900s) and the Interwar period (1918–39) — with some magazines investigated across volumes by the same contributors. A more conclusive definition and inclusion of essays, perhaps

with better coordination across volumes, would have helped mitigate the overlap.

The volume is divided into five parts. Part I, ‘Locations’, features four chapters on various locales in the British Isles. Elizabeth Tilley’s chapter on Ireland focuses on two magazines, *To-Day’s Woman* (1894–96) and the *Lady of the House and Domestic Economist* (1890–1924), although the concern was rather more on the Victorian period. In contrast, Margery Palmer McCulloch covers both pre- and post-WWI periods and a variety of materials, artists, and writers from Scotland. In her chapter on Wales, Claire Flay-Petty presents two case studies of Dorothy Edwards and Sarah Beryl Jones, who, along with other modernist Welsh writers, were ironically given a voice in English little magazines such as *The Calendar of Modern Letters* (1925–27) and *New Stories* (1934–36). Chris Mourant and Natasha Periyar chart the promotion of ‘English domestic femininity’ (p. 61) in *Home Notes* (1894–1958) and *Woman’s Life* (1895–1934) to home and expatriate audiences, defining ‘Englishness’ through the coverage of foreign travels and cultures, with examples taken mainly from the Victorian era. The chapter also discusses the parody of the genre of women’s magazines in Stevie Smith’s *Novel on Yellow Paper* (1936). An interesting point to note is that Smith worked as secretary to Sir Neville Pearson at the magazine publisher Newnes-Pearson from 1923, and the novel ‘was supposedly written on the yellow paper provided at the firm’ (p. 60) and thus its namesake.

Part II, ‘The Sister Arts’, covers a diverse range of arts including music, drama, dance, cinema, architecture, and advertisements, although the inclusion of

the lattermost is curious, as the chapter by Annie Paige does not seek to suggest advertisement as an art form. Rather, she explores the advertisements in the January 1911 issue of *Lady's Realm* (1896–1914) in addressing the ‘archival gap’ (p. 148) for both the magazine and advertisements in general, revealing the magazine’s potential targeting of a mixed-brow audience despite its more high-brow profile and contents. Other contributors discuss female pioneers for their perceptive and advanced insights into new artistic forms, developments, and criticism. Charlotte Purkis mainly centres on the music critic Gertrude Hudson, who was active in the 1890s and 1900s and wrote under male pseudonyms, steeped in on-going debates about the literary merit and critical acumen of musical reviews, the gendered language associated with the genre, and discrimination against female journalists and critics. Women in the theatre profession faced similar prejudice; Elizabeth Wright traces various examples of female playwrights, critics, actresses, directors, and managers in the period of transition from the 1890s to the 1920s, in which opinion of women’s involvement in theatre went from criticism concerning unfemininity and impropriety to greater acceptance after WWI owing to the enfranchisement of women. Wright notes that ironically, due to frequent engagement with the suffragist cause and lack of formal innovation, dramas written by women were rarely published in the ‘institution’ of modernist little magazines.

Susan Jones discusses the innovative and perceptive studies into dance and dance anthropology by Marcelle Azra Hincks, a dance critic of the *New Age* (1907–22), before the vogue of modern dance brought by the Ballets Russes, along with the contribution of practitioners in the other arts, such as painters Dorothy (Georges) Banks and Anne Estelle Rice as well as writer Rebecca West in *Rhythm* (1911–13) and *Outlook* (1898–1928) respectively. Jones argues that their writing is ‘some of the most illuminating dance criticism of the period’ for their ‘sensitive

handling of their observations [which] differs in tone and style from their male counterparts’ (p. 107). This is echoed in Elizabeth Darling’s chapter, which brings to attention female-oriented discussions of architectural modernism (home designs) in women’s magazines such as *Vogue* (1916–), *Queen* (1861–1970), and *Good Housekeeping* (1922–), in which the articles ‘written by and for women [...] demonstrate a sensibility which [...] was active in the establishment of a discourse of “the modern” in architecture’ (p. 135) starting from the early 1920s, before the ideas were embraced by male architects and mainstream society. Reading Iris Barry’s film criticism in the 1920s as a cultural project (particularly in *Vogue*, besides a range of periodicals including the *Spectator*, the *Adelphi*, and the *Daily Mail*), Miranda Dunham-Hickman illustrates Barry’s contribution to the establishment of a ‘film culture’ (p. 121) across ‘different cultural “brows”’ (p. 125) and ‘the nascent discourse of film criticism’ (p. 123) in Britain.

