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Review of Marysa Demoor, Cedric Van Dijck,
and Birgit Van Puymbroeck, eds, *The Edinburgh
Companion to First World War Periodicals*

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Reviews

Marysa Demoor, Cedric Van Dijck, and Birgit Van Puymbroeck, eds, *The Edinburgh Companion to First World War Periodicals* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2023). 539 pp. ISBN 9781474494717

We inevitably review books with our own scholarly preoccupations in mind. It is a rare joy, however, to review a volume that offers such a substantial overlap with the ideas that occupy one's own research as *The Edinburgh Companion to First World War Periodicals* in my case. Over the years my work has been based on recurring interactions with periodicals. The material reality of periodicals, including the occasional discovery of other ephemera between their pages or the frustration of a missing issue, is an important part of this process. It was therefore a delight to see the extent to which the introduction and many chapters of the *Companion* pay close attention to how the material forms in which readers encounter wartime periodicals affects their reading experience. The concomitant focus on links between periodicals and the war's memory—explored most fully by Hanna Teichler—offers a complementary lens through which the volume approaches its subject. A magisterial editorial undertaking and a substantial contribution to scholarship, the various chapters of the *Companion* form a diverse but coherent whole, tied together by a masterly introduction, and capture the nuances and variety of the wartime and inter-war periodical press.

The first part of the *Companion* tackles 'Critical Approaches'. Potter, writing on materiality, emphasizes that wartime periodicals were not 'throwaway objects' (p. 18). She reminds us that periodicals as memory bridges (in Nicholas Saunders's term) have the capacity to 'link the current reader with her counterpart who first read them more than one hundred years ago' (p. 29). This observation points elegantly ahead to Teichler's contribution on memory and the wartime

periodical, which explores the wartime press as a 'memory medium' that is part of a gradual paradigm shift in how the war was experienced, understood, and remembered. Edmund King offers an insightful account of the role different kinds of networks (social, linguistic, and logistical) played in facilitating the production, circulation, and reading of wartime periodicals, revealing much about the interactions between trench and civilian journals in particular. He also makes the important (separate but related) points that, firstly, '[c]irculation – both within units and further afield – was the *raison d'être* behind the existence of the First World War trench and unit journals' (p. 38), and second, that the main reason we can draw on such a wide-ranging archive of trench periodicals was that these were so often sent home to be preserved as souvenirs (p. 39). Meanwhile, Jeffrey Drouin's chapter on war periodicals in/and (digital) archives follows on organically from the preceding chapters, with its thought-provoking reflections on the ways paper and digital archives interact—as well as offering a handy survey of extant digital offerings. I particularly appreciated Drouin's pertinent reminder that in many cases, collections of First World War records and objects (including periodicals) were first conceived of as memorials (p. 53)—though he also highlights the 'rich but uneven' nature of these collections (p. 61). Moving from collections of periodicals back to the periodical as a meaningful object, Fionnuala Dillane's essay on affect and emotion draws attention to periodicals as 'uniquely positioned to capture day-to-day intimacies' and emotions through their very periodicity (p. 68), while the 'polivocality of the periodical' facilitates the coexistence

of a wide variety of affects within the same publication (p. 72). Finally, the broader discussions of the first five chapters in this section are beautifully rounded off by the specific focus of Maaheen Ahmed's essay, which delves into the fascinating subject of French girls' periodicals and their contribution to wartime popular culture and propaganda.

Section II, headed 'Contributors', offers a welcome panoramic view on the wide cast of people and professions that helped to shape wartime periodicals. Argha Kumar Banerjee's essay on authors reminds us how central periodicals were to launching writers' careers in the early twentieth century, and gives a helpful overview of individual writers' involvement with wartime magazines. Where Banerjee takes a fresh look at literary names familiar to Anglophone readers, from Thomas Hardy to Katherine Mansfield, Selena Daly's chapter outlines the devastating impact of the war on the art sector, but also explores niches where avant-garde art continued to thrive in wartime, with particular emphasis on periodicals in Italy, France, New York, and neutral Switzerland and showcasing a fascinating variety of styles and artists. Contrasting Daly's transnational lens, Christophe Declercq takes a case study approach and provides an illuminating deep dive into the Belgian wartime press. His chapter explores the important work of Belgian editors across several countries, which could easily fill a whole volume of its own. Sara Prieto's essay on journalists and Andrew Griffith's on war correspondents, despite some natural overlap, manage to tease out the distinctions between these two roles, and Prieto's focus on American journalists helps reconstruct the crucial role of the periodical press to moving the USA from being a neutral country to joining the war on the Allied side—there are interesting points of contact between Prieto's chapter and Mauro Forno's in the subsequent part of the volume in this respect. By contrast, Griffith's essay complements Prieto's argument by delving into the practical

and ideological aspects of initially barely tolerated and later early embedded British war reporting. Last but certainly not least in this part of the volume, Jan Baetens highlights the key role of photography in shaping audiences' broader understanding of the First World War, from the war itself to the present. Baetens's essay models 'the visual turn' in history and literary studies (p. 191), and connects in interesting ways with Teichler's thoughts on the paradigm shift towards an understanding of the war as tragedy that was facilitated by the periodical press among others.

