

Book Reviews

Eric White, *Transatlantic Avant-Gardes: Little Magazines and Localist Modernism*, Edinburgh Studies in Transatlantic Literatures (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 272 pp. £70.00 (hb).

The momentum of modernist magazine studies, drawing into its current increased engagements with geographical materialism and the ebb and flow of modernism's local/transnational dialectic, has gained pace rapidly in recent years, forging a *status quo* in which magazines are now studied not only in terms of their literary content, but from the hinge-point of their 'human-ness', their status as microcosmic mirrors of the tangled networks of personal co-operation and intellectual exchange that both sustained and catalysed their existence and legacies. The notions of localism, regionalism, nationhood, and self-identity, frequently manifesting as a conscious, binding self-awareness of participation in the same communities, were central components of the magazine's status as a constructed, networked text.

It was through the employment of these tropes that modernist magazine editors were able to shape and contour, to promote and protect a distinct sense of collective, shared self-identity that, as Mark S. Morrisson has argued, fostered a sense of 'counterpublicity' via which some modernist magazines highlighted their participation in alternative enclaves, or, in the case of magazines like Idella Purnell's Mexico-based *Palms*, their status as mouthpieces of modernism's geographical outposts, of modernist iterations that occurred in spaces and places existing well beyond the reach of the 'London, Paris, New York' triumvirate that formed modernism's metropolitan loci.¹ Studies of transatlantic magazines like *transition* have explored the ways that these periodicals, through their 'expat' status, constructed a collective identity, paradoxically, from the sense of having none, but little attention has been paid to the ways a 'home-grown' modernism emerged through magazines, propagating with its growth its own sense of collective identity in which

Book Reviews

contributors and readers alike were united in the fact that they had stayed home and negotiated the developing *avant-garde* from their own back yards.²

Eric White's study tackles this fascinating 'localist' side of modernist expression. Framed with an excellent 'Introduction' and brief, but thought-provoking, 'Epilogue', and spanning a wide range of American magazines, including *Broom*, *Contact*, *Others*, *Pagany*, *S4N*, *Secession*, and *The Dial*, the study's central assertion is that these magazines 'brought local units into contact', their pages acting as spaces through which the 'ragged, unfinished spaces of the modernist transatlantic' could be converted into tangible 'discrete [...] units of appraisable text' (210) which reflected and constructed an alternative sense of domesticized identity in the wake of a modernity that was becoming increasingly defined by engagements *without*, rather than engagements *within*, one's local or regional domicile.

One of the central strengths of the study is its careful unpicking, from the outset, of the 'translocal paradox' underpinning modernism's 'localist' utterances (5). The study of localist *avant-gardists*, as opposed to those who emigrated and participated in an expatriate, transatlantic modernism, suggests localism and transatlanticism as dichotomous opposites, but in reality, White avers, 'localism – the specificities of place, time, nationality, region, and milieu [...] emerged as a component of (rather than as a trend opposed to) the transnationalism generally taken to characterise literary modernism' (1). Statements like this are typical of the study's nuanced approach, an approach that probes and interrogates the multitude of spaces, both local and far-reaching, private and public, that enshrined and gave shape to a series of literary modernisms. Rather than focusing on a single magazine, White expands his foci to encompass a broad array of American periodicals, along with journals, notebooks, poetic manuscripts, and fine press editions. It is not only a study of magazines, but also an account of the interchanges between magazines and a plethora of other discourse networks.

As such, the study is a welcome and timely investigation of the modernist magazine's status as a networked text, of how the small, the localized, and the marginalized networks of little magazines were enmeshed in a wider web of larger, sometimes contradictory, networks, and of how these intersections between marginal and mainstream, the delicate 'balancing act' between local and national, came to define literary modernism. Chapter 1's explication of Alfred Kreyborg's

negotiation of this balance in *Others* is illuminating in its assertion that through the use of ‘typographical designs’ (28) and other bibliographical codes Kreymborg promoted a ‘unified movement taking shape at the margins of American culture’ (19), while simultaneously engaging in a series of ‘seemingly paradoxical partnerships’ (28) in which *Others* was integrated into ‘an intricate network of patronage and commercial relationships within and beyond Greenwich Village’ (30).

As White recognizes, ‘[c]lose reading and bibliographical analysis have [...] been viewed almost as separate disciplines’ (14), and as his six chapters unfold, the study employs an approach that complements materialist readings with close, fine-grained readings of the magazines’ contents. Chapter 2’s discussion of William Carlos Williams’ ‘Tatters’ is one such example of this technique playing out: White’s assertion that Williams weaved the ‘cultural detritus’ of his surroundings into a home-made garment that wore its ‘localness’ as a badge of honour is original and well-argued, while his analysis of the ‘localist project’ (66) of Pound that saw him move ‘from Image to Vortex’ (51) is especially vivid. Equally, the assertion that Lewis’s materialist ‘tactics’ initiated, in the pages of *BLAST*, a ‘process by which geographical place becomes semiotised as cultural space’ (71) is well argued.

