

Women's Periodicals and Print Culture in Britain, 1690-1820s. Ed. Jennie Batchelor and Manushag N. Powell. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. 2018. 528p. £150 (hb). ISBN 978 1 4744 1965 9.

Twenty years ago a volume such as this might have been more in the nature of a manifesto, suggesting future directions in scholarship on eighteenth-century women's periodical writing and editing. Now it arrives exactly on time to give us the state of the art in a field that has grown rapidly over the past few decades and that is taking a prominent place in literary scholarship on the past three centuries of print culture. The thirty contributors are mainly established scholars in the field, and both editors are notable contributors to it: Jennie Batchelor's Leverhulme-funded project on the *Lady's Magazine* at the University of Kent has given focus and impetus to more than a few of the articles in the volume, and Manushag N. Powell's excellent 2012 monograph *Performing Authorship in Eighteenth-Century Periodicals* is quoted frequently in these essays, especially in those which discuss the editorial persona, or *eidolon*, whose assured voice welcomed readers and conducted them through the pages of each particular periodical: Eliza Haywood's *Female Spectator* and later *Parrot*, Frances Brooke's *Old Maid*, and others.

The thirty essays in the volume are placed in sections that can seem somewhat arbitrary at times (perhaps a chronological ordering rather than a thematic one might have made for readier navigation). Across the sections there is a high degree of coherence: references to other articles within the volume are frequent, which is a sign that the editors have been unusually careful and attentive to connections among the diverse contributions. The essays cover the time period 1690-1830 very evenly, while the late and early eighteenth century emerge as particularly fertile areas of study. Some of the authors treated here have long been studied in connection to their roles as editors and authors (Charlotte Lennox and Delarivier Manley); some are more often taught for their novels (Haywood and Brooke); and some of them aren't always immediately thought of as dedicated periodical authors at all (such as Elizabeth Singer Rowe, Hannah Cowley, and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu), so that this volume, in addition to bringing specifically women's periodicals to the fore, also contributes to the important ongoing process of

returning periodical studies to a central position in our understanding of where literary production and reception happen.

Reception can sometimes take a back seat to production in these essays, but it is key to the first section, which deals with education and learning (with articles on periodicals as agents for women's education and "miscellaneous instruction," as well as on feminocentric history and on reaction to current events like the French revolution). We may feel sometimes as though nowadays, when an online article of a couple thousand words can be referred to as "long form", that we read more than ever in snippets. But it is clear from these discussions of eighteenth-century periodical publication and reading that reading in miscellaneous parts has, in the modern era, been the most common way in which readers assimilate and accumulate knowledge.

The second section, on poetry in the periodicals, is perhaps the most coherent grouping, while the "national and international" third section is rather more diverse; the essays there, treating war news and debate in Haywood's *Examiner*, German women's writing in English magazines, and travel writing in the *Lady's Magazine*, suggest that a whole volume could be written on women's international connections as revealed in the periodical press of the period. And the sixth section, on fashion, theatre, and celebrity, could equally be a small volume on its own, with an article on the *Old Maid* and the theatre; three articles that deal with the emerging market for pictorial accompaniments to the text such as fashion plates and portraits; and an article on advertising for female medical practitioners and vendors. This last suggests that the section might be better framed as being about consumer culture and marketing than about fashion and celebrity, but it is still a section with a high degree of coherence.

Other sections might also be re-named. Although the title of the fourth section, "Print Media and Print Culture," evokes a section that is about the material form of books or at least about mediation, it is more properly dedicated to articles about genre (reviews, canon formation, fiction, fan writing, and biography). The articles in the fifth, "Theorising," section often give us studies that, while valuable and interesting, do not always offer more theoretical reflection than others in the volume (there are essays on Francis Brooke as editor, on Charlotte Lennox's eidolon in the *Lady's Museum*, and on the actress Mary

Wells's influence upon the editor of the *World*, as well as two on the production and of *The Ladies Mercury*, and a general discussion of the birth of the women's magazine by Batchelor which on its own makes an excellent and informative introduction to the field). The editors in their introduction to the section pose it as responding to Habermas's masculinisation of the public sphere, which, indeed, the whole volume might be said to do.

But this editorial challenge is certainly understandable given the number and diversity of articles, and is a minor criticism. It does bring up the question of how such a volume is meant to be approached. Given the sometimes deceptive headings of the subsections, reading by section may not necessarily be the best way to approach it. Each article functions well individually and offers original research, and the volume can profitably be dipped into at random. Most rewarding of all, perhaps, is systematically reading straight through; the coverage is broad, the essays are informative, there is only a little repetition (especially where the *Lady's Magazine* and Charlotte Lennox's *Lady's Museum* are concerned), and the payoff is considerable. This book is part of the Edinburgh History of Women's Periodical Culture in Britain, and sets very high standards for the four volumes that will make up the rest of the series.

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Yuri Cowan

Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU)

yuri.cowan@ntnu.no