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Review of Patrick Collier, *Modern Print Artefacts:
Textual Materiality and Literary Value in British Print
Culture, 1890–1930s* (2016)

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Reviews

Patrick Collier, *Modern Print Artefacts: Textual Materiality and Literary Value in British Print Culture, 1890–1930s* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016). 288 pp. ISBN 9781474413473

Patrick Collier's 2016 *Modern Print Artefacts: Textual Materiality and Literary Value in British Print Culture, 1890–1930s* makes important contributions to literary and periodical studies, with implications beyond these fields as well. Collier, one of the leading voices in late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century periodical studies, describes the 1890s–1930s as an 'especially unsettled' (p. 20) time for literary valuation, due to increasing literacy rates, expanded access to printed materials across social classes, and ongoing experiments with literary form. These forces 'combined to bring about a crisis in literary evaluation which can also be understood as a period of paradigm shift' (p. 20).

The question at the heart of Collier's book is: how do periodicals produce monetary and cultural value for themselves and for other objects? Answering this hinges on untangling the term 'value', and attempting to determine whether it denotes a trait intrinsic in objects, or extrinsic through the system of valuation. When, after extensive consideration, Collier asserts that value is both intrinsic and extrinsic, and that periodicals' 'accrual, gathering and loss of value illustrates certain difficult-to-formulate aspects of more abstract and respectable aesthetic (or literary) value' (p. 26), his claim is no less nuanced for its seeming inevitability.

In a 2015 article titled 'What is Modern Periodical Studies?' Collier took stock of the first decade of work in this area. He worried that scholars had yet to form a consensus on the field's 'object of knowledge' — expressing concerns that scholarship often lost sight of the

periodicals themselves while focusing on their cultural and literary implications.¹ In this 2015 article, Collier advocated for 'sit[ting] down with a periodical that speaks to you, long before your findings have to be framed so as to address the field's grand concepts'.² In *Modern Print Artefacts*, Collier appears to heed his own advice: in each chapter, close readings of fiction and non-fiction, advertisements, and images are central to his broader arguments about each periodical's role in society. The book focuses the bulk of its attention on the *Illustrated London News* (1842–1989), *John O'London's Weekly* (1919–45), the *London Mercury* (1919–39), and two poetry anthologies published by Harold Monro in the 1920s.

Each chapter of *Modern Print Artefacts* looks at a periodical in relation to ideas and definitions of 'value', as well as those of 'modernism' — a thorny word for Collier, and one he addresses at length in the book's postscript. *Modern Print Artefacts*' first chapter looks at the *Illustrated London News* — England's first 'respectable' (p. 47) illustrated weekly, which began publication in 1842. Collier focuses on the magazine during the summer and autumn of 1892, a period during which it was interested in three separate areas of activity: the British Empire, London, and the British literary marketplace. Collier demonstrates how the *Illustrated London News* used the predictable form of the newspaper to impose order on these three spheres, which were each undergoing rapid, seemingly-chaotic, change in the 1890s. In establishing order in the minds of readers, Collier shows, the *Illustrated*

1 Patrick Collier, 'What Is Modern Periodical Studies?' *The Journal of Modern Periodical Studies*, 6.2 (2015), p. 93.

2 Collier, p. 109.

London News revealed its complicity in an imperial system of valuation that privileged Britain over its colonies, the city over the suburbs, and 'serious' writers over 'popular' ones. The chapter pays particular attention to the *Illustrated London News's* publication of Henry James's story 'Greville Fane', in installments during the autumn of 1892. Collier describes the story as grappling with 'the opposition of the literary text's aesthetic form to its commodity status' (p. 3) — anticipating what would prove to be a key thread in late twentieth century modernist scholarship.

The second chapter's focus is on *John O'London's Weekly*, which began publication in 1919 and targeted the rapidly expanding audience of newly literate, working class readers. *John O'London's* made reading and writing seem like accessible daily activities to its readers through contents and advertisements, and promised to teach readers the cultural literacy many of them had not grown up with. In order to establish itself as an arbiter of cultural value, *John O'London's* aligned itself with established authors, and Collier examines the magazine's 1925 serialised reprinting of Thomas Hardy's much earlier novel, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891). Collier explores the conflict inherent in the newspaper's attempts to insist on the gravity of a writer like Hardy, while also selling the dream of authorship as accessible to everyone — a tension he concludes the magazine could not fully reconcile. He finds a similarly unresolved conflict in the magazine's refusal to take a side in ongoing debates about the value of 'modernist' literature, concluding that 'with a few notable exceptions — including, on the one hand, Robert Lynd's polemical dismissal of T. S. Eliot in 1932 and, on the other, the paper's consistent, enthusiastic embrace of Virginia Woolf — *John O'London's* writers tended to hedge when modernism was at issue' (p. 129).

