Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Women's Writing

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/rwow20

Introduction to Women's Writing 1900–1920

Meredith Miller

To cite this article: Meredith Miller (2024) Introduction to Women's Writing 1900–1920, Women's Writing, 31:2, 143-156, DOI: 10.1080/09699082.2024.2325811

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/09699082.2024.2325811

Published online: 23 Apr 2024.

WOMEN'S WRITING
2024, VOL. 31, NO. 2, 143–156
https://doi.org/10.1080/09699082.2024.2325811

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION TO WOMEN'S WRITING 1900–1920

Meredith Miller

School of English, Communication, and Philosophy, Cardiff University, Cardiff, UK

This issue is a collection of repositionings – generic, canonical, and ideological. We have chosen the decades 1900–1920 for two reasons. First, they sit across a confluence of boundaries that have organised the periods in which we construct the canon of English literature and culture across the long twentieth century. These have been continuously redrawn and contested by scholars, and much of the work here engages with these debates. Secondly, these decades are very clearly a period of material change in the activity of women around the world as workers, readers, writers, critics, editors, and publishers. The first of these things, the period boundaries with which we divide these decades, often obscures the full picture of the second, the material changes which affected all women, in varying ways, through this period.

Susan Friedman has argued in "Definitional Excursions" that "period categories govern or contain different cultural formations, absorbing their specificities within the definitional boundaries of the privileged metonymic part".[1] With regard to modernism, as she put it a decade later: "Period designations [...] are ultimately circular: they take privileged parts for the whole by using those predesignated as modernist to define modernism".[2] Friedman is one of many scholars who has sought to apply new dates, new modes of periodisation, and new forms of time to our study of the literature and culture of the twentieth century. We agree with Kristen Bluemel that, when we "inscribe lines around new dates" we also suggest "a new organization of values".[3] That is to say that these moves are ideological, whether or not they announce themselves as such.

Obviously, a bracketed historical moment such as ours materially grounds an approach, tying its cultural productions to economic and cultural change in ways that are problematic if viewed as emblematic. While a signal failure of period designations based on formal stylistics and sympathetic groups of practitioners is their inevitable tautology, historical designations are also

CONTACT Meredith Miller millerm4@caerdydd.ac.uk

inescapably reductive. These latter, as Friedman argues, become metonymic, reading particular works, groups of practitioners, styles or sentiments as emblematic of historical effects.[4] Such reductions are then read both backward and forward as defining relations. These reductions are nowhere more comprehensive than with regard to early twentieth-century literature.

Historical positioning also cannot escape a narrative of linear progress which, as Aijaz Ahmad and Susan Friedman have pointed out, also partakes of a spatial politics of power.[5] At least two of the essays in this volume (by Samonte and Wånggren) directly challenge the geo-politics of canon formation with regard to work done by women these decades. Following other recent work, these essays examine the idea of gendered modernity as it is constructed across the map of empire.

The decades 1900–1920 are most often seen by literary scholars as either an extension of the nineteenth century, whether through the lens of the Victorian or the *fin de siécle*, or as the realm of early modernism. That is to say, these years are a ground on which a group of fields in literary studies negotiate their boundaries. Various constructions of these two decades both define and obscure practices of literary study, instrumentally and intellectually. The Victorian, the *fin de siècle*, and the modernist, each with its own unstable boundaries, are all intermittently, imperfectly and partially situated in these years.

Such temporal fluctuations persist in recent studies of the *fin de siècle*, which Emily Alder's *Weird Fiction and Science at the Fin de Siècle* (2020) designates "fairly generously" as the period from about 1880 to about 1914.[6] Kate Holterhoff's *Illustration in Fin de Siècle Transatlantic Romance Fiction* (2022) applies the term to work published as late as 1920, while in *Strindberg's Game of Normality: The Criminal, Visual Culture and Normalisation at the Fin de Siècle* (2020) Gustaf Marcus finds the traditional focus on the final two decades of the nineteenth century more useful.[7] In each of these cases, the negotiation of temporal boundaries is prompted by efforts to make comprehensive arguments for stylistic practice or emblematic structures of thought, and/or to justify canonical inclusions and exclusions. *Fin de siècle* literary study has been constructed in relation to the idea of the Victorian, in response to evident problems in defining the Victorian as either cohesive set of cultural values or a useful historico-cultural designation delineated by the feudal reign of a particular individual.

