

BOOK REVIEWS



Jennie Batchelor, *The Lady's Magazine (1770–1832) and the Making of Literary History* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022), 320 pp. ISBN 978-1-4744-8766-5; open access (ePDF).

Recognising how entangled the women's magazine was with other contemporary print forms such as the novel and the Reviews [...] suggests new and necessary ways to think about literary history in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. [...] [A] women's literary history that does not recognise the centrality of the periodical print culture or the particular contribution of individual titles such as the *Lady's Magazine* is a distorted and impoverished one. It is also one that participates in a politics of forgetting that the magazine and its intergenerational communities of authors and readers not only rejected, but also actively sought to counter. (p. 241)

NO BETTER MANIFESTO of methodological and critical practice could summarise Jennie Batchelor's latest scholarly achievement, *The Lady's Magazine (1770–1832) and the Making of Literary History*: a thorough, ambitious study and a substantial evidence-based roadmap of late-modern English periodical culture. It is so fascinating, and so full of information, that at times the results of this research can read like a novel. The vast amount of textual and non-textual media analysed in these pages—an imposing corpus running probably into several million words, plus countless plates and illustrations, produced over the magazine's extraordinary 62-year run, and handled with enviable confidence and cleverness by Batchelor—is presented from the dual perspective, both wide angle view and close up. Now we find the discussion of a letter to the editor, now the reproduction of a song sheet, now snippets from the instalment of a novel, now a fashion plate, now lines from a literary review, in the unapologetic spirit of the glorious miscellany. Such an imposing tapestry, which would make scholars of lesser finesse and dedication waver, is thus made accessible through a captivating gallery of multimodal case studies, extrapolated from the imposing multimedia, cross-temporal, cross-genre mosaic the *Lady's Magazine* composed over its many decades.

Lavishly illustrated (unfortunately only in b/w), detailed, wide-ranging and generous in the number of topics it covers, *The Lady's Magazine (1770–1832)* is organised into six chapters. While each of them is typically structured around a theme, the chapters are arranged in a predominantly chronological order, and fur-

ther connected through skilful cross-referencing and infra-textual connections. Thus, we move from the early eighteenth-century periodical models discussed in Chapter 1 through to the magazine's nineteenth-century legacy addressed in Chapter 6, first evoked by the opening epigraph, in Charlotte Brontë's eulogy of the publication. This praise comes from a letter written to the highly sceptical Hartley Coleridge in 1840, and it is an opening tribute that Batchelor sets up as a symbolic (matrilineal) figurehead for the whole book and, presumably, her project. However, it is clear from Batchelor's nuanced arguments that the very concepts of structure and chronology are continually challenged by the ontology of the miscellany. Such a format breaks down genre hierarchies, encourages unprofessional (and partly, at least until the early nineteenth century, unpaid and voluntary) production and challenges the notion of originality on the one hand and linear reading on the other, hence encouraging recycling, reprinting, repackaging, down to re-reading contents with a backward glance, even from a distance. We could therefore speak of the *Lady's Magazine* as a space for writing back to previously published texts, also by way of newly reconceptualised excerpts and readers' letters to the editors.

Another interesting heuristic used by Batchelor is that of change. A first type of change of exemplary significance occurred only a few months after the launch of the magazine in August 1770. In 1771, a highly public dispute erupted between the magazine's first editor, John Wheble, and George Robinson and John Roberts, who had bought the magazine from its founder, the publisher and bookseller John Coote. The highly publicised row centred on issues of legitimacy: that is, who owned the intellectual and material rights to the publication, with obvious questions of profit in the background. Interestingly, the battle was fought entirely over the loyalty and brand allegiance of readers and contributors who, in the end, determined the survival of only one of the two identically named rival magazines.

Further hiatuses and changes occurred in the following years, linked to hikes in the magazine's price, culminating in the next century with the introduction of illustrated reviews, which helped move the magazine away from its successful initial formula of reader-content and miscellany. It is here that Batchelor makes what I think is one of the most successful critical points of her study. The miscellany, in its shifts and fragments, in the constantly evolving instability of its form and content, represents and responds on a formal level to the instability of the turbulent decades in which it was published, to constant conflict, the fragmentation of events and changes imposed by contingency. Despite the accusations of its detractors, both past and present, magazines, including this mostly female-oriented miscellany, were in fact inherently political.

This long-ignored nature of the *Lady's Magazine* is not surprising, given that its long-time editor, George Robinson senior, had such radical writers as Helena Maria Williams and Thomas Holcroft in his catalogue. On closer examination, the pages of the magazine, 'its columns of births, marriages and deaths; its chronicles [...] the accounts of state events' (p. 88), down to the engravings and

numerous episodic poems, are mirrors of History. They send back its reflections, in the form of personal, private micro-stories, often with surprisingly happy conclusions, as if to compensate for the tragedy of reality. This is the thematic level. However, another aspect, which I think is even more central, confirms Batchelor's thesis as to why it is more important than ever to study the *Lady's Magazine*. The external 'permacrisis' of the historical context (to use a contemporary term) is refracted by the internal 'permacrisis' of the format, itself an episodic, heteroglossic 'permanarrative' spread over the monthly instalments, which refutes the illusion of coherence. Reflecting on the strategy of 'repetition with difference' carried out by the plentiful moral and sentimental narratives, Batchelor notes that 'the very fact that these fictions are formulaic is their point, allowing readers to reflect critically on the intractability of the problems they face' (p. 115). The chaos of grand History finds an analogous counterpart in the thematic and formal cosmos of the miscellany and its miniature stories.