Part III, ‘Key Literary Figures’, focuses on well-known female modernists. Kathryn Laing explores Rebecca West’s outputs in periodicals in the 1910s, highlighting the allegorical relationship between the female body, writing, and the suffragette cause. Margaret D. Stetz discusses West’s theatre criticism in *Time and Tide* (1920–58) in the 1920s, describing the ‘unpredictability’ (p. 183) and ‘idol-smashing’ (p. 193) feminist belligerency therein as ‘a kind of literary performance art’ (p. 192) amongst West’s experimentation with various journalistic forms in different types of periodicals. Elizabeth Pritchett and Scott McCracken argue for Dorothy Richardson’s ‘everyday democratic aesthetic’ (p. 207) in her more political and experimental writings published in periodicals, in contrast to her style in *Pilgrimage*. Louise Kane investigates Violet Hunt’s periodical writing spanning from the late Victorian period to the 1930s, ranging between mainstream and modernist tendencies

under a 'multi-temporal' (p. 223) lens. Henry Mead explores Dora Marsden's anarchism in contrast to her contemporaries', such as A. R. Orage's *New Age*, Emma Goldman's *Mother Earth* (1907–17), and Benjamin Tucker's *Liberty* (1881–1908), and discusses Tucker's subsequent debates with the *New Freewoman* (1913) and the *Egoist* (1914–19). Carey Snyder charts in detail Beatrice Hastings's deployment of two pseudonyms (essentially differing personas), Beatrice Tina and D. Triformis, to generate debates on controversial topics regarding women in the *New Age*, notably in the correspondence section, 'a forum for polyphonic and pugilistic debate' (p. 249), which begged to differ from the Women's Social and Political Union's stance and elicited comments from both suffragettes and their opponents. Faith Binckes discusses the posthumous publication of Katherine Mansfield's manuscripts in the *Adelphi* in 1923–24, focusing on the 'editorial interventions' (p. 270) by her husband John Middleton Murry. Finally, Laurel Foster focuses on May Sinclair's prolific work in a wide spectrum of periodicals on both sides of the Atlantic over her long career, with particular attention to the WWI period.

In contrast, Part IV, 'Networks, Circles and Margins', turns the spotlight on more peripheral figures of the period. Helen Southworth and Alina Oboza discuss the poetry of Charlotte Mew and Anna Wickham in tandem, as female poets in the early twentieth century who are neither conventional nor avant-garde, forging a path through transatlantic print culture. This chapter also includes a helpful comparative timeline of their various publications. Lee Garver illustrates the significance of Edith Nesbit and Florence Farr's writing in the *New Age* between 1907 and 1910 as reflective of their concern of Nietzschean thought and social reform. Also writing on Nesbit, Anthony Camara presents a fascinating reading of her gothic tale 'The Power of Darkness', published in the *Strand* (1891–1950) in April 1905, in its engagement with the feminine abject

and the uncanny as well as mass culture symbolized by the wax museum. Melissa Bradshaw discusses Edith Sitwell's editorship of *Wheels* (1916–21) and her role in shaping its radical stance, such as her inclusion of anti-war poems by Wilfred Owen and Iris Tree.

In his digital humanities case study, Bartholomew Brinkman investigates the discourses of 'suffrage', 'sex', and 'domesticity', which popularity was flagged by statistical topic modelling, in reading poetry by women published in the *Freewoman* (1912) and its successors as compared to the *English Review* (1908–37) and the *New Age*. The analysis was performed using Text Encoding Initiative (TEI) and 'medium' reading – a term referring to an approach between using either a small, focused corpus or 'thousands or millions of unstructured texts across nations and epochs' (p. 315) — with subsequent human inspection and interpretation. The results draw attention to works not only by canonical female modernist poets such as H.D., Amy Lowell, and Marianne Moore, but also by lesser-known figures, presenting a more comprehensive view of the disparate female voices and opinions on the topics of significant concern to women of the period.

