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Clay, Catherine, Maria DiCenzo, Barbara Green, and Fiona Hackney, editors. *Women's Periodicals and Print Culture in Britain, 1918–1939: The Interwar Period*. Pp. 528. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017. UK £150.00. ISBN: 9781474412537.

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The continued rise of periodical studies has been a rich addition to the research landscape, attracting a range of scholars to this interdisciplinary area. Sean Latham and Robert Scholes, writing in 2006, called for researchers "to invent the tools and institutional structures necessary to engage the diversity, complexity, and coherence of modern periodical culture" (530). More than a decade on, it is safe to say that periodical studies (and more broadly, print culture studies) is flourishing, complemented by the archival turn and recent innovations in digitisation. As the excellent quality of Lisa Z. Sigel's *Making Modern Love: Sexual Narratives and Identities in Interwar Britain* and Catherine Clay, Maria DiCenzo, Barbara Green, and Fiona Hackney's edited collection *Women's Periodicals and Print Culture in Britain, 1918-1939: The Interwar Period* indicate, new work in periodical studies has much to offer us.

Sigel's *Making Modern Love* uses three types of sources – correspondence, magazines, and evidence and testimony – to investigate how individuals self-fashioned their own sexual narratives in interwar Britain. Sigel argues that instead of trying to distil a singular truth from these narratives, we should read them as complex and often fantastical projections: they display how "people experienced a chaotic mix of emotions, engaged in myriad relationships, and viewed themselves and each other in multiple and often contradictory ways" (16). The discussion of these sources is framed by the understanding that it was popular culture (as opposed to sexology) that allowed people to write and read about sex and sexuality *en masse* for the first time. To help establish this claim, the first chapter offers

a broad overview of how writing about sexuality was able to circulate in Britain and the British Empire in the interwar period. Issues surrounding distribution and censorship made some texts easier to obtain or encounter than others. Magazines and other ephemera were the most readily accessible, followed by popular literature and science, then "serious" novels about sexuality (such as the work of Radclyffe Hall and D. H. Lawrence), and sexology. By looking across these various texts, we can see that there was "no single coherent framework" for people to understand sexuality in the interwar period (44).

The following chapters are case studies, each examining the narratives constructed in relation to a specific type of sexual desire: conjugal love, fetishes, cross-dressing, and whipping. Marie Stopes's bestselling sex manual *Married Love* (1918) forms the base for the first case study. Sigel uses the correspondence sent to Stopes by *Married Love*'s readers to argue that the act of writing a letter to Stopes helped these individuals to construct "a coherent sense of the self as having a sexual identity" (47). The correspondence was in response to Stopes's call for submissions from the public to help strengthen her theory of periodicity in women; but as Sigel details, this was seen by many readers to be a general invitation to contact Stopes about their sexuality more broadly. Through plentiful and detailed close readings of these letters, Sigel argues that the correspondence demonstrates that many viewed "sexuality as a way to remake themselves"; by contacting Stopes, they hoped to be able to figure out the logistics and pragmatics of sexual activity with their partners, whilst also transforming their own lives (72).

Sigel's argument is strongest in the following case study, which examines the correspondence column of *London Life*, a glamour fetish magazine. While *Married Love* and its associated correspondence focused on normative ideas of conjugal love and procreation, the *London Life* correspondence column was a space to discuss one's deepest desires. Looking closely at the discourses surrounding three fetishes in the pages of *London Life* – corsets, amputee women, and boxing girls – Sigel takes a holistic approach, interrogating the correspondence column alongside other sections of the magazine, such as fiction and essays. The narratives that were created in the correspondence column were produced in response not just to the individual's everyday life but also to previous correspondents, the editors, the published fiction and essays, and broader social contexts. An issue that is rightly recognised is the potential inauthenticity of these letters – were they actually written by the *London Life* editorial team? However, Sigel provides a comprehensive explanation to refute this claim. The magazine's editorial policies, the inclusion of an editorial reply column, the frequency with which letters engaged with the content of the magazine, and the inclusion of images supplied by readers strongly suggest that the correspondence column was legitimate. Under pseudonyms such as "Sporty Wife" and "Forward Minx," those who wrote to *London Life* were able to transform themselves: they could put forward narratives where they were someone else, and write about desires they may not otherwise have been able to express (85). Sigel's readings of the significance of these fetishes are instructive. Corsets acted as an emblem of nostalgia (even for those who didn't grow up with them), amputee women provided a way to discuss disability without directly confronting the traumas associated with the First World War, and the boxing girls allowed readers to consider the place and role of the new modern woman in society.

