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Review of Catherine Clay, *Time and Tide:
The Feminist and Cultural Politics of a Modern
Magazine* (2018)

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Reviews

Catherine Clay, *Time and Tide: The Feminist and Cultural Politics of a Modern Magazine* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018). 320 pp. ISBN 9781474418188¹

Time and Tide, asserts Catherine Clay, is one of the most important British magazines of the twentieth century, and one of the most undervalued. In 1929, the Lady Margaret Rhondda, founder and editor of *Time and Tide*, gave a speech upon the opening of the paper's new offices, in which she envisioned that some future historian might 'unearth the legend that Saint Bernard came to bless the offices of a paper, which was in its day not without importance' (p. 1). Clay positions herself as this future historian. Her in-depth study — the first of its kind — seeks to unearth the material history of the magazine, to assert its importance to the political and cultural landscape of the early twentieth century, and to revise the canon of feminist literature in inter-war Britain with emphasis on the middlebrow.

As the only woman-run periodical of its kind in the inter-war period, *Time and Tide* is a landmark in British periodical culture. It has, however, been overshadowed in periodical studies by high modernist little magazines such as *Blast* (1914–15), which ran for only two issues, and yet has received considerably more attention. Whilst Clay wisely restricts her study to the 1920s, when *Time and Tide* flourished, and the 1930s, which marked the clearest changes in editorial direction for the magazine, the implications of her study are far reaching for how we might reconsider the categorization of the 'women's paper' (p. 3). Clay's main argument is that contrary to some contemporary opinion, *Time and Tide* remained faithful to its feminist motivations throughout its life, and that in fact some of the very tactics for which it was critiqued formed a part of its overarching praxis. Clay also

touches on *Time and Tide's* relationship with modernism, suggesting that it 'not only highlights the limits of modernism as a lens for assessing culture in the interwar period, but also the perspicuity of its key staff writers' (p. 9) who contested the very modernist paradigms by which they themselves would come to be erased. With a due hat-tip to traditional periodical studies, Clay acknowledges *Time and Tide's* importance vis-à-vis its contributors, including Elizabeth Bowen, Eleanor Farjeon, Stella Gibbons, Kate O'Brien, Jean Rhys, Sylvia Townsend Warner, Vita Sackville-West, E. H. Young, and Virginia Woolf. That many of these women went on to attain national or even international status as writers and critics is not Clay's point, rather she situates their work in *Time and Tide* within the broader editorial strategy of the magazine, highlighting their contribution to popular culture, a conscious and welcome challenge to the post-war erasure of middlebrow works from the canon.

Clay's study is organized chronologically, in three main sections, consisting of two or three chapters each. The first of these traces *Time and Tide's* evolution from its foundation to becoming a magazine with overt feminist tendencies, the second charts the magazine's expansion and rebranding in the late 1920s as a more general audience weekly review, and the third section examines the magazine's response to a world in crisis in the 1930s. In her first chapter, Clay explores *Time and Tide's* construction of newness in the context of early feminist print culture, realized as a rejection of feminist categorization, whilst remaining faithful to its politics in terms of content.

1 This book was sent out for review, and the review returned to us, before Catherine Clay joined the *JEPS* editorial team.

What at first appears as a rejection of feminist designation in fact allowed *Time and Tide* to perform some of its most effective activism, and by not limiting their readership to women, they were able to preach the feminist message to men also. The chapter explores the specific editorial tactics by which Lady Rhondda and her colleagues realized this. Clay's discussion of the magazine's links to women's professional magazines including *Woman Engineer* (1919–) is a particularly fresh piece of scholarship, as is her discussion of the 'editorial Sir' (p. 28). In this, Clay describes how the fully female editorial team were wont to publish reader letters with the male appellation 'Dear Sir'. This choice frames the female address as deprecating, and engages with the contemporary debate that the professional female should assimilate to masculinity. Clay demonstrates that the editorial team was able to use this tactic to reassure male readers, masculinizing the female journalistic space as male editors had done in the 1890s by assuming female identities. Crucially, *Time and Tide's* adoption of the 'editorial Sir' took effect at the precise moment it launched its feminist programme, 'thus concealing its female editorial identity at the very moment it was making a more direct appeal to women' (p. 28). With tactics like this, *Time and Tide's* editorial team were able to grow their readership.

