



Journal of European Periodical Studies

an online journal by ESPRit, European Society for Periodical Research

Review of Jennie Batchelor and Manushag
N. Powell, eds, *Women's Periodicals and Print Culture
in Britain, 1690–1820s* (2018)

Fauve Vandenberghe

Journal of European Periodical Studies, 5.1 (Summer 2020)

ISSN 2506-6587

Content is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 Licence

The *Journal of European Periodical Studies* is hosted by Ghent University

Website: ojs.ugent.be/jeps

To cite this article: Fauve Vandenberghe, 'Review of Jennie Batchelor and Manushag
N. Powell, eds, *Women's Periodicals and Print Culture in Britain, 1690–1820s* (2018)',
Journal of European Periodical Studies, 5.1 (Summer 2020), 109–12

Reviews

Jennie Batchelor and Manushag N. Powell, eds, *Women's Periodicals and Print Culture in Britain, 1690–1820s* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018). 528 pp. ISBN 9781474419659

Women's Periodicals and Print Culture in Britain, 1690–1820s (2018) is a collection of thirty essays edited by Jennie Batchelor and Manushag N. Powell, both established scholars in the relatively new but burgeoning field of eighteenth-century periodical studies. Their aims for this volume are laudably ambitious as they work to upend common misconceptions about women's involvement in the production and consumption of periodicals. This volume takes as its starting point that 'there is no periodical culture without women, full stop; nor is there any simple way to sum up women's multifaceted importance to the genre and how they shaped its public power' (p. 3). In taking women writers as their focal point for discussing periodicals of the long eighteenth century, the contributors challenge several misconceptions that have run persistently through previous scholarship on eighteenth-century periodical culture, ranging from the ostensibly rigid divide between the public and private sphere, periodical readership, and the extent to which women were involved in the textual production of this period. Particularly refreshing is the editors' insistence on the varied nature of women's involvement in the making and dissemination of periodicals: women occupied a central place in the history of periodical writing as writers, editors, critics, readers, and sellers. This multi-faceted approach to eighteenth-century women writers likewise comes to the fore in the many different and innovative methods that this volume manages to combine: contributors draw from, among other fields, recent developments in transnational studies, material-cultural studies, and reception

theory. The collection thus not only makes important contributions to periodical studies, but also has further implications in the fields of eighteenth-century women's writing, print culture, novel studies, and poetry studies.

The collection is divided into six sections that conveniently group together the essays thematically. The first part, 'Learning for the Ladies', studies how the miscellaneous and heterogeneous character of the eighteenth-century periodical claimed a central position in women's educational development. James Robert Wood usefully surveys a number of women-oriented periodicals across the century, showing how these journals not only promoted different types of learning as an important part of women's daily lives, but also actively contributed to the conversation around the nature and limits of female education itself. Eve Tavor Bannet emphasizes the importance of bringing the history of reading to the study of eighteenth-century periodicals. She argues that it is precisely the fragmentary and discontinuous nature of the genre that made it an important pedagogical vehicle because it helped to foster a critical mindset in its female readers. Koenraad Claes insightfully discusses the perhaps surprisingly elaborate investment of the *Lady's Magazine* (1789–95) in the Revolution Controversy, while Anna K. Sagal convincingly studies Charlotte Lennox's strategic employment of romance elements in the historical pieces in the *Lady's Museum* (1760–61). Both of these chapters serve as interesting illustrations of the wide variety of topics periodicals aimed to educate their readers

about — ranging from current political events to British and foreign history.

The essays of the second part, ‘The Poetics of Periodicals’, tackle the rich cross-fertilization of poetry and periodicals, collectively highlighting the importance of fleshing out this interaction in more detail. Jennifer Batt offers an excellent overview of the different editorial strategies periodicals employed when featuring female poets. Magazines offered female writers the opportunity to express their poetic voices and to reach wider audiences. At the same time, such magazines could often be exploitative, publishing the works of female poets in sometimes restrictive ways. Whereas Batt studies this intermingling of genres as a larger phenomenon, the other essays in this section each examine a specific case study. Dustin D. Stewart, for instance, explores Elizabeth Singer’s poems about platonic love in the *Athenian Mercury* (1690–97), just as Tanya M. Caldwell examines Hannah Cowley’s racy correspondence with Della Crusca in the *World* (1787). In this section’s closing essay, Octavia Cox looks at how the *Lady’s Poetical Magazine* (1781–82) promoted different views on femininity, encouraging its readers to scrutinize different perspectives and come to their own conclusions. Taken together, these individual case studies hint at the significant role the periodical genre played in the popularization of verse and in the canonization — or even obscuration — of certain poets’ work, while also demonstrating how poetry helped both to shape and legitimize the newly emerging periodical genre in this protean literary era.

Part Three, ‘Periodicals Nationally and Internationally’, turns its attention to how female periodical writers mediated and shaped national and international debates. The first three chapters put now well-known female authors in a different light by highlighting how they contributed to national political debates in their periodical writing. Rachel Carnell discusses Delarivier Manley’s editorial persona in the *Examiner* (1711), while

Isobel Grundy looks at elements of social critique in Lady Mary Wortley Montagu’s often over-looked ventures into periodical writing. Catherine Ingrassia analyses how Eliza Haywood attempted to educate her female readers about England’s military conflicts in the *Female Spectator* (1744–46) and the *Parrot* (1746). In contrast to the focus on national conflict in these earlier essays, Alessa Johns adds a much-needed transnational perspective to this collection in her discussion of the reception of German women’s writing in British magazines. Lastly, JoEllen DeLucia argues that the *Lady’s Magazine’s* numerous travel narratives challenge our conceptions of women readers by showing us their deep interest in worlds beyond domestic narratives. As a whole, this diverse section successfully demonstrates the need — and further potential — of tracing international connections in eighteenth-century periodical studies.

