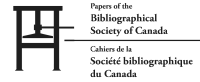


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Kirsten MacLeod. American Little Magazines of the Fin de Siècle: Art, Protest, and Cultural Transformation (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018), 508 pp. \$106 (Hardback) ISBN 978-1-442-64316-1

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REVIEWS

Kirsten MacLeod. *American Little Magazines of the Fin de Siècle: Art, Protest, and Cultural Transformation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018), 508 pp. \$106 (Hardback) ISBN 978-1-442-64316-1

Review by J. MATTHEW HUCULAK
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Over the past century, fin-de-siècle American magazines (1894–1904) were left in an epistemological void within the field of periodical studies: they did not fit neatly within the work of many Victorian scholars (Laurel Brake et al.), and they were overshadowed by the more famous modernist “little magazines” that began to appear on or around 1910 (*The New Age*, *The English Review*, *Poetry*, *BLAST*, the *Little Review*, etc.), which are historically associated with the term *little magazine*. Although René Taupin published *L’influence du symbolisme français sur la poésie américaine* (Paris, 1929), which touched on a few of the American fin-de-siècle magazines, most attention paid to this period and genre tended to be from collectors, librarians, and bibliographers in articles and bibliographies.

Kirsten MacLeod – professor, book historian, bibliographer, and collector with degrees in English literature and library science – is uniquely situated to undertake the bibliographic and cultural work to recover the omission of these objects in the archival and cultural record in a book-length study. *American Little Magazines of the Fin de Siècle: Art, Protest, and Cultural Transformation* is divided into two halves: an examination of major forces and figures behind the periodicals of the period as well as a bibliography of fin-de-siècle American magazines.

MacLeod has advantages in these efforts previous scholars did not: as Robert Scholes and Sean Latham note in “The Rise of Periodical Studies,”

magazine scholars aggressively use digital media and some “might be able to mine these sources for a narrow range of materials relating to their fields.”¹ I will explicitly add that the rise of digital archival finding aids and networked library catalogue entries allow scholars to uncover networks and previous publications unavailable to those working in earlier eras. MacLeod, who also happens to be a collector of fin-de-siècle ephemera and has curated an exhibition on the subject at the Grolier Club, has used both the tools of the digital age and her intimate knowledge of the era to produce the most complete bibliography of fin-de-siècle magazines to date, which accompanies the earlier study of the period in the first half of the book.

The first major question of the book is: are these magazines published between 1894 and 1904 a separate branch in the evolutionary tree of modernist print production, or do they deserve recognition as part of the direct lineage of the more famous modernist little magazines? Even at the time of their publication, these fin-de-siècle books were hard to define. Frederick W. Faxon – a librarian and the owner of the Faxon Publishing Company, which was famous for printing indices and bibliographies – coined the term *ephemeral bibelots* to describe the modern chapbooks that appeared in America around the turn of the twentieth century.² In the popular press at the time, they were called “Ephemerals, Bibelots, Brownie Magazines, Fadazines, Magazettes,” and my personal favourite, “Freak Magazines,”³ which bucked against readerly expectations of large commercial periodicals like *Scribner’s* and *Munsey’s*. As MacLeod shows, however, these ephemeral bibelots were more than mere curiosities: they were certainly proto-modernist in form and greatly influenced the genre of modernist magazines that appeared after them. MacLeod admits that “while consensus over terminology may have been lacking, these terms

¹ Sean Latham and Robert Scholes, “The Rise of Periodical Studies,” *PMLA* 121, no. 2 (March 1, 2006): 517–531 (517).

² Frederick W. Faxon, “*Ephemeral Bibelots*”: *A Bibliography of the Modern Chap-Books and Their Imitators*, Bulletin of Bibliography Pamphlets (Boston: Boston Book Co., 1903), 3, <https://modjourn.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/faxon.pdf>.

³ *Ibid.*

are highly suggestive of what constituted what I call ‘little magazineness’—i.e., the quintessential characteristics of the [little magazine] genre. They were small. They were short-lived. They were precious and collectible ... They were radical ... They were unique” (7). They are, she continues, “undoubtedly part of the early history little magazines, and I treat them in this light” (12). She is in good company in approaching fin-de-siècle periodicals as little magazines. In 1930, reflecting on the rise of the modernist magazine, Ezra Pound (a figure so instrumental in periodical publishing), wrote that fin-de-siècle publications were the “pre-history of the small magazines in America”; Pound argues the “active phase” of small [little] magazines in America begins with Monroe’s *Poetry* (Chicago) in 1911.⁴ MacLeod’s study, therefore, fills in an important void in scholarship by not only surveying what magazines were produced in this period in her comprehensive bibliography, but also by providing a survey of the complex periodical market that gave rise to a new form used by modernists, and also as a modernist genre in its own right.

MacLeod has produced a visually stunning book (many of the colour illustrations come from her own collection) that contextualizes social and cultural forces in American print markets, serving both high and low readerships and readerships in between. Part one, “Social, Media, and Little Magazine Contexts,” examines the shifts in American middle-class readerships after the Civil War and the emergence of professional-managerial readerships, and the cultural institutions that developed to cater to their tastes. She looks at the rise of various movements that harnessed the periodical form to reach these specific audiences. MacLeod notes that reading “was a part of one’s ongoing education, self-development, and self-improvement. Periodicals were most crucial to the development of this identity” (35). Here, MacLeod does not limit herself to coterie magazines: her study looks at the periodical market as a whole and includes newspapers, magazines large and small, and one-offs.

⁴ Ezra Pound, “Small Magazines,” *The English Journal* 19, no. 9 (1930): 689–704, <https://doi.org/10.2307/803043>.

The thematic organization of the book mirrors the table of contents of a magazine. Part two consists of chapters dedicated to fiction, poetry, visual art, literary criticism and editorials, social and political commentary, and sayings. This organizational choice allows MacLeod to connect disparate publications, places, and people within a larger comprehensible whole, and to mix the familiar with the unfamiliar. In terms of people, Stephen Crane, Bliss Carmen, and Elbert Hubbard appear alongside Gelett Burgess, Michael Monahan, Thomas Bird Mosher, Clinton Scollard, and Vance Thompson. The specific magazines discussed include the *Chap-Book*, *Smart Set*, *Yellow Book*, *Bibelot*, and *Philistine*. In short, MacLeod has written a perfect periodical studies book that deftly manages to encompass a host of people and periodicals to capture what she calls the “mediamorphosis” of fin-de-siècle literary production (60).

MacLeod’s work seeks to “test” previous work on ephemeral bibelots to see if earlier assumptions stand up in “wider cultural, literary, and media context[s], and across a broader and more representative range of titles” particularly through the lenses of new media studies and the digital humanities (10). Her interdisciplinary approach, which defies traditional disciplines and even professions, is successful in bringing to light a complex field of cultural production that has hitherto been in the dark.

The book is essential reading for media studies, literature, and history, and will also be of interest to bibliographers, librarians, and collectors of all sorts in that MacLeod has built on the work before her. The book ends with the most complete bibliography of fin-de-siècle magazine production to date (starting with *The Acorn* and ending with *Young Folks World*). It is the missing piece to a formerly gaping hole in the archive of modernity.

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