Batchelor's ability to bring out the complexity and comprehensiveness of methodological references without ever falling into ostentation, the trap of super-specialist jargon or extensive quotations—on which the study draws but does not depend—is remarkable. On transmedia and intermedia relations in the *Lady's Magazine*, for example—a subject that would (erroneously) seem only peripheral to this kind of study—Batchelor writes neat pages, born of erudite passion and her profound mastery of the theoretical and methodological reference texts. The whole of the third chapter, which focuses on the reading practices, and intertextual and transmedia exchanges encouraged by the magazine, is of great interest, discreetly pointing out, unencumbered by technical jargon, the dynamic meaning that each textual and non-textual item took on in the network of associations and dissociations created by miscellaneity and magazine culture.

If audience achievement is anything to go by, the phenomenal estimated monthly circulation of the periodical, which reached between 10,000 and 15,000 copies a month at its height, turned its obscure, anonymous or pseudonymous authors into familiar presences, better known and more sold than the likes of Jane Austen or Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley. The history of the rise and fall, and the ensuing market fortunes and misfortunes, of established genres such as the oriental tale or the epistolary novel, are scrutinised in detail and come under strain in the *Lady's Magazine*, while the cultural agency commanded by a now forgotten and long discredited magazine emerges powerfully. The conceptual and practical theorisation of 'unRomanticism' as an alternative Romanticism—beyond reading practices and authorial content, professionalism and masculinity—corroborates the value of Batchelor's study and confirms its usefulness far beyond the perimeter of periodical history and women's writing. Who was *really* being read in Romanticism, Batchelor wonders? Who was *really* worth reading? And crucially, I would like to argue as a follow-up query, *how* did readers read?

Arguably, the value of a critical work can also be measured in the impact it has on the reader, on that mental and emotional engagement so well reconstructed in relation to the *Lady's Magazine*. While reading this book I found myself more

than once reflecting on my own research on Frances Burney, a writer to whom I think Batchelor's concept of 'unRomanticism' can be fruitfully applied, with the dismantling of long-standing and, for Batchelor, lame categories of literary analysis in its broadest sense. (Incidentally, equally convincing is Batchelor's sophisticated epistemic-linguistic play on the *Lady's Magazine* as both 'unromantic', in the sense that it is a publication surprisingly cynical about love and romance, and 'unRomantic', in the sense that it lacks posthumous, Romantic recognition).

Batchelor's pages contain many valuable insights for further critical investigation. One example is the application of the concept of micro-history (discussed in the section 'The Under-plots of the Grand Story', p. 99) to the obituaries and memorials reprinted in the magazine. She argues persuasively: 'The magazine's practice of the extract is a less obvious act of commemoration, but it was its most persistent and arguably most effective strategy for writing women into literary history', reminding us that 'the extract was also a political act' (pp. 219–20). Indeed, as the scholar theorises, form is method (p. 116). Excerpted micro-texts are welded to the forms of reputation, memorialisation, publication and, finally, public recognition. Personally, I would have liked much more information about the biographical profiles included in the magazine and their role and significance within the history of women's biography. Other insights I wish I had found more of, again out of personal interest and decidedly not because of the scholarly shortcomings of the author, concern the decorative embellishments (that is, copper plate and later steel engravings), which are central to my research on early visual depictions of authorship at the dawning of copyright. It is for this reason that I was utterly captivated by the precious nugget in Chapter 6 that discusses the magazine's engraving honouring the statue of the educator and historian Catherine Macaulay.

Visual and material representations of authorship are inextricably linked to the discourses of transmission, tradition and authority explored in Batchelor's volume, from which there emerges a Romantic dynamic print ecosystem (I deliberately avoid the term 'canon' here), starkly different from what is taught in the classroom or made available in bookstores. I hope that Batchelor will explore this area in further stages of her research, perhaps including more of the *Lady's Monthly Museum* or *La Belle Assemblée*. It is naive and possibly narrow-minded to think that one book, however rich it may be—and Batchelor's is indisputably a rich one—can exhaustively explore such a diverse, protean publication. It operated for more than six decades under different owners and with different fortunes, within a vibrant print ecology whose true polyphony and wealth are only now beginning to emerge, thanks to masterful investigations such as Batchelor's. In view of the methodological, logistic and disciplinary difficulties of such (in)quests, there are still challenges a-plenty out there, for Batchelor herself and the generations of scholars who will benefit from her scholarship.