In distinguishing a set of later nineteenth-century aesthetic practices, *fin de siècle* also smooths over the impossibility of upholding the myth of the modernist "break" in the presence of actual literary and aesthetic history. Sometimes limited to the years 1880–1900, safely within the reign of Victoria, the period was expanded in Sally Ledger and Scott McCracken's influential *Culture and Politics at the Fin de Siècle* (1995) to the years from1880 to 1914.[8] Ledger and McCracken view the period through historically grounded

ideas of fragmentation and decline (of economy and empire), which informed a variety of aesthetic responses. With repeated references to the volume's year of publication, the editors knowingly invoke what Friedman calls the "always heuristic" character of literary history, "narrating the past through the lens of the present".[9] In his recent introduction to *British Literature in Transition, 1900–1920*, James Purdon notes the shifting early twentieth-century constructions of the 1890s *fin de siècle* as the "last gasp of British creativity" or as an age of turbulent transition leading to the "New Age" of the 1910s.[10] Recently, Mark Hearn has written about the manner in which Eric Hobsbawm, writing after the Second World War, defines the historical *fin de siècle* through personal experience of nostalgic loss.[11] As a historical and aesthetic moment, the *fin de siècle* was defined retroactively and in contested ways from the start. Its history and its historiography is, as with all periods, constructed through various relational oppositions.

Similarly, over the past two decades, scholars working either inside or outside the "new modernist studies" have remapped early-twentieth century literature in interesting ways, specifically seeking to obviate the inequalities of visibility produced by high modernism's ideological underpinning of literary studies as a discipline. Indeed, the critique of the foundational values of English Literature as a discipline and its concomitant enshrining of modernist social, political and aesthetic values began in the late 1950s.[12] In some part due to a recognition of the problematic definition of modernism as a period, the constant revelation of the artificiality of its self-defined moment of rupture, the label has extended its scope in both directions on the timeline, sometimes moving forward through the twentieth century and sometimes encompassing the *fin de siècle* by looking back, to 1900 or even to 1880.

The problem, of course, is that modernism was never a period, it was a movement. In a useful overview of the redefining of modernism, and its failure, Michael H. Whitworth argues that it is a movement in retrospect, constructed by critics working after the Second World War.[13] *Enshrined as an object of study* in retrospect would be more accurate. There clearly was a group of interwar writers who perceived themselves as engaged in related experiments. They articulated a specific stylistic engagement with representation practiced by a small circle of Western and cosmopolitan writers in the context of a much wider and more diverse sphere(s) of literary production. They spoke of themselves and their work, as did other widely diverse groups of people from at least 1800, as "modern". They were spoken of, both positively and negatively, as "modernists". Ironically, in seeing themselves as radically new and separate in their own moment, this group engaged an already well-established practice of self-definition as the "new" aesthetic, which goes back at least to Dante and the *stil novisti*. What distinguishes canonical modernists is that they also shared specific

claims to aesthetic authority in an age of empire which rendered their particular self-definition wildly successful and far-reaching. The writers collected in this issue sit outside this self-definition in a variety of marginal positions.

Modernism may perhaps have been one of the most successfully promoted movements in global history. As Ajaz Ahmad has written, its alignment with imperial notions of centrality and progress, with ideas of modernity *as* both progress and imperial movement, continues to shape our ideas of literary value.[14] Whitworth notes that arguments for expanding the geographic space of modernism (as cultural and aesthetic response to modernity) also necessitate the expansion of its temporal boundaries.[15] Situating itself on the canonical historical timeline, the Anglo-American modernist movement defined itself in opposition to the Victorian as both an aesthetic practice and a fixed mode of perception. Its core belief in itself as a literary movement relied on the fabled progress of history and, implicitly, on the radiating of aesthetic progress outward from this Western centre.