The latter half of the book shifts from these broader case studies to examine the sexual narratives of two individuals: a cross-dresser, and a poison-pen letter writer who engaged with discourses surrounding whipping. Due to this focus on the individual (rather

than a number of individuals, as in the previous case studies), these final chapters do not feel quite as persuasive in their arguments; the links made between the case study and broader interwar contexts sometimes feel tenuous. For instance, Chapter 4 examines the case of Mr. Hyde, a cross-dresser and First World War veteran who was arrested for being involved in the trade of obscene books. By analysing his police records – which show "what Hyde read, wrote, wore, and owned and whom Hyde met and knew" – Sigel claims that we can see how materials and ideas about sexuality circulated during the interwar period, and how these in turn shaped sexual narratives (125). While the case of Mr. Hyde is certainly fascinating, its significance is somewhat inflated; not enough evidence is provided to truly link Mr. Hyde's circumstances to wider claims about the nature of interwar cross-dressing. Arguing that the First World War allowed for experimentation with gender roles, Sigel posits cross-dressing as having multiple meanings in the years between the wars; for some men, it served as an escape from masculinity, for sadomasochists, it functioned as a humiliation, and for others, it eroticised childhood memories (150).

Frederick Holeman, an author of multiple poison-pen letters in the 1930s, is the subject of Sigel's analysis of whipping in interwar Britain. Holeman – posing as a concerned mother – wrote letters to other mothers accusing their daughters of being involved in lewd sexual activity. The letters promised that no further action would be taken on the proviso that the mother physically chastised her daughter and placed an advertisement in the local newspaper to prove it. While Holeman was socially subversive through the writing of these letters, Sigel argues that he was responding to a large corpus of ideas surrounding the relationship between sexuality and the whip. The letters are read alongside various documents from the Home Office and Colonial Office about the use of the whip on those guilty of sex crimes, as well as the work of reformers who sought to eliminate whipping as a corporal punishment.

Despite these final case studies lacking some of the force of the first half of the book, *Making Modern Love* is overall an important contribution to scholarship. Its focus on popular texts and culture provides a rich and innovative way to understand interwar sexuality, and Sigel should be applauded for the extensive archival research undertaken to complete this project. While readers of this journal may have liked to have seen Sigel engage more closely with the popular fictional texts of the early twentieth century (romance megasellers E. M. Hull and Ethel M. Dell receive only passing mentions), *Making Modern Love* provides constructive insights into the ways in which ordinary people conceived their sexual identities during a turbulent and transformative period.

While *Making Modern Love* uses periodicals as a means to understand sexuality, *Women's Periodicals and Print Culture in Britain* – co-edited by Catherine Clay, Maria DiCenzo, Barbara Green, and Fiona Hackney – presents a broader perspective on the potential of periodicals as a methodological tool. In the general introduction, the editors position the collection's goal as being "to open up the category of the 'women's magazine' beyond the assumptions and expectations through which it is conventionally understood" (1). Rather than attempting to present a singular narrative, the editors write that the collection is designed to encourage new work in this research area and help to spark further conversations about women's print media and modern periodical studies. The collection indeed realises these aspirations: furnished with plentiful high quality images and boasting an impressive list of contributors who are well-known and established in the field, *Women's*

Periodicals and Print Culture in Britain is a significant contribution to our understanding of women's lives in the interwar period and to the field of periodical studies.

The collection consists of thirty chapters, split into five thematic parts. When taken together, these sections present a comprehensive overview of the key concerns germane to studying women's print media of the period: culture, style, domesticity, feminism, and community. Each part is prefaced with its own introduction, which provides a brief overview of the broader contexts and concerns that emerge across its chapters. Part I, "Culture and the Modern Woman," seeks to push interwar periodical studies beyond the study of modernism, with the chapters in this part exploring a variety of women's periodicals – from highbrow to lowbrow – in order to examine how magazines "taught readers what to read, what to see, and how to consume a variety of modern aesthetic forms" (11). The essays presented in this section are all strong, but highlights include Claire Battershill's survey of the representation of bookish culture in interwar women's periodicals, and Lise Shapiro Sanders's examination of 1920s romance weeklies, which will be of particular interest to popular romance scholars. Sanders argues that a close inspection of girls' magazines of the period – such as *Girls' Favourite* and *Peg's Paper* – reveals changes to "the pattern of heterosexual romance," aided by new attitudes towards consumption and leisure (87). The romance fiction presented in these magazines "both departed from and reflected the experiences of the modern girl" (88). They presented plots where working or middle-class heroines become involved with the stage and screen, depicting this world as a space of glamour and fantasy, while also presenting its potential moral and sexual dangers. Alongside this depiction, however, is the understanding that this involvement with theatre and cinema can only be temporary, with the heroines relinquishing their involvements after marriage – the happily ever after provided by the narratives.

