



BOOK REVIEWS

POST-1800

Jennie Batchelor. *The Lady's Magazine (1770–1832) and the Making of Literary History*

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By shifting literary historians' focus away from the novel and toward the miscellaneous magazine, Jennie Batchelor's groundbreaking book *The Lady's Magazine (1770–1832) and the Making of Literary History* charts new directions for women's literary history and provides scholars with a roadmap for study of the intermediality of eighteenth-century print and literary culture. The magazine, as Batchelor points out, was as popular if not more so than the novel. Accessible in circulating and subscription libraries and more affordable than multivolume novels, magazines reprinted excerpts from popular histories, novels, travel narratives, newspapers, histories, and philosophical texts; significantly, in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, they also depended on reader contributors for original fiction, translations, and essays. A multimodal form, magazines included engravings, sheet music, fashion plates, and (at least in the case of the *Lady's Magazine*) needlework patterns. Despite their popularity, magazines have been largely dismissed by literary scholars or mined exclusively for their reviews of canonical novels and writers. Even scholars who spent lifetimes studying magazine fiction, such as Robert Mayo, have depicted its fiction as second-rate, formulaic, and most useful as a negative definition of canonical or literary fiction. Through her careful reading of the over sixty-year run of the *Lady's Magazine*, Batchelor generates a powerful and persuasive feminist counternarrative. Literary history, according to Batchelor, has ignored magazines because of the threat they pose to analytical categories that have long been sacrosanct, including periodization, genre, and the author.

Begun in 1770 by the booksellers John Wheble and John Coote, the *Lady's Magazine* was taken over by John Roberts and George Robinson in 1771 and remained in the hands of Robinson and his descendants until 1832 when it merged with its rival *The Ladies Monthly Museum*. Although by no means the first periodical marketed to women, the magazine, as Batchelor notes, was “arguably the first recognizably modern women's magazine” (3). The first issue released under the Robinson imprint likely included the “first mass-produced hand-coloured British fashion plate” (69); over the next few years, Robinson and his staff created a miscellaneous table to contents that was designed to both educate and entertain his readers. The magazine regularly included serial fiction, including one novel, *Monks and Robbers* (1794–1805), that was published over eleven years by two different authors. Issues normally included biographies of famous women, such as Catherine the Great and Catherine Macaulay, travel narratives, translations of mainly European texts, fashion plates, sheet music, and needlework patterns. A series of needlework patterns from 1776 invited readers to stitch Great Britain, Africa, and the Americas, emphasizing the magazine's

complex attitude toward domesticity, inviting women readers to read and explore the world, while at the same time cultivating skills applicable to the home (120).

Building on Eve Taylor Bannet's description of the "discontinuous reading practices" cultivated by magazine reading (105), Batchelor insightfully describes the forms of knowledge fostered by the *Lady's*: "The periodical's contents are not closed, but associative and open-ended. Knowledge is divined not by reading discrete essays, letters, advice columns or tales but via the work of interactive and discontinuous reading demanded by the miscellany format" (105). This associative form of reading invited readers to search for themes and ideas across genre, "unfixing" genre itself (82). Similarly, magazines unsettle conventional ideas of authorship. Most writers for early magazines were pseudonymous or anonymous; many of the early writers for the *Lady's Magazine* before 1820 were likely unpaid reader contributors. They wrote formula fiction; imitations of Ann Radcliffe and other popular novelists of the Romantic period were popular for decades in the magazine. These practices resulted in what Batchelor dubs an "'unRomantic' model of authorship," difficult to reconcile with the Romantic period's emphasis on original genius (161). With a start date in the early 1770s, the magazine also spans the eighteenth-century and the Romantic periods; the difficulty in applying existing historical frameworks to understand the magazine is compounded by the fact that until the Copyright Act of 1842 magazines reprinted from copyrighted texts with little fear of penalty. This led to several curious remediations, such as the *Lady's* "repackaging of Delarivier Manley's *The New Atalantis* (1709) as a series of pithy maxims for conduct in modern life" (83). Part of the joy of reading Batchelor's book comes from her clear and compelling sense that in confounding conventional frameworks for studying literary history the *Lady's Magazine* charts new paths for scholars who want to embrace collective forms of authorship, work across periods, and value less purely literary aesthetic practices.

As magazine culture developed and the *Lady's Magazine's* competitors multiplied, it became much more conventional. After 1820, the magazine shifted away from reader contributors and toward staff writers, reinforcing the growing split in literary culture between the paid "masculine" professional and the "feminised coterie amateur" (226). The review section also came to take up more and more space in the magazine; the reviews largely dismissed early sentimental and Gothic fiction written by women and anonymous writers. The novels that the reviews deemed too derivative and poorly constructed to be of value closely resembled the fiction published in the magazine. As Clifford Siskin has influentially argued, this led to "the Great Forgetting" of women writers of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (210). Batchelor intentionally looks beyond and away from the magazine's reviews, instead focusing on the transhistorical community of women's writers fostered by the magazine's incredible sixty-year run. As Batchelor argues, the *Lady's Magazine* "played a vital and unjustly unacknowledged role in what, who and how readers remembered women writers" (222). Batchelor's book itself is an extraordinary act of remembrance that upends the what, who and how of women's literary history.

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