Criticism produced by canonical modernists such as May Sinclair and Virginia Woolf positions particular formal interventions in fiction as modes of apprehending reality that are "modern", specifically against the realist project.[16] Yet, at the same time, modernism ascribed this same progressive, historical temporal mode as belonging to the Victorian, famously privileging subjective expansions and contractions of time against its linear construction. A striking example of this occurs as Woolf's *Orlando* increasingly takes on the functions of the essay toward its close. As Orlando travels through historical time, Woolf depicts, in the characteristically performative mode of her critical writing, the nineteenth century as a horrific pile of decorative objects, a threatening monument to the material which might destroy both truth (always interior) and sanity.[17] While realism is posed as the Victorian temporal other of modernism, this opposition included the erasure of realist productions contemporary to modernist textual practices. As Aijaz Ahmad puts it, "realist texts produced during that same period in the same Euro-American spaces now find no significant place in the literary curricula and critical discourses pertaining to that period and place".[18] These abjected realist practices include mass address. The chapters on early-twentieth-century realism in *English Literature in Transition, 1900–1920, A New Age?* seek to rectify the critical elision of important realist practices contemporary with modernism. At the same time, however, each uses modernism as its yardstick. In one essay, Andrew Shail repeatedly uses the term modernism in defining opposition while arguing we ought not to use the term at all.[19] In this issue, the recovery of Ivy Low-Litvinov and of Edith Nesbitt as an author of adult fiction is in part a class-conscious practice. As contributors argue, the class cultural positions of authors and audiences determined their social inclusion or exclusion as contemporaries of the

modernist movement and continues to determine their presence or absence in the canon.

While much valuable work expands the time, space and cultural lens of our study of early twentieth-century literature, it continues to do this in relation to canonical modernism, whether by extension, comparison, or opposition, thus strengthening the hegemony of its measure.[20] Melinda J. Cooper's recent monograph on Eleanor Dark is an example of the manner in which the new modernist studies questions modernist aesthetics at their centre and at the same time extends its geography globally.[21] Rasoul Aliakbari's edited collection, *Comparative Print Culture: A Study of Alternative Literary Modernities* (2020), argues for moving beyond the book as object and viewing global responses to modernity through an examination of print culture as a whole. His broad view of modernism as cultural response to modernity expands its definition not only across the globe, but temporally across centuries rather than decades.

Our own geographically and culturally limited synchronic slice sits deliberately atop the fluid boundary between Victorian and modernist, embracing its liminal character, which may or may not include the *fin de siècle*. As editors we are pleased to include in this issue various and even conflicting definitions of *fin de siècle* and modernist. These essays illuminate the problems of periodisation which define these decades and reveal the unstable constructed-ness of their ascription to literary "periods". They also point to the complexity of this particular historical and cultural moment, not only within the scope of this issue, but in terms of cultural power globally. We hope these essays will generate further conversation in this vein.

Following important work by Rita Felski and Bonnie Kime Scott in the 1990s, scholars have continued to reposition the *fin de siècle* and modernism through the lens of gender.[22] In *Refiguring Modernism*, Bonnie Kime Scott sought to resituate the canonical narrative of the 1922 as *annus mirabilus* of modernism, locating a revolutionary break in the use of style and affect in a fixed historical moment. She does this by suggesting another fixed historical moment, 1928. If we place women's writing at the centre of our critical narrative, and view explorations of gender and sexuality as the defining characteristic of modernism, she argues, 1928 is the signal year. In *Challenging Boundaries: Gender and Periodization*, Joyce W. Warren and Margaret Dickie demonstrate that both expansions to the canon to include women authors and studies of period history focused through gender immediately necessitate redrawing of period boundaries.[23] And yet, as Bluemel has pointed out, these period boundaries have a remarkable tenacity, persisting to the present day in academic curricula and publishing practices. This is not an incidental hegemony. It continues to enshrine particular authors and particular aesthetics at the centre of our academic lives.

We would like to define these two decades as a historical moment in which women writers, readers, publishers, and critics recognise each other in new ways. In order to do this, we have looked across cultural and social registers and outside canonical placements. We do this in the hope that some will come behind us to challenge and reorder this claim. That conversation is our work here.

