

## Afterword: We Other Periodicalists, or, Why Periodical Studies?

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Modernism came from the magazines, Sean Latham tells us.<sup>1</sup> So did, depending on whom you ask, the serial novel of the nineteenth century, the character-driven fiction of the eighteenth century, the public sphere, and many widespread conceptions of femininity (masculinity, too) that continue to pursue us today. That sentence sounds glib—these are huge claims—but it is not meant to be; good arguments can be and have been made for all of the above.<sup>2</sup> Periodicals can do almost anything. They have been called “the nursery of literary genius” and purveyors of “the deadly dominance of the commonplace.”<sup>3</sup> They are certainly both. Periodicals are not discrete; they abound. They are composed by every kind of contributor imaginable and consumed by every kind of reader. They are difficult to talk about, not because they are shallow, but because they contain multitudes, acting as vehicles in which “suffragist debates jostled for space with Picasso . . . Einstein meets Joyce, and . . . a single author might write an article under one name then violently disagree with herself under a different name the very next week” (Latham, p. 409). The variety of content, including advertisements, essays, images, letters, fiction, and reportage, that can be found inside any periodical is both a major advantage of and an obstacle to its study. Two things have become clear to me, having recently finished a book of my own on periodicals. One is that periodicals are inspiring, deeply rewarding objects of study for the feminist literary scholars lucky and persistent enough to manage access to them, for they upend many of the assumptions about writing that disproportionately favor manly discourse. The other is that because of this ability to capsize and contradict, periodicals are exceptionally difficult to discuss coherently. Yet we should try.

To do so, the periodical scholar must take on something approximating John Keats’s notion of negative capability, dwelling in doubt as a methodology.<sup>4</sup> She will then learn to embrace her field’s cacophony as an enabling paradox: for almost every sweeping generalization about what periodicals “do,” it is possible to find compelling examples of them doing precisely the opposite. For example, most of the essays in this issue advocate periodical studies in part because they trouble or pressure Romantic and modernist notions of authorship, models that have too often pushed women writers to the margins of respectability; even the feminist hallmark of “a room of

one's own" turns out to be overly narrow when compared to the possibilities for authorship that periodicals can offer (Latham, p. 411). Indeed—and yet this pressure on authorship and canon formation comes from two irreconcilable directions, for periodicals both carve out a cultural space for amateur writers and make it possible for women who want to become “serious” canonical authors to find a remunerative practice to support their careers. It is our task as academic readers to find a way to make such contradictory impulses mutually informing.

It is in our interest to do so as well. If nothing else, it might give us new tools for assessing our own careers, which certainly straddle an awkward balance between respectable and undervalued writing—and even, at least in the case of literary scholars, to find new ways to identify with our authors, for while the differences between scholarly and popular periodical writing are obvious, there *are* major similarities. Scholars who hesitate (even guiltily, as I have too often done) over Jennie Batchelor's suggestion that we should perhaps cease to “persist in seeing amateurism as the dirty word professional writers sought to make it at the turn of the nineteenth century” might ask themselves how much *they* are typically paid for their periodical contributions.<sup>5</sup> Much of the best work we do in academia is unremunerated; why should this necessarily trouble us in the work of others? (“The publishers [of *The Lady's Magazine*] refused even to pay postage”—well, who doesn't?<sup>6</sup>) One value of periodicals is that the category of publication, taken broadly, connects diverse forms and writers; we should try to pursue this connection and stop seeing periodical publication as a reason for suspicion. Feminist scholars have long understood that to prize professional writing over other kinds results, intentionally or not, in a de facto devaluation of women as writers. Amy Erdman Farrell's essay hints that the cultural step between underrating women writers and underrating all periodical writers may be a perilously short one.<sup>7</sup> Yet we struggle with an equal impulse to dismiss writing that is *too* professional, insufficiently artistic, too clearly created for market popularity or for hyperspecialized audiences, or with financial compensation as its obvious primary goal (and in this impulse, of course, we condemn most of our own periodical product). We reject on aesthetic grounds texts intended to have very broad appeal and are in turn rejected for writing too narrowly ourselves. In short, if “popular” is a bad word, so is “unpopular”; condemnation is always to be preferred to obscurity.

