



SE Features

HD Scissors-and-paste revolution; BIBLIOGRAPHY

BY LEAH PRICE

WC 862 words

PD 24 May 2013

SN The Times Literary Supplement

SC TLITE

ED 1; National

PG 28

LA English

CY © 2013 Times Newspapers Ltd. All rights reserved

LP Elizabeth Carolyn Miller

SLOW PRINT

TD Literary radicalism and late Victorian print culture Stanford University Press. \$60; distributed in the UK by Eurospan. £54.95.

978 0 8047 8408 5

Social historians have long known that early Victorian radicals saw a free press and mass literacy as preconditions for political progress. Literary historians have long identified early twentieth-century "little magazines" as a driver of modernist aesthetics. Elizabeth Miller is the first scholar to succeed in connecting those dots. Her missing link lies in a fresh and revealing archive: the now-dusty mass of late-nineteenth-century British periodicals that took up the political mantle of earlier radicals while inventing coterie distribution methods that literary avant-gardes a generation later would adapt to their own (ostensibly apolitical) ends.

Rates of British magazine production shot up at the end of the nineteenth century. Not only did the few most popular titles circulate in unprecedented numbers, but the titles themselves multiplied in number - from 643 in 1875 to more than 2,000 by the century's end. Their proliferation generated what theorists of online media now call a "long tail": niche monthlies or weeklies addressed to a small but loyal following whose subscriptions defined their identities. Whether addressing socialists, theosophists, spelling reformers or vegetarians, these periodicals shared the quixotic ambition to represent - if not reach - the labouring masses without becoming absorbed into a mercenary mass media.

The fin-de-siècle press fancied itself heir to the unstamped press that had flourished in the face of state censorship half a century earlier. The difference is that, as the cheap print once associated with democracy began to look complicit with capitalism, radicals came to fear the pressure to attract subscribers and advertisers more than they feared a repressive state. Some refused advertising altogether; others ran only lists of titles by other radical publishers. Still others turned to politically correct personal ads: readers in 1897 could choose between "A Middle aged gentleman wishes to correspond with a lady aged 25 to 30 with a view to a permanent union on Ruedebusch's principles. Please write in confidence with photo" and "A Lady, tall, dark, strongly built, wishes to meet a gentleman going to Socialist colony, with a view to union". Many radicals turned away from the periodical press altogether, whether to the stage (George Bernard Shaw) or the handmade book (William Morris). Miller's subtle comparison of successive versions of Morris's novels, first serialized in *Commonweal* and later collected in Kelmscott editions, brings out the specificity of each medium used to counteract the political effects of mass print culture.

Miller groups periodicals devoted to everything from free thought to free love under a title that may at first sound oxymoronic. "Slow" is the last word that comes to mind to characterize periodicals that replaced the

stately tempo of book publishing with monthly or weekly or even daily deadlines. Like today's "slow" food, Miller's "slow print" turns back the clock on industrial mass production; like slow food, too, it courts charges of elitism. Yet for radical editors and publishers, the medium was the message. Not content to advocate social change, periodicals enacted it by carving out a space beyond the market. And even when their contents lacked novelty, their form took a stand: in juxtaposing quotations from what we now call the mainstream media - for example, a clipping on "Yachting in the Mediterranean" with another on "The Homes of the Poor" - "cut-and-paste montage took on a revolutionary cast long before the advent of Soviet film".

In a book not out in time to be cited by Miller, Gandhi's Printing Press: Experiments in slow reading (Harvard University Press), Isabel Hofmeyr has shown how central such scissors-and-paste work was to journalistic networks (and ideological frameworks) that extend far beyond Miller's British archive. Hofmeyr's emphasis also stretches beyond Miller's interest in genre (was the novel inherently more conservative than the drama?) to labour relations and intellectual property. It's no accident that both scholars are based in literature rather than history departments: the disciplinary habit of dovetailing form with content lets us see for the first time that print was radical not simply because it transmitted radical ideas, but also because of the ways in which it was produced and distributed. Yet form also tugs away from content, as when Miller shows that the novel posed Shaw the same problem the press posed Morris: the most effective conduit for radical messages was itself enmeshed in commercial trammels.

Miller's own reading, while careful, must have been anything but slow: she commands a dauntingly deep reservoir of sources, and her argument overflows with incisive analyses of interminable novels, poems and essays. The traces of their own origin in literary-critical journals make some chapters feel more like individual case studies than parts of a continuous argument. Many of the pleasures of reading Slow Print lie in its details, such as the 1896 "Prize Competition" in the Clarion Cyclist's Journal for "the best poetry having reference to country life". Winners were promised "good, useful lamps".

NS gbook : Books | nrwv : Reviews | gcat : Political/General News | gent : Arts/Entertainment | ncat : Content Types | nfact : Factiva Filters | nfce : FC&E Exclusion Filter

RE uk : United Kingdom | eecz : European Union Countries | eurz : Europe | weurz : Western Europe

PUB News Group Newspapers Ltd.

AN Document TLITE00020130524e950000b

Search Summary

Text	"scissors-and-paste revolution"
Date	In the last 2 years
Source	All Publications
Author	All Authors
Company	All Companies
Subject	All Subjects
Industry	All Industries
Region	All Regions
Language	English
Results Found	2
Timestamp	28 September 2014 11:02 PM