As editors, we have chosen these two decades partly because they clearly locate material changes in paid work, print technology and distribution, reading practices and political participation which lend to newly visible opportunities and connections for women writers. In *Working Girls*, Katherine Mullin examines the relations between changing patterns of women's work and the growing and diversifying sphere of British periodical culture which addressed them as working women at the end of the nineteenth century. She examines British culture's uneasy relationship with the idea of the "working girl", a figure in a very different class position to the New Woman, less educated and with a more visible sexual agency.[24] While a new class of women took up work as telegraphists, typists, and office workers and a new set of periodicals addressed them directly, popular fictions of gender moved in part from New Woman novels to "sex problem novels" in direct address to a newfound sexual agency and concomitant repositioning of gender. By 1919, the "working girl" had become the "modern girl". A wide and diverse print culture addressed her directly and more generally, also providing space for women editors and authors.[25] Before the publication of Marie Stopes' *Married Love* in 1918, an explosion of British "sex advice" literature had already begun, much of it written by women already well established as cultural critics.[26]

In the 1910s, feminist activism expanded opportunities for women in publishing, famously begun in the nineteenth century by Emily Faithfull and the Victoria Press.[27] According to Simone Murray, there "is evidence of at least eleven pro-suffrage presses in addition to the Woman's Press operating in London between the opening shots of the campaign in 1905 and the outbreak of war in August 1914".[28] In the same moment, as Nicola Wilson notes in her introduction to *The Book World*,

> with new avenues for sales and distribution emerging in this period, including the rise of twopenny libraries in newsagents and tobacconists, the rapid expansion of free public libraries, and the continuing growth of commercial circulating libraries, there was a heightened sense of a widely diverging and stratified audience.[29]

Much has been written about the expansion of feminine readership in this period, particularly with respect to periodical culture.[30] Recent scholarship has continued an exploration female middlebrow authors, though there is still much work to do on their female editors, copyists, typists, and

reviewers.[31] Simone Murray quotes Fred Pethick Lawrence's offhand use of the intriguing phrase "literature secretaries", in keeping with the increasingly feminised meaning of that second term.[32] With regard to the Woman's Press and other suffrage outlets, the existence of these literary secretaries as women is well documented. How many other women in this period used their newly acquired office skills to perform, like George Eliot in the 1850s, uncredited editorial work at general presses?

As editors of this issue, we are interested in work on publishing cultures and cultures of reception. The selections here reflect this. The essays collected in this volume re-examine women's lives within Euro-American writing, and publishing cultures against the grain of the myth of period break. We looked specifically for work on women authors not centred in the canonical literary picture of these years, or work which reframed women authors' place in the canon by working against the manner in which selective critical tradition defines their *oeuvre*.

The essays here variously explore under-represented figures, look again at authors as diverse as Carrie Lane Chapman Catt and Mina Loy, or re-order the canonical narrative of relations between aesthetic and political practices such as decadence and suffrage. Some contributors reposition authors and movements by uncovering significant areas of published output placed under erasure through the selective critical tradition. Others critically resituate work against the grain of accepted aesthetic and ideological oppositions which have defined it in previous criticism. In this way, we seek to trouble period designations which clearly fail to operate in the presence of women authors either excluded or retroactively and imperfectly positioned by the canon.

Looked at from a certain viewpoint, it seems perfectly obvious that in the midst of culture's myriad continuities, no set of aesthetic practices, audience inclinations, or publishing trends comes to a definite end at a fixed point in time. Likewise beginnings, and yet so much of our literary scholarship revolves around proving or disproving this, around undoing the idea of a given period as fixed between beginning and end points historically determined in one way or another. Culture is quite evidently fluid, and any attempt to impose temporal boundaries is going to be artificial. Threads of influence are likewise irreducibly complex. Any attempt to trace them will be reductive. Any drawing or redrawing of period boundaries will be, as Kristin Bluemel points out, ideological. We render ourselves absurd when we argue one way or another the precise beginning and end of any literary or cultural period. Such designations are constructed and imposed by us, usually retroactively. At the same time, all cultural practices are clearly historically embedded. As cultural materialists, the editors recognise the connections between economic and cultural change, as well as the connections among aesthetic practice, cultural apprehension, and various types of

power. It is that recognition which underlines both the choices and the acknowledged limitations which shape this issue.