This issue of *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, however, functions on the level of form as well as content, and I believe it lives up to its own challenge in becoming, if only for a short period, a periodical about periodicals. Academic journals, even special issues, *are* miscellanies. Although working within the disarmingly specific topic of Women and Anglo-American Periodicals, the editors of *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* have collected

essays—thoughtful, moving, but diverse—about editing, writing, reading, and buying; essays about the eighteenth, nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries; essays about ambitiously artistic periodicals, news periodicals, popular periodicals, and reader-generated crowdsourced periodicals. This is tremendously exciting. We should, as scholars and readers, exult that it need not be understood as a disadvantage for periodicals to be organized differently from books; that their heterogeneous nature and formal discontinuities provoke unlooked-for associations. The difficulties in navigating periodical archives reward the brave with new methodological possibilities. We should, as Latham urges, “read more adventurously” (p. 425). And so, with an eye to proximity, and to the special challenges of taking periodical reading as its own method, what can we learn from this periodical, about periodical studies? As at least a preliminary attempt to answer, I will suggest five points (organized by proximal relations rather than importance) about the periodical form, periodical authors and editors, and how and why to read them.

### *One*

Even niche publications can matter to and alter cultural history when they are intellectually ambitious. If this seems an obvious point, it is nonetheless a crucial one and hopeful for isolated scholars. “Periodicals” is a loose term, and periodicals are an intensely heterogeneous body. Smaller, carefully curated titles have long nurtured experimental and burgeoning approaches to art and culture. This is, as Amanda Sigler, Barbara Green, and Latham demonstrate here, especially true for modernism, but it has also been the case for other periods and other aesthetic priorities.<sup>8</sup> It may well yet come to be a truism of some of today’s blogs, which remind Farrell of “the spectacular flourishing of small feminist periodicals in the early 1970s” (p. 403). As a form, then, periodicals offer us a strange bridge from Samuel Johnson to Ezra Pound, Eliza Haywood to Virginia Woolf to Gloria Steinem. At the same time, we must recall that even the highbrow vehicles have to advertise, find supporters, turn a profit, and above all, circulate to stay alive; if their solutions to these constraints are sometimes different, still, they face similar stresses as their bigger cousins.<sup>9</sup>

### *Two*

Without neglecting lesson one, we also need to carry within our minds the truth that bulky, popular magazines and newspapers, the ones with “an established place at the newsstand,” matter too (Farrell, p. 398). As I suggest above, periodical studies urge us to embrace the paradoxical. Despite important exceptions, periodicals—considered as a whole class of

publications—are far more middle- than highbrow. This fact does not in the least diminish their importance or impede the number of strong writers and thinkers who work within their pages. Sharon M. Harris describes for us the career of Rebecca Harding Davis, who was proud to write for the highly regarded *Atlantic Monthly* but wrote more often for *Peterson's Magazine*; the latter had a broader circulation and was a better fit for the modes—gothic and mystery—that Davis chose for leveling her critiques of post-bellum American society.<sup>10</sup> From Charlotte Brontë's wish that she had been “born in time to contribute to the Lady's magazine,” to the origins of the Broadway musical *Chicago* in the murder trial coverage of the “sob sister” journalist Maurine Watkins, the essays in this collection acknowledge the myriad paths for periodical work to extend its reach into other genres.<sup>11</sup>

What these and many other examples tell us is that important authors have important relationships with all kinds of periodicals. Some, like Davis, built careers on the critical respect they earned through periodical publishing; others, like the already famous Gloria Steinem, simply launched their own (Harris, pp. 291-92; Farrell, pp. 396-97). Periodicals of all kinds are therefore worth serious consideration. Writing for periodicals need not be a choice borne of desperation or indicative of some kind of mediocrity to be overcome, by way of trial, by truly great authors. For many writers, including anonymous amateurs and the eventually legendary alike, writing or editing periodicals is a rewarding process, a good fit, a first choice. Since the eighteenth century, the number of now-canonized authors who have worked in periodicals as writers, reviewers, and editors has been so high that we ought simply to accept (by which I mean speak more loudly about) the obvious implication: periodical work is a normal part of the development of authorship.

### Three

One reason for periodical work to be at least occasionally ideal is that not every author values an established, steady public persona, and—as a corollary—cultural influence is not limited to traditional modes of authorship. Periodicals can absolutely objectify people and force private lives into the public eye. But (paradox again) they can also function as a way for their subjects to control access to their core identities by offering up a simulacrum of the inner self designed to please and satisfy the public.<sup>12</sup> A number of moments in this issue show women using periodicals to adjust the way different kinds of texts and personas interact, and from a surprising number of angles.