Part Four, ‘Print Media and Print Culture’, convincingly shows the value of this collection for scholars whose interests lie outside of the field of periodical studies. It maps out the various ways in which periodicals are vital objects of study for re-thinking literary canonization, female authorship, and genre formation. Perhaps paradoxically, periodicals have functioned as both ‘standard-bearer[s] of literary taste’ (p. 219) and as vehicles for popular, defiantly non-canonical writing. For instance, while Rachael Scarborough King persuasively shows how the periodical’s prescriptive lists of novels helped to secure the form of the novel — often associated with female readers — into the literary canon, Jenny DiPlacidi and Evan Hayles Gledhill emphasize that the periodical is also an important venue for uncovering a wealth of unstudied, popular prose narratives such as serially published fiction or gothic narratives. Pam Perkins’s account of periodical reviews of women’s writings likewise re-thinks commonplace conceptions of eighteenth-century female authorship, reminding us that early recovery efforts have often

privileged certain types of female authors over others. Further, Hannah Doherty Hudson's excellent essay contends that incorporating magazine biographies by and about women into the genre of biography challenges 'gendered preconceptions about biography's function' (p. 291). Finally, Megan Peiser explores Elizabeth Moody's and Anna Laetitia Barbauld's efforts to ensure a place for women in literary history through their periodical reviews. Such efforts yet again illustrate the breadth of women's involvement in eighteenth-century periodical culture: they were not only readers, writers, and editors, but also astute critics and reviewers who actively shaped the literary canon.

The six chapters in Part Five, 'Theorising the Periodical in Text and Practice', reflect on the state of eighteenth-century periodical studies and, in the words of the editors, aim to 'sketch out the cutting edge of gendered queries into periodical writing' (p. 313). This theoretical angle could sometimes be more clearly articulated, as these essays do not necessarily provide a full-fledged theoretical reflection on the state of the field, or at least any more than other contributors to this collection. This is understandable, however, since periodical studies is still a much less established field in eighteenth-century studies than in nineteenth- and twentieth-century literary studies. Nonetheless, these chapters often provide unique and novel methods for approaching women's periodical writing. Kathryn King, for instance, rightfully points out the need to take into account women's vital role as editors in collaborative periodicals, just as Jennie Batchelor takes the *Lady's Magazine* as her object of study in order to reflect on larger definitional problems of such terms as 'magazine' and 'periodical'. Susan Carlile shows that reader correspondence in the *Lady's Museum* (1760–61) was a vehicle for complex intellectual content, which might force us to reassess the function of readers' letters in the periodical as a whole. Claire Knowles accounts for the 'feminization of the newspaper', by showing Mary Wells'

influence on the *World* (1787–94). The chapters by Nicola Parsons and Slaney Chadwick Ross both examine the *Ladies' Mercury* (1693). These essays are decidedly less theoretical in nature, but their insistence on reading this female-oriented periodical on its own terms — and not merely as a counterpart to or extension of the *Athenian Mercury* — offers a welcome and rewarding perspective.

The volume closes with the sixth section, 'Fashion, Theatre, and Celebrity'. Chapters by Serena Dyer and Chloe Wigston Smith elucidate how periodicals not only aimed to circulate information about fashion by disseminating embroidery patterns and fashion plates, but also hoped to educate female readers about more general concerns, such as consumption and spending habits. Manushag Powell's chapter tackles the intersections between theatrical and periodical writing in Frances Brooke's *Old Maid* (1755–56). She argues that its essays on the theatrical landscape of the period show Brooke's ambition to 'establish the provenance of women as authorities over the theatre' (p. 428). Laura Engel also offers a contribution to our understanding of the interaction between the periodical and theatrical worlds. She contends that visual representations of famous women (such as actresses) in periodicals provided their audiences with 'an inspirational model for active strategies of self-styling' (p. 460). Lastly, Barbara Benedict suggests that serial publications offered female physicians a place to promote their cures and recipes, allowing them to compete in the medical marketplace. While the title of this section might misleadingly suggest that these chapters have little in common besides their interest in fashion, theatre or celebrities, their shared emphasis on, above all, consumer culture and women's agency within it brings these final essays together.

Collectively, these thirty chapters provide a wealth of new information on eighteenth-century female periodical writers. They convincingly demonstrate that a thorough examination of women's

REVIEWS

contributions to eighteenth-century periodical culture is a useful way to combat 'essentialist assumptions commonly associated with the genre' (p. 18). This volume will likely appeal to a wide range of literary historians working in eighteenth-century periodical studies and women's writing, as well as those interested in print media, book history, canonization and the development of the novel, more broadly. In particular, this collection will be of interest to scholars studying the reception of specific authors as many of its essays explore the often underexplored periodical writings of such canonized writers as Mary Wortley Montagu, Charlotte Lennox, or Delarivier Manley. The collection's strength lies in the remarkable diversity

of the authors, periodicals, methods, and approaches explored. However, perhaps precisely because of this heterogeneity, this volume sometimes lacks a set of unified theoretical reflections on the state of the field and might at times have benefitted from more explicit methodological reflections on the future of eighteenth-century periodical studies. Even so, *Women's Periodicals and Print Culture* is a worthy and significant contribution to our understanding of female writers, periodical studies, and British eighteenth-century culture as a whole.

Fauve Vandenberghe
Ghent University