We have placed Margaret Stetz's essay at the front of the issue because it highlights so clearly the way in which traditional period designations are built on the invisibility of whole groups of women writers *and readers*. Stetz's examination of Ella Erskine's work and its publication by Elkin Matthews in "Ella Erskine, Elkin Matthews, and the 'Long Aesthetic Century'" speaks directly to the problem of period designations. She brings one more historically bound term to the table – decadence, so often paired with *fin de siècle*. Stetz examines Erskine in the context of Elkin Matthews' and John Lane, publishers often remarked as instrumental in the development of canonical modernism. This critical tradition, Stetz shows, has obscured the continued presence of Aesthetic texts on Matthews's list. Tellingly, these texts are both produced and consumed by women. Alongside the early work of Joyce, Pound, and Yeats, Matthews published Ella Erskine, Eleanor Farjeon, and Rosa Mulholland, all examined by Stetz here.

In his introduction to *Comparative Print Culture*, Rasoul Aliakbari describes "a female-oriented alternative literary modernity grounded in commercial print culture".[33] He argues that studies of global modernity and its cultural responses should look beyond "the centrality of the book" into broader spheres of print culture.[34] Essays on suffragette writers by Ann Heilmann and Cecilia Samonte in this issue illustrate the value of such an approach, and the heightened complexity it engenders.

In "The Radical Politics of Laughter" Ann Heilmann applies Patrick Giamario's recent work on laughter politics to British suffragette plays.[35] Reviewing uses of identification and opposition by both anti-suffrage and suffrage campaigners in novels and visual culture, Heilmann frames her reading of the use of humour in the plays through Freud's triangular relationship of the joke. She demonstrates that suffrage playwrights enjoyed a knowing subversion of the mechanics of the joke and its insider/outsider dynamic. The essay examines various strategies deployed by suffrage campaigners – textual, sexual, and sartorial – to provide a full context for the activist play as socially embedded literature. Crucially, Heilmann reworks the association of feminine audiences with both "low" culture genres such as comedy and with the supposedly passive pleasures of consumption by demonstrating suffragette plays' complex and powerful invitations to the pleasures of agency.

Cecilia Samonte's historical essay on the life-writing of Carrie Chapman Catt, "Nothing Left for Women but the Vote", places the American suffrage movement in the context of U.S. imperial expansion. She argues convincingly that, in the wake of the (*de jure*) granting of suffrage to African-American men, suffrage for white American women and imperial expansion are ideologically interdependent, each relying on Darwinist

notions of racial hierarchy. Through an examination of her life-writing, Samonte carefully documents Catt's opposition to Filipino enfranchisement, masked by her lauding of the paternalistic pose of the U.S. project as a sort of democracy in training. She examines Catt's application of the feminist rhetoric of women's superior moral fibre through racist constructions of Filipino men. Samonte argues convincingly that the study of women's travel writing facilitates a full understanding of the complex embeddedness of white women's liberation in the context of notions of imperial modernity as progress.

Christina Lake's, "The Early Novels of Ivy Low: Literature, Love, and Lust in 1910s London" considers new contexts of urban women's work through representations of office work in Low's novels. Lake then reflects on Low as a figure placed at the margins both of contemporary modernist sociality and of later critical constructions of modernism. As she demonstrates, it was Ivy Low's Jewish immigrant background and perceived vulgarity as much as her radical cultural politics that excluded her from modernist inner circles. The essay provides readings of Low's two sex-problem novels of the 1910s as well as her social relationships with D.H. Lawrence, Katherine Mansfield, and others. Lake's argument relates Low's stylistic innovations to her love of nineteenth-century Russian novels rather than reading them as an imitation of her contemporaries who wrote from inside the modernist pale. This article convincingly argues for the importance of Low's distinct brand of psychological realism as a vehicle for a unique and significant writing of women's sexuality.

Lindsy Lawrence's is the first of three articles which reposition children's authors seen chiefly in terms of the retreat from modernity into rural idyll. In "'An honest bargain?': Transatlantic Marriage, Domestic Violence, and Garden Restoration in Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Shuttle*", Lawrence argues for a re-examination of Burnett which recognises the full diversity of her lifetime output. Here, she reads Burnett's adult fiction, including New Woman fiction serialised after 1900. In her consideration of a career that stretched from the 1870s into the 1900s, she writes period boundaries and continuities differently than some others in this issue. For her, Burnett, who advertised herself as *not* a feminist sympathiser, is writing New Woman novels well into the twentieth century. The article reads *The Shuttle* in part through Burnett's own transatlantic life and experience of domestic violence, in the context of the transfer of American wealth into British estates through the "brokering" of heiresses in this period. Thus, the article provides a significant counterpoint to canonical studies of Wharton and James. In resituating Burnett, Lawrence also argues for the importance of melodrama as a fictional practice. The specific facilities of melodrama, she argues, enable Burnett's critique of gendered power.