For example, celebrities who become periodicalists may have more power than celebrities who do not. This is especially true for female celebrities, who might even finesse a way for more than their bodies to have

media representation. Jamie Libby Boyle shows that the performance of periodical writing, in which an author can craft a recurring persona to appear before the public at planned intervals, has much in common with the performance of acting and may in some ways be more liberating. Boyle's case study, Cornelia Otis Skinner, modifies the public's perception of her character by writing in a style that is—in contrast to her “refined and regal” acting persona—“blundering and artless,” vulnerable, but also funny and winning (p. 372). Jean Marie Lutes uses periodicals to construct a gripping examination of women journalists-turned-playwrights, famous murderesses and the emotional states thereof, performative character, and dramatic achievement all intersecting in the 1920s (or, in short, “discourse on love, gin, guns, sweeties, wives, and husbands”<sup>13</sup>). In her elucidation of the importance of emotive writing to the reputations of newspaper women,<sup>14</sup> Lutes also puts her finger on the important connection between drama and periodical writing: while periodicals are more readily associated with their ability to cultivate fiction, periodicals have long nurtured drama as well through reviews and performative writing.

But periodicals do not have to revolve around celebrity at all, and one needs no popular status to work within their pages. On the flip side of Farrell's exploration of the many ways intractable advertisers can seriously harm professional journalism, Batchelor points out that amateur writers—and this category certainly includes women—may have more autonomy in some aspects than writers who depend on reasonable pay for their literary labors, precisely because amateurs have nothing at stake beyond the gratification of their own whims. Thus, silence and non-response from contributors should be understood as a form of communication, especially in the great many cases in which readers and contributors overlap (Batchelor, p. 253). At the same time, we have authors like Beatrice Hastings, who ran through positions and pseudonyms at will and tilted at windmills of her own construction (Latham, pp. 409-10). Hastings discovered a means by which periodicals might enable a single writer to multiply her influence exponentially provided that she lets go of her core identity.

If I may be allowed a point 3a to this overlong lesson, it would be that editors of all stripes and sexes matter, even the unsung and semi-anonymous ones. This is true of the probably-male editors of the *Lady's Magazine* and the definitely-male editors of the *Ladies' Home Journal*, who took it upon themselves to determine what should pass as both women's writing and women's reading (Batchelor, p. 248; Farrell, p. 396). Or consider Marian Evans's appearance in this issue, not as George Eliot, but as an “amateur” (in the sense of unofficial) editor. Fionnuala Dillane reminds us that women can have profound influence on periodical development in ways that are not easily made visible, as in Marian Evans's stint as the crucial, hardworking, and unpaid editrix of the intellectual *Westminster*

*Review*, sharing the frustrations of dealing with—but not the applause of—men like Charles Dickens. Despite the fact that Evans was unpaid, Dillane makes a convincing case that we should regard her as by far the more capable professional than the official editor, John Chapman; she not only handled touchy (male) contributors with aplomb and acted as a beautiful copyeditor who warned her authors that “Print is like broad daylight—it shews specks which the twilight of manuscript allows to pass unnoticed,” but she also profitably restructured the magazine itself to showcase its innovative discourses on national literatures.<sup>15</sup> In the next era, Margaret Anderson (and Jane Heap), who understood better than most the revolutionary aesthetic potential of editing a miscellany magazine, butted heads with Ezra Pound over the mission of *The Little Review*—and won (Latham, pp. 407-08).

#### Four

Speaking of the editorial burden and editorial power, while it is important that we read periodicals at all, *how* we read them is also important. When it comes to trying to understand periodicals, the optimal, or at least prudent, choice is to do the reading ourselves instead of relying upon reviews and digests from other critics. Periodicals are complicated beasts, and because priorities are given to other, more containable genres such as fiction, drama, and poetry, critics have not, historically, had good models for unpacking them. It can be better, and often more fun, to start from scratch.<sup>16</sup> It is also true that the digital aspects of research can be a double-edged sword, since electronic access actually encourages readers to navigate with keywords instead of defaulting to reading in context. So where do we get our periodicals, and which versions, or how much of them, should we read? This is a quandary with, as yet, only partial solutions.