Chapter 3’s exploration of localist representation in *Seven Arts*, *The Soil*, *Others*, and *Contact* is compelling, particularly the discussion of *Contact*’s sustaining of ‘cultural localism’ through a ‘dialogic editorial policy’ (109). This focus on editorship is one of the best features of White’s study; its interweaving of a literary-historical approach that situates each magazine within its individual contexts with a materialist approach that, through archival research and close examination of the magazines’ constructedness, answers the central question of the ‘Introduction’: ‘how elevating an ‘ephemeral’ periodical not only to an aesthetic object, but to a statement of the editor’s policies, poetics and cultural agenda, alters how we perceive its content’ (18).

As well as using different approaches, the study is characterized by a strong sense of ‘rootedness’. It maintains a dialogue with existing studies relating to the intersections between modernism, identity, and space, such as Edward W. Soja’s *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (1989) and Daniel Katz’s *American Modernism’s Expatriate Scene: The Labour of Translation* (2007), while situating itself clearly within the context of magazine-based studies, both past and present. From William Carlos Williams’s underexplored yet

Book Reviews

culturally significant ‘The Advance Guard Magazine’ (1932), to the more familiar magazine studies – Pound’s ‘Small Magazines’ (1930), Morrisson’s *The Public Face of Modernism* (2001), and, most recently, Robert Scholes and Clifford Wulfman’s *Modernism in the Magazines* (2010) – White’s study engages with a wide range of secondary material, but carefully emphasizes its own position and originality. The result is a rich, layered text that is extensively researched.

Chapters 2 and 4 bear witness to this, the former’s reference to Pound’s journals and the latter’s reconstruction of Williams’s editorship of *Contact*’s September 1921 ‘Advertising Number’ providing a high level of detail. Chapter 4, perhaps, is the highlight of the study. Offering an extended account of the assembly of the ‘Advertising Number’, the chapter’s anecdotal slant produces a vibrant and fascinating account of Williams’s co-opting of ‘the language of economics’ and ‘appropriation of print advertisements’ (115), which reinforces the importance of shaking off any residue of a perceived ‘Great Divide’ between modernist and commercial networks.³

Chapter 5 widens the study’s horizons by exploring magazines in which ‘modernist problems of place’ were ‘interspersed’ with ‘problems of the colour line’ (141). The chapter’s examination of a diverse array of magazines – *Secession*, *S4N*, *Survey Graphic*, and *Fire!!!* – again utilizes the dual analysis of periodical codes and close readings of poetry to prove its assertion that magazine editors and contributors used ‘formal experimentation’ as a means of ‘delineating [...] group identity’ (143). As White notes, Einstein’s visit to New York in April 1921 had forced the concepts of time and space to a point of climatic cultural consciousness and it is as if this consciousness played out in the poetics of the little magazines. White’s assertion that ‘identity also became a site of time-space compression’ (111), inflecting a poetics that, especially through the use of linguistic *parataxis*, mediated a textual ‘reunification’ of ‘the social and geographical boundaries’ (149) within localities, is carefully evidenced through well-chosen readings, while his recognition that the sense of network that played out internally on (and between) the pages of the little magazines was a conscious attempt to replicate and give a material form to the external sense of network or group identity that bound its contributors complements recent studies that have promoted the internal ‘dialogics’ of the little magazine as an identity-shaping tool.⁴

Finally, the sixth chapter’s assertion that several mid-to-late 1920s journals contained ‘a new localist counter-narrative’ (173) extends the

study's focus into a temporally wider realm, reaffirming the revisionary work of the past few years that has gradually eroded the idea that late modernism contained only a weaker, diluted slipstream of a high modernism that had peaked in 1922. White chooses carefully selected examples from *1924*, *Pagany*, *Blues*, and the relaunched *Contact* to show how these magazines bore the work of a new generation of localists who 'chronicled their own self-defining praxes, as well as those which had come before' (174). Arguably, the examination of another magazine that stretched later into the 1930s may have offered a more convincing edge to the claim that localist modernism continued into the 'late' modernist period proper. However, this shows how White reconfigures the traditional periodizations through which we demarcate and classify magazines: 1924 is hardly 'late' modernist in the traditional sense, but the 'porous and indistinct [...] borders of modernist avant-gardes' (209) force us to reconsider modernism's timeline.