Lawrence's scholarship will lend itself to ongoing conversations regarding the stratification of (especially feminine) audiences in this period.

In "'You Belong to My Time, Not His': Aging, Obsolescence and 'Allotted Time' in Edith Nesbit's Dormant", James Green examines the work of another writer whose adult fiction has been largely ignored until recently. Like Hodgson Burnett's, Edith Nesbitt's writing career spanned the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Like her also, Nesbitt has been largely regarded until recently as a children's writer, in spite of a varied output. Green's introduction provides a useful overview of public sphere discussions of women's life cycle across the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century, arguing that with regard to the social anxiety around women, aging and changing life narratives, there is more of continuity than break across the period. The article goes on to argue that the complex ambiguity of Nesbit's politics and her relationship to feminism is as much a picture of the period as those of more radical New Woman and sex-problem authors. Through a comprehensive and complex close reading of Dormant, Green demonstrates that the radical queer potential of the novel is ultimately "constrained and overwritten by normative alternatives".

In "Beatrix Potter in Cumbria: Pastoral Pleasures, Classic Commodities, Rural Modernity", Kristin Bluemel places Beatrix Potter's children's books in the context of a biographical reading which works against the widely accepted idea of retreat into rural idyll. Bluemel notes that the ongoing commodification of Potter images in tie-in products positions Potter and her work in a very different relation to countryside life than the text themselves do. She argues for a reading of children's literature that combines material, visual and textual methodologies. Returning to the texts and using this reading practice, Bluemel notes the many and complex ways in which story and images produce very modern characterisations and anxieties. She points out Potter's selective and metatextual strategies, demonstrating that these belie our fixed notion of Potter's depictions of the countryside as unproblematic representations of the real. Bluemel's article here combines historical, contextual and textual reading in order to shed light not only on Potter's books, but on the manner in which criticism and commodification work together to shape our ideas regarding a woman writer in this period.

Sophie Yates makes a direct challenge to the modernist canon in "Voyeurism, Desire, and Narrative Subversion in Colette's *Claudine* Novels". Yates queries the critical separation of Colette's work from that of other queer modernist women with whom Colette communicated and shared mutual admiration. She argues that the positioning of Colette and her work outside the realm of serious literary value derives more from her relationship to audience and publishing markets than it does from literary style. Close readings of the *Claudine* novels illuminate Colette's use of heightened subjectivity and stream-of-consciousness narration as determined queering strategies in the series. Yates's

important intervention in the criticism of these novels reads in them a queering of genre in pursuit of a narrative space for queer desire and an escape from the heterosexual frame. Returning to the selective critical tradition in conclusion, she argues that Colette's canny manipulation of popular literary markets does not negate the fact that "her stylistic tactics of narrative evasion and fragmentation remain strikingly similar" to those of canonical modernists who typically focus studies of queer modernism. Such an understanding of Colette's early work, she writes, can help us to "complicate categorisations of literary modernism as a small-press, highbrow artform".

In "Feminist Utopias in the Early Twentieth Century", Lena Wånggren argues for the period from 1900 to 1920 as a significant one for feminist utopias, and for the centrality of utopian literature to feminist movements. Her article highlights the international character of feminism in these decades and provides detailed close readings of Pauline Hopkins' serialised novel *Of One Blood* and Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's short story "Sultana's Dream". She asks the important question, in the presence of utopian stories and feminist textual production across the globe in this period, why does a text such as *Herland* still remain by far the most visible feminist utopia on our reading lists? This essay compliments Cecilia Samonte's and also speaks to Aijaz Ahmad's critique of the spatial politics which structure the idea of modernism in literary studies.