Digital archives, such as Brown University and the University of Tulsa's jointly sponsored Modernist Journals Project, matter tremendously, but we must never forget that most of the periodicals we study were once consumed as material objects, palpable paper technologies with a different presence from their online avatars. Farrell shows how the layout of a magazine's content, and the contrast between what is highlighted on the cover and what is buried, can counteract some of the carnivalesque potential of periodical miscellany. This happened when the first incarnation of *Ms. Magazine* downplayed and hid essays “about poor women, women in jail, uneducated women, and women of color” in a doomed attempt to balance the demands of advertisers that they reach “quality” readers against the magazine's editorial goal of becoming an inclusive space for all women (Farrell, p. 399). Consequently, all periodical scholars must “pay careful attention to the financial underpinnings of the text” they want to under-

stand (Farrell, p. 401). To excerpt an article from virtually any commercial magazine may risk losing crucial cultural information about how different components of the periodical's readership were intended to interact with its content.

Heading back to the original formats can not only inform but also reinvigorate our readings of previously excerpted works if, play-acting at being original readers, we treat contiguous essays and paratexts as interpretive lenses. Sigler's revisit of *Mrs. Dalloway* as *The Dial*'s "Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street" makes Woolf's story, which is itself concerned with circulation and economy and even the circulation of other literary items, into a circulable item on its own. ("THE DIAL is not only a gift but a compliment," Woolf's readers would have been told.<sup>17</sup>) Periodicals have a tendency towards self-reflexivity that seems to surpass that of other genres; approaches such as Sigler's recapture the importance of context in close reading.

It is because of such suggestive readings that both Green and Latham address the perpetual problem of the periodical archive: digitization increases access, but it is still crucial to keep an eye on the digital archives for legibility and completeness, making sure, as much as possible, that advertisements, design matters, and other paratextual elements come through untrammelled and untrimmed. The contents that surround any particular periodical piece—letters to the editor, other articles, advertisements—all affect how the piece was experienced by its readers. This is something authors and editors know perfectly well; and it is a valid reason to push for, and to support by using, wider access to unexpurgated periodicals wherever we can.

### Five

Finally, studying periodicals is good for feminism, and we must neither dismiss nor restrict ourselves to so-called "women's magazines" in so doing. In the matter of designating (or dismissing) something as a "women's periodical," the real story is often more complex. Periodicals supposedly for and by women often involve male writers and editors and almost always have at least a few male readers (Batchelor, pp. 248-49). Print culture and reading, therefore, are not easily sexable. In complicated ways, however, they also have something important to do with constructing social images of femininity (Green, p. 430). If, as Boyle puts it, "To be a modern woman . . . is to be forever in front of a judgmental audience," should all modern women strive to become periodicalists? (p. 381). Indeed, it might be salutary to contemplate what would happen if most women, or even most people, thought of themselves first in terms of textual, and only secondarily in terms of visual, representation. (This may explain Twitter.)

Setting aside for a moment the special case of periodicals meant just for women, it is also true that periodical study is methodologically helpful for scholars interested in recovery and other feminist projects. Green's thoughtful review essay follows Latham and Robert Scholes in emphasizing the heterogeneous and "mixed" nature of most periodicals.<sup>18</sup> Periodicals "make things messy," says Green, but most periodical scholars would agree that on the balance, it is a good kind of messy (p. 438). They invite interdisciplinary study, which in turn, by its very nature, can lead us to question received wisdom about women authors and women's issues. Green recognizes simultaneously the key role of periodicals, especially women's magazines and magazines run by women (which are not the same thing), in "constructing ideas of modern femininity (often in relation to the identity of the consumer)" (p. 429). She also observes that periodical studies more generally can have a rejuvenating effect on their scholars (in Green's case, modernist critics) because they bring to the fore new texts, new authors, and new questions—and new ways to ask them (pp. 429-31). Periodicals work as the connective tissue in studies of modern societies, pulling together seemingly disparate communities and interests. The women who run and read periodicals are indispensable components of those interstitial spaces that allow cultural moments to converge and interact.

These are, of course, only suggestions. One could easily read this issue with an eye for different continuities, other themes: gender and modernism, for example; or the role of the magazine versus other types of periodicals; perhaps the relationship between performance and celebrity culture and how periodicals might reveal that relationship to us in new lights. One thing, though, remains certain: academics are periodicalists. In supporting periodical studies, we have the potential to recover the rich legacy of our subjects while laying the groundwork to revalue the nature of our labor as readers, writers, and editors—to reclaim our own place in literary history.

#### NOTES

Unless otherwise noted, all article citations are from *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 30, No. 2 (2011), and after the first reference, will be cited parenthetically in the text.

<sup>1</sup> Sean Latham, "The Mess and Muddle of Modernism: The Modernist Journals Project and Modern Periodical Studies," 407.