The final section, Part V, 'Social Movements', moves beyond literary modernist interests into the wider social arena, covering diverse topics from religion and spirituality to socialist and feminist causes. Mark S. Morrisson argues for the interest in esotericism beginning from the *fin de siècle* as a product of modernity, with the significant involvement of women and periodical culture, which enabled women to assume authority as spiritual leaders and writers. Mabel Collins, a major theosophical author, and Dion Fortune, founder of the Society of the Inner Light, are cited as examples and discussed in relation to various occult journals such as *Lucifer* (1887–97) and the *Occult Review* (1905–33). On the other hand, Krista Lysack charts suffragist movements within the Church of England as facilitated by

the Church League for Women's Suffrage and its *Monthly Paper* (1912–17). Layne Parish Craig discusses the importance of the *Malthusian* (1879–1952) in the debate of birth strike and birth control in Britain, especially during WWI against the discourse of 'pronatalist patriotism' (p. 402) and in relation to the female perspective through key contributors such as Bessie Drysdale and Stella Browne. Elizabeth Carolyn Miller explores women's columns and their writers in socialist papers such as *Clarion* (1891–1934), the *Labour Leader* (1894–1987), *Forward* (1906–60), and *Justice* (1884–1925), and their views on issues ranging from labour to consumption in an attempt to advance socialism from female perspectives inclusive of various social classes.

Besides the wealth of research that is presented in individual chapters, the back matters of the volume also provide useful information to researchers, especially regarding access to materials and references. The Appendix is noteworthy in presenting brief profiles of the periodicals discussed as well as listing physical and virtual holdings, which is very helpful for researchers. That said, at times the listing can be more comprehensive. For example, *Poetry and Drama* is only listed with the British Library and archive.org, although according to the [Index of Modernist Magazines](#), created by Suzanne W. Churchill, the magazine seems to be available at around twenty university and institutional libraries in North America alone. While archive.org provides both image and full-text versions, and individual institutions might not hold a complete run, it would be of interest to researchers who are within easy reach of one of the holding sites to consult an actual copy, the importance of which the editors recognized in the acknowledgments (p. x).

Given the increasing availability and access to archival resources online and for the benefit of researchers outside of Britain and America (also significant for times when a global pandemic would prevent travelling and on-site

consultation), it would be tremendously helpful if more online avenues be suggested or included. For example, for *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse* (1912–), the Modernist Journals Project (MJP) is listed along with three sites in Wisconsin, London, and Edinburgh, although the MJP only offers copies from 1912–22. In fact, the Poetry Foundation has set up an [archive](#) of all past issues, and JSTOR also holds a complete run (with a three-year moving wall from the latest issue), with issues from 1912–24 freely accessible. Nonetheless, such pervasive availability only happens in the case of more well-known and well-preserved modernist magazines.

Similarly, despite the fact that references for individual chapters are often thorough, the 'Works Cited and Helpful Sources' includes a mere twenty resources (with fewer than half published within the last twenty years), which is far from commensurate for a volume of this length. Even though modernist magazines is a diverse field and scholarship might be highly specific or localized, many of the contributors have published prolifically, and the list could be expanded by the inclusion of a range of scholarship (including those mentioned in the Introduction). For example, *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines*, vol. I, *Great Britain and Ireland* edited by Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker would be of general interest apart from the three chapters cited. Edited volumes such as *Little Magazines and Modernism: New Approaches* (2007) edited by Adam McKible and Suzanne W. Churchill, and *Transatlantic Print Culture, 1880–1940: Emerging Media, Emerging Modernisms* (2008) edited by Ann Ardis and Patrick Collier, also deserve mention. In terms of monographs, Clifford Wulfman and Robert Scholes's *Modernism in the Magazines: An Introduction* (2010) was frequently mentioned in various chapters; studies on individual magazines and editors, for example Bruce Clarke's *Dora Marsden and Early Modernism: Gender, Individualism, Science* (1993), Mark S.

Morrisson's *The Public Face of Modernism: Little Magazines, Audiences, and Reception, 1905–1920* (2001), and Faith Binckes's *Modernism, Magazines, and the British Avant-garde: Reading Rhythm, 1910–1914* (2010) are also noteworthy. Patrick Collier's *Modernism on Fleet Street* (2006) covers modernist figures such as Virginia Woolf (on whom the absence of dedicated discussion in this volume is conspicuous), Rose Macaulay, and Rebecca West, charting the latter's career well into the 1920s when she became more mainstream. That said, from now on any such overview of scholarship on modernist print culture should put this volume front and centre.

Overall, this book is indispensable for the vast and diverse field of women and print culture in the modernist period despite minor imperfections. The range of scholarship presented therein greatly enriches and expands our current understanding of the field, and is of interest not only to modernist scholars, but also social historians in helping piece together the *Zeitgeist* for a general understanding and more specific further study.

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