While the study has several strengths, one might question its structure. The study's richness, with its examination of a diverse array of very different magazines, private journals and diaries of Pound and Williams, and archival and secondary material, undoubtedly made chapter organization difficult, but with its tracing of 'the development of localist modernism from the little magazines [...] of the late 1910s to the moment of its first articulation in the early 1920s' (81) one cannot help but feel that Chapter 3 should have been placed as the second, rather than third, chapter. This would have created a stronger fluidity between Chapter 1 (focusing solely on *Others*) and the discussion of *Others*, *The Seven Arts*, *The Soil*, and *Contact* contained in Chapter 3, and allowed the author-based Chapter 2 (examining Pound, Williams, and Lewis) to stand out on its own. In some ways, the study veers between a magazine-based approach and an author-based approach, and, while the two complement each other, at points these approaches appear somewhat unreconciled, leaving the reader unsure as to the connections between magazine-related material and other ephemera such as journal entries, a problem that the lack of a bibliography does not aid.

However, these small issues cannot obscure the sensitive research, reader-attuned writing style, and scholarly precision with which White tackles a vast subject, offering a synoptic overview of the tangled networks of periodical production while carefully deconstructing the paradigms affiliated to them. The result is a comprehensive, probing study whose far-reaching conclusions destabilize the familiar tropes of

Book Reviews

‘space’, ‘place’, and ‘identity’, and pave the way for more materialist, multi-disciplinary methodological approaches to the little magazines that, as White states, ‘helped consolidate the modernist canon’ (209).

Louise Kane
University of Birmingham, UK

Notes

¹ Mark S. Morrisson, *The Public Face of Modernism: Little Magazines, Audiences, Reception, and 1905-20* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), 9.

² Andrzej Gąsiorek has explored how both *transition* and the *transatlantic review* capitalized on the notion of ‘exile’ as their defining sense of identity. See Andrzej Gąsiorek, ‘Exiles: *the transatlantic review* (1924) and *The Exile* (1927-8)’, in Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker (eds), *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines – Volume II: North America 1894-1960* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012): 697-717.

³ See Andreas Huyssen, *After The Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture and Postmodernism* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986), viii.

⁴ Ann Ardis and Alan Golding have both used the term ‘dialogics’ in discussions of magazines. See Ann Ardis, ‘The Dialogics of Modernism(s) in the *New Age*’, *Modernism/modernity*, 14.3 (2007): 407-34, at 408; and Alan Golding, ‘*The Dial*, *The Little Review*, and the Dialogics of Modernism’, in Suzanne W. Churchill and Adam McKible (eds), *Little Magazines & Modernism: New Approaches* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2007): 67-82, at 67.

Natalya Lusty and Julian Murphet (eds), *Modernism and Masculinity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 269 pp. £55.00 (hb).

Was the early twentieth century a period of peculiar crisis for western masculinity? Is there any period in which masculinity *isn't* in crisis? The First World War and the crescendo of Suffragist movements represented great shifts in the sexual landscape, and several decades' worth of fruitful scholarship has considered how the artistic and literary cultures of the early twentieth century were shaped by, and spoke back to, these changes. But this scholarship has sometimes followed on the idea, implicit or explicit, that what happened to gender during the first decades of the last century was unique, singular in one or other grand historical sense. Modernism itself often claimed the status of total historical rupture. By imagining that, sometime between 1910 and 1918, the nature of being a man suddenly and unprecedentedly changed, scholars of modernism have sometimes repeated its own self-congratulation. While it does lend the subject matter a certain glamour, this affirmation can place a distorting burden on scholarship. For one thing, no assessment of literary modernism could sufficiently bear out a radical claim about a whole society; if that whole society were our object, we might wonder why such a small and idiosyncratic subculture deserved our attention at all. Neither does historically sensitive work on modernism and masculinity require a grand narrative argument.

Modernism and Masculinity, a new volume of thirteen essays edited by Natalya Lusty and Julian Murphet for Cambridge University Press, is canny enough to avoid making grand social claims on the metonymic evidence of literature. This valuable collection focuses on the ways in which the changing shapes of masculinity informed the creation of literary and other art, in a variety of individual scenarios. The book is divided into four sections. The first is called 'Fields of Production', and the key question it raises – how did the gendering of aesthetic ideas and approaches affect art-making? – colours the volume as a whole. A panoramic first essay by Rachel Blau DuPlessis sketches a range of instances in which male modernist poets tried to assert their technical precision and 'virile thought' (the expression comes from T. E. Hulme) against standing conventions of poetry as vague, hyper-emotional, and feminine. A contribution from editor Julian Murphet shows how, in the

Book Reviews

advent of new media like the radio and the phonograph, male high moderns strove to gender these domestic and popular technologies as 'female', in contrast to their own more arch and unsentimental offerings, but also how they furtively borrowed from these fertile new means of aesthetic production.