Katherine Hobbs' "The Ineffectual Feminist?: Mina Loy and the 'woman-cause'" introduces its subject by noting her marginal and indeterminate place in the modernist canon. Hobbs' main focus here, however, is Loy's relationship to the fragmented landscape of early twentieth-century British feminism. Focusing on Loy's noted but unpublished feminist manifesto, Hobbs provides a close reading of the complex logic of nested negations that characterises this polemic. The essay traces each of the ideas put forward in the manifesto back into the earlier work of Loy's feminist contemporaries and then forward into its possible and, Hobbs concludes, ultimately impossible, feminist standpoint. The essay closes with a close reading of Loy's "The Effectual Marriage, or, The Insipid Narrative of Gina and Miovanni", reading its embedded parodic strategies against the logic of the manifesto. We close the issue with this essay because it returns to the relationship between economies of work, sexuality, and representation which characterises these decades.

Loy's work and Hobbs' reading of it highlight the creative and representational instabilities that permeate the various disciplines, period designations and movements that converge in these years. A multilayered examination of any bounded period will reveal the history of aesthetics as full of washes and ebb tides, individual writing lives that carry forward modes of working which canonically have ended, while perhaps also anticipating others that canonically haven't yet "begun". A multilayered examination of print culture in any bounded period will highlight

the instability of period characterisations as particular effects, practices, or qualities at its accepted temporal boundaries. These essays further highlight the difficulties of belonging, access, exclusion, and inclusion that make canonical categorisations particularly problematic with regard to women's writing. Just as Loy's anti-rhetoric highlights the impossible negative excess of woman as a category, we hope this collection highlights the impossibility of reducing or containing women's literary output between 1900 and 1920 to any of our available categories.

Notes

1. Susan Stanford Friedman, "Definitional Excursions", *Modernism/Modernity*, 8.3 (2001): 493–513, 509.
2. Susan Standford Friedman, "Alternatives to Periodization: Literary History, Modernism and the 'New' Temporalities", *Modern Language Quarterly*, 80.4 (2019): 379–402, 385.
3. Kristin Bluemel, "Introduction", *Intermodernism: Literary Culture in Mid-twentieth-century Britain*, ed. Kristen Bluemel (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011) pp. 1–18 (5).
4. Friedman, "Definitional Excursions", p. 509.
5. Aijaz Ahmad argued this perhaps first and certainly most eloquently in his *In Theory: Nations, Classes, Literatures* (New York: Verso, 1992), pp. 1–42, an argument perhaps both addressed and ultimately failed by such later works as Jed Esty's, *A Shrinking Island: Modernism and National Culture in England* (Princeton University Press, 2003) and Lise Jaillant and Alison E. Martin's special issue of *Modernist Cultures* (13.1) which introduced itself as a study of 'global modernism'.
6. Emily Alder, *Weird Fiction and Science at the Fin de Siècle* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), p. 4.
7. Kate Holterhoff, *Illustration in Fin de Siècle Transatlantic Romance Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 2022); Gustaf Marcus, "Strindberg's Game of Normality: The Criminal, Visual Culture and Normalisation at the *Fin de Siècle*", *Scandanavian Studies* 92.2: 167–195.
8. Sally Ledger and Scott McCracken, eds., *Culture and Politics at the Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
9. Friedman, "Alternatives to Periodization", p. 397.
10. James Purdon, ed., "Introduction" in *British Literature in Transition, 1900–1920: A New Age?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021) p. 8. Here, Purdon cites W. G. Blaikie Murdoch, *The Renaissance of the 1890s* (London: Alexander Mooring, 1911); Holbrook Jackson, *The Eighteen-Nineties* (London: Grant Richards, 1913).
11. Mark Hearn, "Interpreting Eric Hobsbawm's History of the Fin de Siècle "Twilight Zone"", *The Historical Journal* 66: 619–64.
12. See Raymond Williams, both *The Long Revolution* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1961) and *The Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists*, ed. Tony Pinkney (London and New York: Verso, 1989), and Aijaz Ahmad (1992). Of the many works that appeared both inside and outside of the 'new modernist studies' after the founding of the Modernist Studies

Association in the United States, see for example Ann Ardis, *Modernism and Cultural Conflict 1880–1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Lynne Hapgood and Nancy Paxton, eds., *Outside Modernism: In Pursuit of the English Novel, 1900–1930*. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000).