The second chapter explores the internal dynamics of the magazine's editors, staff, and contributors, illustrating the overlapping feminist and socialist periodical networks of the time. This chapter is particularly useful in positioning the middlebrow's relationship with wider social concerns such as the Irish war of independence, or the Miners' Strike of 1926. Clay successfully illustrates 'how a set of concerns seemingly antithetical to Rhondda's business interests also played an important shaping role in the periodical's early identity' (p. 42), raising questions about the tension between personal and professional interests in wider periodical

culture. In her third chapter, Clay explores more specifically *Time and Tide's* relationship with modernist culture, with a focus on some of its eminent female critics, Christopher St John, Rose Macaulay, Sylvia Lynd, and Naomi Royde-Smith. In actively casting her net beyond a consideration of literary modernism, Clay mirrors the actions of *Time and Tide* itself, and demonstrates that whilst highbrow literature may have sought to differentiate itself from the middlebrow, other art forms such as music or film were more suspicious of a hierarchical authority.

In the second section of the book, 'Expansion 1928–1935', Clay takes the 1928 Equal Franchise Act as a springboard for developments in the magazine; as the campaign for women's suffrage succeeded, *Time and Tide* gradually 'rebranded itself as a less woman-focused, more general-audience publication, and worked intensively to secure a position among the leading intellectual weekly reviews of its day' (105). In the fourth chapter, Clay demonstrates that this move from being a women's paper was not a move from women's issues, but rather a move towards reframing women's issues as being relevant and intrinsic to wider conversations about public life and the body politic. Dismantling the concept of the female reader as passive consumer, *Time and Tide* defended the tastes of the middlebrow reader whilst seeking to expand their cultural interests, setting up the critic as one half of a conversation rather than as a didact of taste, and allowing the assumed intelligence of the reader to take precedent. In Chapter 5, Clay discusses *Time and Tide's* male contributors and cross-gender collaboration, and in Chapter 6, she explores the tension between moving away from being a 'women's paper' and yet not wanting to be viewed as highbrow, as *Time and Tide* actively carved out a space for the feminine middlebrow to be legitimized. There is extensive discussion on the discourse of pleasure, and the gendered implications of this discourse. Clay juxtaposes a demonstration of *Time*

and Tide's business acumen with their emphasis on reader enjoyment, through which the magazine was able to contest both the spheres into which women were permitted, and the ways in which they should exist within those spaces.

In the final section of the book, which examines *Time and Tide* from 1935–39, Clay's seventh chapter explores the magazine's later directions, in which it was 'refashioning an image of the modern woman in terms of her economic power as professional worker, rather than domestic consumer, in the context of middle-class women's large-scale professionalization in [the] period' (212). This chapter discusses the relationship between Lady Rhondda and *Time and Tide's* literary editor from October 1935, Theodora Bosanquet, and how Bosanquet steered the magazine in new directions in parallel with developing society. This third section of the book serves to conclude the ideas Clay establishes in her earlier chapters. The final chapter presents two case studies, of *Time and Tide's* book reviews section, and its political correspondence pages, which disrupted its seemingly non-feminist veneer. Cementing the argument she has constructed, Clay demonstrates

that the editors' 'deliberately removing women's names from *Time and Tide* does not represent a willing neutralization of the paper's content ([Rhondda] writes to Woolf that to do so is "maddening"); rather, it is a lamentable but necessary compromise with both "advertisers" and the "general public" in order to preserve women's participation — however invisibly — in political affairs' (243). The ideas Clay sets out in her introduction hold consistently throughout both this study, and *Time and Tide's* pages.

Finally, Clay acknowledges the work still to be done in charting *Time and Tide's* developments in reaction to the second world war. This generous invitation to further scholarship is well supported by this book, which provides an impressively detailed single study of a periodical which will form a methodology for extensive further periodical studies. Clay successfully celebrates *Time and Tide's* contribution to British periodical history, but also to wider conversations about women, as the *only* female controlled — editorial team and board alike — periodical of the British inter-war period.

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