Part II turns to the question of style, exploring how periodicals instructed their readers to be modern. This section takes a broad approach to understanding representations of modern style, aiming to move beyond existing work that has largely focused on the links between style and fashion. As such, the essays examine not only the popular fashion magazines of the period (such as *Vogue* and *Eve*) but also periodicals targeted at more specific audiences, such as cinema magazines and young adult publications. Moreover, these chapters offer useful insights into methodologies in periodical studies. For example, Penny Tinkler's analysis of the middle-class young women's magazine *Miss Modern* offers an overview of how the magazine constructed the ideal of "youthful feminine modernity" in its pages (158). Tinkler takes an "inclusive" approach to reading *Miss Modern*, considering both how the magazine fits into the wider periodical landscape, and its diverse forms of content, such as editorials, fiction, images, and advertising (154). Tinkler argues that this type of holistic approach to studying magazines – one that "engages with text, image, and design and the relationships between them" – is necessary in order to present a comprehensive reading (154).

The chapters on domesticity and the home provide a complex and highly nuanced view of these concerns as represented in the pages of interwar periodicals. This discussion interrogates the common characterisation of interwar domestic writing as being "a retreat into domestic life," and recasts domestic discourses as being varied and diverse (209). For instance, Adrian Bingham's chapter on the emergent women's page in national daily newspapers argues that there was a shift away from traditional domestic routines. Instead, the women's pages presented modern domesticity as requiring new and professionalised

techniques (such as approaches to housewifery and childcare informed by science and psychology), and engagement with the consumer economy, along with the recognition that women wanted to balance their domestic duties along with paid work and socialising. There are also political aspects to understanding domesticity, as Karen Hunt's chapter on the monthly women's magazine *Labour Woman* demonstrates. The magazine's column, "The Housewife," provided a space to engage working-class housewives with politics through their everyday lives, by providing practical tips and advice for managing a household while on a budget.

The shift to feminism in the latter half of the collection is a welcome addition, although some of the essays in this section feel slightly underdeveloped. Take, for example, Helen Glew's chapter on *Opportunity*, a feminist periodical for civil servants. While the essay provides a well-researched overview of the journal's history during the interwar period, it ultimately feels too brief to be able to develop a strong and sustained argument. However, Laurel Forster's discussion of feminist debates in *Time and Tide* is the real stand-out in this section, demonstrating how the magazine promoted debate and discussion over the issue of women's work. Forster's analysis focuses primarily on a 1926 essay series titled "Women of the Leisured Classes," which provided deliberately contentious ideas as a means to provoke debate amongst *Time and Tide*'s readers. Importantly, this debate about women's work (or in the case of the leisured class, lack of work) spilled over into other arenas, turning up in other print media and culminating in a face-to-face debate between G. K. Chesterton and the author of the essays, Candida, a pseudonym for *Time and Tide*'s founder, Lady Margaret Rhondda.

The volume closes strongly with a focus on women's organisations and communities. Seeking to expand perspectives on women's movements of the interwar period by moving beyond explicitly feminist groups, the chapters in this section examine a wide-ranging selection of titles, including the periodicals of housewives' associations, co-operative guilds, religious communities, political parties, and journalism societies. These organisations, as Maria DiCenzo notes in her introduction to the section, were not necessarily explicitly feminist, but did engage with "women's politics and forms of advocacy […] across the political spectrum" in a broader sense (405).

Perhaps the real benefit that *Women's Periodicals and Print Culture in Britain* offers to those in popular romance studies is that it opens up a number of new avenues for potential inquiry. Romance fiction and romance novelists are regularly mentioned in passing throughout the collection. Ursula Bloom contributed articles to *Woman's Outlook*, a feminist co-operative periodical; the pages of *Miss Modern*, a young women's magazine, frequently featured romance fiction. The collection provides us with the methodological approaches and tools necessary for future explorations of the ways in which popular romance studies and periodical studies may intersect. Indeed, the volume's extensive appendix – which details where every periodical mentioned throughout the collection is archived – is supplied in order to help promote further research on women's periodicals of the 1920s and 30s.

When taken together, *Making Modern Love* and *Women's Periodicals and Print Culture in Britain* illustrate the potential print cultures have to reveal how constructions of sexuality, identity, femininity, and community operated in interwar Britain. Both works will be of value to those studying the early twentieth century and the interwar period, as well as those interested in periodicals and print cultures.

Works Cited

Latham, Sean, and Robert Scholes. “The Rise of Periodical Studies.” *PMLA*, vol. 121, no. 2, 2006, pp. 517–31.