Modern Print Artefacts's third chapter looks at the *London Mercury*, a monthly literary review launched the same year as *John O'London's*, aimed at

the cultural establishment, rather than the self-educated. The *Mercury* attained 'popularity and notoriety as the leading anti-modernist voice of the early 1920s' (p. 35), and is often remembered for its negative review of T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, 'best known, that is, for ending up on the wrong side of literary history' (p. 142). Collier notes that the *Mercury* at times served as a trade journal for the book trade — most explicitly with the review's 1931 'Special Printing Issue' and 'Book Trade Number'. By close-reading the *Mercury's* content and advertisements, and comparing it to its closest competitor, the *Bookman*, Collier locates the *Mercury's* system of valuation in material objects. This is displayed in the magazine's celebration of 'the English heritage as materialised in old churches and monuments; in the time-honoured craftsmanship of rare and antiquarian books and *éditions de luxe*; even in the artefact of the *Mercury* itself' (p. 144).

Collier's fourth chapter compares two poetry anthologies influential in the *fin de siècle* with two anthologies from the 1920s. These are the Francis Palgrave-edited *Golden Treasury*, launched in 1861 and in its twenty-fourth reprinting by the end of the nineteenth century; Arthur Quiller-Couch's *Oxford Book of English Verse* (1900); *Shorter Lyrics of the Twentieth Century*, edited by W. H. Davies and published by Harold Monro in 1922; and *Twentieth Century Poetry: An Anthology by Harold Monro*, published in 1929. One major difference between these popular anthologies of two eras was that, while Palgrave and Quiller-Couch largely avoided placing the poetry of their contemporaries in their collections, those published by Monro were filled with still-working poets. Business in anthologies was booming in the period covered by *Modern Print Artefacts*, with Collier citing the fact that twenty-nine poetry anthologies were published in England in late 1927. For poets in the period, anthologies were often one of the few places to earn income from their work, yet poets and critics were

also critical of these books, worrying that anthologies and their editors were assuming too large a role in determining which work had value.

Collier plants the most polemical part of his book in his brief postscript. Here he returns to his 2015 advocacy for ‘reading early twentieth-century periodicals not *as* modernism, not even *against* modernism, but as participants in a much wider literary field’.³ In contrast to the popular trend in modernist studies of gathering an ever-expanding — geographically, temporally, and generically — range of works under modernism’s umbrella, Collier argues that ‘the concept of “modernism” inadequately and inaccurately frames the literary production of Great Britain and the United States in the early twentieth century’ (p. 233). Collier’s issue is not with those who practice modernist studies, but rather with the idea that this term can help readers make sense of everything that was produced in the early twentieth century, as he laments that those texts that cannot fit under modernism’s capacious banner are being overlooked. Collier’s concerns about ‘modernism’ come full circle back to the book’s guiding questions about value, as Collier recognises that “Modernism” is both the marker and the spring of value

for scholarship on this period in the print cultures of the west’ (p. 234) — a fact he hopes to change.

One of the incredible joys of modern periodical studies is that, more than a decade after Robert Scholes and Sean Latham described ‘The Rise of Periodical Studies’ in *PMLA* in 2006, there still remain important magazines, newspapers, and journals being approached for substantially the first time.⁴ Collier is the first to introduce much of his material to readers, and this book is full of fascinating finds that will be of lasting interest to those working in nineteenth- and twentieth-century literary and cultural studies. Collier is a generous writer who makes space for, and praises, the many other scholars whose work he draws on, and the book is exemplary in performing just the kind of detail-oriented periodical scholarship he has been advocating for. Collier’s attempt to trace ‘the interaction between individual artefacts and the constantly evolving system they continuously create, and through which they create (and, often, fail to create) their own value’ (p. 26) is a rich and rewarding read.

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3 Collier, p. 106.

4 Sean Latham and Robert Scholes, ‘The Rise of Periodical Studies’, *PMLA*, 121.2 (2006), 517–31.