The three following sections address 'Masculinity in Crisis', various attempts at formulating 'New Men', and the idea of 'Masculine Form', but each of these sections is touched by the theme of masculine modernism's tortuous relationship with the aesthetics it identified as unmanly. Cinzia Blum points out the subtle debts that F. T. Marinetti's futurist machismo owed to the soft and decadent tradition of romantic individualism it named as its enemy. Thomas Strychacz describes D. H. Lawrence's stylistic investiture both in traditional gender performance and unexpected gender reversal. A compelling essay by Jessica Burstein finds a surprisingly empathic quality in the vitalist sculpture of Henri Gaudier-Brzeska. Gaudier's version of masculinity, Burstein observes, contains a sensuous organicism, even a queerness, which sets it apart from the more austere versions of Vorticist machismo to be found in Pound or Lewis.

Natalya Lusty's introduction to the volume, which usefully situates it in relation to previous scholarship, tacitly defends the singular-crisis approach to early twentieth century masculinity, at least in reference to the world of literary art. Even confined to this arena, the approach may be historically tendentious. If male modernists inherited and struggled against a nineteenth-century image of poetic inspiration as feminine, their Victorian predecessors were also aware of, and discomfited by, this gendering. Nor was masculinity any less a special anxiety for the Angry Young Men who began writing after the Second World War. Many enlightening moments in this collection do focus on crises, in the gender-position of certain individual modernists ('Masculinity in *Crisis*' could be the title of the second section). Ronan Macdonald writes of the way Irish authors, in the years close to the country's struggle for independence, felt caught between images of 'male' Irishness as violent and destructive, and 'female' Irishness as prone, passive, and victimized. James Donald describes Paul Robeson's struggle, as a living embodiment of New Negro cultural and political aspiration, to exemplify a new and uplifting image of black manhood, as well as his eventual tragic entrapment in this struggle. Lusty's own article chronicles the drive in French surrealism to develop an experience-

based model of masculine subjectivity, one that would replace, but also differ from, the image of maleness they thought had perished in the First World War. All of these variously situated crises can be grasped without the supposition that, in some summative way, they outweigh the crises of other historical moments.

Modernism and Masculinity extends in many directions. Beyond those already mentioned, pieces by David Marriot and Maren Linett touch on postcolonial, Caribbean, and Jewish masculinities. Tyrus Miller adds both early twentieth-century Marxism and avant-garde music as subjects of analysis in an essay on Theodor Adorno. Several subjects absent from the collection, which Lusty helpfully enumerates in her introduction, offer fascinating possibilities for future scholarship. This volume contains no sustained consideration of how 'virile thought' might intersect with class dynamics. Masculinist formalism and abstraction were typically deployed with aristocratic hauteur, and it would be interesting to consider what possibilities and difficulties they offered for more working-class conceptions of maleness. The same goes for gay maleness. What could we say, for instance, about the partial rapport between Ezra Pound and Jean Cocteau, or between T. S. Eliot and W. H. Auden? (An essay here by Melissa Jane Hardie briefly considers the connection between Eliot and Djuna Barnes, but this is mostly to establish their difference.) Most promising of all may be the topic of female masculinity. The valuation of the technical and unemotional in literature, after all, finds one of its first exemplars in Gertrude Stein. This fact, as well as Stein's own vexed gender allegiances, must indicate a great deal about the unstable sexing of the modernist artist.

Stein's dual status, as woman and as detached, technical literary experimenter, raises an important question for anyone interested in modernism, one taken up in the last essay of this volume: Is it possible to appreciate and value the aesthetic of hardness and abstraction without reasserting the gender hierarchy by which it was expressed? In a marvellously suggestive reading of Ezra Pound's later Cantos, Peter Nicholls distinguishes two modes, bravado and bravura. Bravado is the expression of defiance – defiance of historical plausibility, political consensus, good taste – offered self-consciously as evidence of the poet's courageous manliness, while bravura is the achievement of durable and impersonal poetic form. The achievement is the basis of the boast, but the boast also undermines the achievement, mobilizing agendas and insecurities which are far from stoic or impersonal. The

Book Reviews

implication is that masculinist formalism may be most formally successful when it is least masculinist. There is no separating these qualities in Pound, many of whose most finely wrought lines advertise for phallic heroism. But Nicholls's distinction is important. As a tool for the reading of modernist art against modernist machismo, it is both a relief and a challenge.

Alastair Morrison
Columbia University, New York, USA