<sup>2</sup> Dear reader, an exhaustive list would be deadly to us both, but see, for example, Richard Altick, *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public, 1800-1900* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957); Graham Law,

*Serializing Fiction in the Victorian Press* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000); Robert D. Mayo, *The English Novel in the Magazines, 1740-1815* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1962); J. Paul Hunter, *Before Novels: The Cultural Contexts of Eighteenth-Century English Fiction* (New York: Norton, 1990); Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. by Thomas Burger with Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989); Kathryn Shevelov, *Women and Print Culture: The Construction of Femininity in the Early Periodical* (New York: Routledge, 1989); Gillian E. Hanscombe and Virginia L. Smyers, *Writing for their Lives: The Modernist Women, 1910-1940* (London: Women's Press, 1987); Ros Ballaster, Margaret Beetham, Elizabeth Frazer, and Sandra Hebron, *Women's Worlds: Ideology, Femininity and the Woman's Magazine* (London: MacMillan, 1991); Shawn Lisa Maurer, *Proposing Men: Dialectics of Gender and Class in the Eighteenth-Century English Periodical* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998); and Peter Jackson, Nick Stevenson, and Kate Brooks, *Making Sense of Men's Magazines* (Cambridge: Polity, 2001).

<sup>3</sup> Walter Graham, *English Literary Periodicals* (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1930), 13; and Charles Austin Beard and Mary Ritter Beard, *America in Midpassage* (New York: MacMillan, 1939), 741.

<sup>4</sup> For his definition of negative capability, see John Keats to George and Tom Keats, 21, 27 (?) December 1817, in *Selected Letters of John Keats*, ed. Grant F. Scott, rev. ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 60.

<sup>5</sup> Jennie Batchelor, "Connections, which are of service . . . in a more advanced age": *The Lady's Magazine*, Community, and Women's Literary Histories," 261.

<sup>6</sup> Batchelor, "Connections, which are of service," 253.

<sup>7</sup> Amy Erdman Farrell, "From a Tarantula on a Banana Boat to a Canary in a Mine: *Ms. Magazine* as a Cautionary Tale in a Neoliberal Age," 393-405.

<sup>8</sup> Amanda Sigler, "Expanding Woolf's Gift Economy: Consumer Activity Meets Artistic Production in *The Dial*," 317-42; Barbara Green, "Around 1910: Periodical Culture, Women's Writing, and Modernity," 429-39; and Latham, "The Mess and Muddle of Modernism," 407-28.

<sup>9</sup> See Farrell on *Ms. Magazine's* struggles with its advertisers as a warning sign for the challenges soon to become an obstacle to periodical writing as a whole (pp. 401, 403); Sigler on the attempts of *The Dial* to balance aesthetics and the need for subscribers (pp. 328-34); and also Fionnuala Dillane, "The Character of Editress": Marian Evans at the *Westminster Review*, 1851-54," on the challenges of the *Westminster Review* (pp. 272-77).

<sup>10</sup> Sharon M. Harris, "The Anatomy of Complicity: Rebecca Harding Davis, *Peterson's Magazine*, and the Civil War," 291-315.

<sup>11</sup> Charlotte Brontë is quoted in Batchelor, "Connections, which are of service," 262. Maurine Watkins is discussed throughout Jean Marie Lutes, "Tears on Trial in the 1920s: Female Emotion and Style in *Chicago* and *Machinal*," 343-69.

<sup>12</sup> See Jamie Libby Boyle, "A Chameleonic Character: Celebrity, Embodiment, and the Performed Self in Cornelia Otis Skinner's Magazine Monologues," on Skinner and her strategic deployment of vulnerable confessions, especially 372-73.

<sup>13</sup> Watkins quoted in Lutes, "Tears on Trial in the 1920s," 343.

<sup>14</sup> See especially, Lutes, "Tears on Trial in the 1920s," 345-46, 350, 363-64.

<sup>15</sup> Marian Evans quoted in Dillane, "The Character of Editress," 280.

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Batchelor's problem that "The *Lady's Magazine* has been commonly and problematically assessed in precisely the terms offered up by its less-than-reliable editors" (p. 246).

<sup>17</sup> Advertisement for *The Dial* quoted in Sigler, "Expanding Woolf's Gift Economy," 333.

<sup>18</sup> See Latham and Robert Scholes, "The Rise of Periodical Studies," *PMLA*, 121 (2006), 517-31.