In conclusion, *The Lady's Magazine (1770–1832) and the Making of Literary History* is a superb study, essential reading for its methodological accuracy, the clarity of its linguistic style and the meticulousness of its bibliography. The im-

portance of this book to specialists of long Romanticism is obvious. Batchelor also offers valuable insights to Victorianists (who will identify with the considerations on scribal communities in Chapter 6), to scholars of the early eighteenth century (represented mainly, but not exclusively, in Chapter 1) as well as to those of us who are concerned with the history of reading and media studies in the present, who will find original insights into the prehistory of intermediality.

This is an outstanding work of literary history. It is also a masterful example of archival research that significantly advances our understanding of the British press as a whole. It is truly welcome news that this exemplary study, so enriching and indeed unique, is available in open access and thus accessible irrespective of individual financial means. Batchelor has found a way to revive the cultural currency of this once astonishingly popular magazine, sadly written off by generations of literary historians, to strengthen and extend to the present day the vibrant community of reading, mental cultivation and readerly engagement with a periodical that for many decades championed active and democratic reading practices.



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Geoffrey Bond and Christine Kenyon Jones, *Dangerous to Show: Byron and His Portraits* (London: Unicorn Press, 2020), 160 pp. ISBN 978-1-9126-9071-8; £25.00 (hb).

IN *DANGEROUS TO SHOW: Byron and His Portraits*, Geoffrey Bond OBE FSA and Dr Christine Kenyon Jones FKC have crafted both a delightfully absorbing work and a deeply useful addition to the field. Their book explores the chasm between Byron the myth and Byron the man.

19 April 2024 marked the bicentennial of the death of Lord Byron, the British Romantic poet and satirist. Fiona McCarthy's highly detailed *Byron: Life and Legend* was a departure from previous biographies because it thoroughly examined Byron's relationships with adolescent boys at Harrow and in later life. *Dangerous to Show* is likewise a remarkable contribution to the study of Byron. The sheer number of Byron's portraits in this book, the proliferation of his countless selves, testifies to the inherent slipperiness of pinning down a figure with a cult following.

Bond and Kenyon Jones's detailed inspection of Byron's foibles renders him less mysterious. While they dispel the myth that Byron slept with curlers in his hair, for instance, the authors seem to confirm more recent scholarship that

Curious History of Romantic Collectors, 2006). Her third book, *The Sarah Siddons Audio Files: Romanticism and the Lost Voice* (2011), was the recipient of the Bernard Hewitt Award for Outstanding Research in Theatre History. In her most recent book, *On the Bullet Train with Emily Brontë: 'Wuthering Heights' in Japan* (2017), which she completed as a Guggenheim Fellow, Pascoe wrote about Japanese Brontë adaptations and about foreign language mastery.

Francesca Saggini is Professor in English Literature at the Università degli Studi della Tuscia (Viterbo), Italy. Since 2017, she has been Senior Research Associate, Lucy Cavendish College, University of Cambridge. Francesca is the author of, among others, *The Gothic Novel and the Stage: Romantic Appropriations* (2015, Honourable Mention at the 2016 ESSE Book Awards) and *Backstage in the Novel: Frances Burney and the Theater Arts* (2012, Walken Cowen Memorial Prize for an outstanding work in eighteenth-century studies). In 2021–2023, Francesca was the primary investigator on a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions-funded project at the University of Edinburgh, entitled 'Opening Romanticism: Reimagining Romantic Drama for New Audiences'. Francesca is the author of five books and she has edited twelve collections and special journal issues. Among the over ninety-five articles and chapters she has authored, many engage with popular fiction and genre literature, including the gothic, the fantastic and crime writing.

Matthew Sangster is Professor of Romantic Studies, Fantasy and Cultural History at the University of Glasgow, and the current President of the British Association for Romantic Studies. His recent publications include *Living as an Author in the Romantic Period* (2021), *Institutions of Literature, 1700–1900* (co-edited with Jon Mee, 2022), *Remediating the 1820s* (co-edited with Jon Mee, 2023), *An Introduction to Fantasy* (2023), *Realms of Imagination: Essays from the Wide Worlds of Fantasy* (co-edited with Tanya Kirk, 2023) and *David Bowie and the Legacies of Romanticism* (2023). He is currently working with Katie Halsey on a book exploring the results of the Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded 'Books and Borrowing, 1750–1830' project. He is also writing about Tom Waits, Pierce Egan, J. R. R. Tolkien's legacies and rude student marginalia.

Zoë Van Cauwenberg (she/her) is a BAEF postdoctoral fellow in Irish Studies at Boston College and a research associate at the department of translation, interpreting and communication at Ghent University. Currently, she is researching female Irish antiquarians from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. She obtained a PhD in history from Ghent University and in literary studies from KU Leuven. This research (2020–2024) on the role of women in shaping Scottish and Irish histories during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century was funded by the FWO (Research Foundation–Flanders). She has presented and published on orality and history in the works of Anne Bannerman and Mary St John, Romantic and gothic connections in the lyrics of Taylor Swift and the gothic heroine in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Zoë recently co-edited