Demonstrating commendable breadth of scope, the six chapters comprising section III on 'Events' focus not only on directly war-related events—though the chapters on the origins of the war (Samuel Foster), coverage of notable battles (Vincent Trott) and the press's role in building international alliances (Forno) are illuminating and well-researched. But the *Companion* also moves beyond the directly war-related to events that were in various ways linked to but independent of the war, namely the Armenian genocide (Claire Mouradian), revolutionary activity in Russia (Irina Zhdanova), and the influenza pandemic (Jane Fisher). These chapters serve to highlight that by paying attention to the periodical press, we can understand the at times intricate interplay of national and international concerns and the limitations of press coverage, which Mouradian and Fisher delineate compellingly: while Mouradian shows that the widespread and explicit press coverage of the Armenian genocide ultimately failed to secure any meaningful international relief for the persecuted Armenian people, Fisher illustrates the inability of the international press to construct an adequate overarching narrative about the pandemic, leaving advertising to fill this gap.

Section IV, likewise, moves beyond the combatant dimension of war, as its six chapters showcase a wide variety of different types of periodical. Beginning with trench journals, Robert Nelson offers at once a succinct overview of

soldier magazines and a fresh look at what these can reveal about gendered and racial discourse. Anne Schwan's excellent chapter on Prisoner-of-War camp journals explores the pressures put on self-understanding and masculine ideals by transcultural encounters and interactions between civilian and military internees. Her discussion of the periodicals produced by and for inmates and their families pays close attention to practical and cultural challenges entailed in these publications. Likewise, Jessica Meyer's fascinating essay on hospital journals offers a comprehensive introduction to these as a parallel to unit and regimental publications, exploring in turn the 'multiple roles played by these periodicals, as rehabilitative tools, pressure valves and sites of public communication' (p. 339). As a counterpoint to the emphasis on military and military-adjacent periodicals, the second half of this section turns to civilian journals and reminds us that the conduct of the war intersected with and indeed prompted a variety of other concerns. The chapter on pacifist journals by Grace Brockington, Sarah Hellawell, and Daniel Laqua offers a compelling insight into the ways pacifism and internationalism interacted, tracking the use made by pacifist editors and journalists of pre-war international networks and the importance of periodicals to the pacifist cause. Maria DiCenzo's fascinating essay on women's suffrage and labour journals debunks, by looking closely at the wartime suffrage press, the still pervasive myth of all suffrage activists ceasing their activities to aid the war effort. Rounding off this section, Andrew Thacker manages to distil his encyclopaedic knowledge of avant-garde magazines into a lucid overview of the interaction between wartime necessities and radical artistic vision.

The final section of the *Companion* further widens its scope, with case studies of the wartime periodical press in German colonial Africa (Daniel Steinbach), India (Santanu Das), Australia and New Zealand (Patricia Thomas), China

(Elisabeth Forster), Canada (Tim Cook), and the Ottoman Empire (Mustafa Aksakal, M. Talha Çiçek, Aimee Genell, Dimitris Kamouzis, Janet Klein, Armen Manuk-Khaloyan, and Devi Mays). The latter chapter models best practice as a collaboration of seven scholars with complementary expertise to fully capture the complexity of this multi-ethnic, multi-religious state. Although these chapters take different approaches (Thomas's, for instance, discusses the wartime Australian and New Zealand press through the lens of adverts for a Belgian corset manufacturer), they all share a commitment to capturing the nuances of the periodical press in their respective areas, and the insights to be gained from paying close attention to local as well as national media environments. Steinbach and Das moreover highlight the difficulties (and the rewards) of working with periodicals in colonial contexts, from the layers of collection bias which ensured that virtually only white settler newspapers survived for German colonial Africa, even though 'several newspapers in African languages did exist by the outbreak of the war' (Steinbach, p. 402), to the challenges of researching a vast array of different periodicals in numerous different Indian languages, preserved in a wide range of archives (Das). Forster's chapter on China offers fascinating insights into what the wartime and immediate post-war Chinese press can reveal about the shifting Chinese interpretation of the conflict—a focus on opinion-building through periodicals that also informs Thomas's and Cook's chapters in this section.

It is hard to do justice to a volume like this one in the confines of a book review. The thirty-one chapters of *The Edinburgh Companion to First World War Periodicals*, including the excellent introduction, make for varied and invariably fascinating reading. The ample illustrations that accompany so many of the chapters serve to reinforce the value of this volume by showcasing the affective potential and multimodality of wartime periodicals. Based on a huge

array of original research, this book is a *Companion* volume in the best sense of offering a lasting guide to a medium that deserves continuing scholarly attention. In his 1988 essay 'What is ephemera?', noted ephemerist Maurice Rickards cited Samuel Johnson on periodicals: "These papers of a day, the ephemerae [sic] of learning."¹ It turns out that we can learn many and often unexpected things from First World War periodicals, and these lessons have been gathered and preserved here in a wonderful resource for scholars and students for years to come. At the same time, *The Edinburgh Companion to First World War Periodicals* is also a lasting monument to a fragile medium, and the

editors poignantly evoke the powerful impact of encountering 'the brittleness of the paper, [...] the sour smell of cigarettes and damp air, [...] the stains of coffee or tea, the blackened or yellow fingerprint smudges' (p. 3) of surviving periodicals. As Rickards notes, 'The essential appeal of most forms of ephemera lies in their fragility, their vulnerability – the very *improbability* of their survival.'² The editors and contributors to this volume remind us of this fragility of periodicals while doing their bit to safeguard their legacy for new generations of readers.

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¹ Maurice Rickards, *Collecting Printed Ephemera* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1988), p. 13.

² *Ibid.*, p. 15.