13. Michael H. Whitworth, "When Was Modernism?" in Laura Marcus, Michèlle Mendelssohn and Kirstin E. Shepherd-Barr, eds., *Late Victorian into Modern* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 120–34, the title of which of course revisits Raymond Williams' original question in *The Politics of Modernism* (1989).
14. In his chapter 'Salman Rushdie's Shame' in *In Theory*, Ahmad traces the occlusion of these and other questions as well as their structuring presence in the process of canon formation which defined modernism and postmodernism, so that "even" Fredric Jameson positions '"Third-world Literature" as a global Other of postmodernism itself, under the insignia of "nationalism"'. Ahmad, *In Theory*, p.126.
15. Whitworth, "When Was Modernism?"
16. See May Sinclair's noted review "The Novels of Dorothy Richardson" *The Egoist* V (April 1918), pp 57–9 and Virginia Woolf's equally well-cited 'Modern Fiction' (originally 'Modern Novels' 1919), in Andrew MacNeille, ed., *The Essays of Virginia Woolf. Volume 4: 1925–1928* (London: Hogarth, 1984), pp. 157–65.
17. Virginia Woolf, *Orlando: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2008), pp.149–50.
18. Ahmad, *In Theory*, p.123.
19. See Rex Ferguson, "*Notable Trials* and Literary Realism", pp.177–91; Andrew Shail, "Realism and Mass Politics", pp. 260–78, both in James Purdon, ed., *British Literature in Transition 1900–1920, A New Age?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021). As Purdon puts it in his introduction to the volume, 'It is difficult now to extricate "modernism" from the processes of canon formation and scholarship … which have shaped its formation as a subject of academic scholarship.' p.19.
20. See for example Laura Marcus, Michèle Mendelssohn and Kirstin Shepherd-Barr's edited collection *Late Victorian into Modern* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).
21. Melinda J. Cooper, *Middlebrow Modernism: Eleanor Dark's Interwar Fiction* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 2022).
22. Rita Felski, *The Gender of Modernity* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1995); Bonnie Kime Scott, *Refiguring Modernism, Volume 1: The Women of 1928* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1995). See also Kirstin Blumel (2002) and Ann Ardis, *Modernism and Cultural Conflict* (2011).
23. Joyce W. Warren, "Introduction: The Problem of Women's Periods", *Challenging Boundaries: Gender and Periodization* (Atlanta: University of Georgia Press, 2000), pp. ix–xxiv.
24. Katherine Mullin, *Working Girls: Fiction, Sexuality and Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).
25. Among many periodicals which addressed working women in this period, we should note the founding of the long-running and widely distributed *Peg's Paper* by Pearson's in 1919. For a comprehensive overview and detailed studies, see Faith Binkes and Carrie Snyder, eds., *Women's Periodicals and Print Culture in Britain, 1890–1920s: The Modernist Period* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019).

26. See "The Suffrage Era", in *Outspoken Women: An Anthology of Women's Writing on Sex, 1870–1969*, ed. Lesley A. Hall (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), pp. 37–94. Much of this is of course inflected by the contemporary discourse of eugenics.
27. See Miranda Marraccini, ""True Home Spirit": Paper Homes from the Victoria Press", *Victorian Periodicals Review* 51.2: 320–339.
28. Simone Murray, ""Deeds and Words": The Woman's Press and the Politics of Print", *Woman: A Cultural Review* 11.3: 197–322, 199.
29. Nicola Wilson, *The Book World: Selling and Distributing British Literature, 1900–1940* (The Hague: Brill, 2016), p. 3.
30. See for example, Margaret Beetham, *A Magazine of Her Own?: Domesticity and Desire in the Woman's Magazine, 1800–1914* (London and New York: Taylor and Francis, 1996); Katherine Mullin, *Working Girls*; Binkes and Snyder, *Women's Periodicals*.
31. In addition to Melinda J. Cooper, *Middlebrow Modernism*, see Terri Mullholland, ""Less than Ten Shillings Between Her And Nothing": Social Class and the Economics of the Boarding House in Storm Jameson, Lettice Cooper, and Stella Gibbons", in *British Boarding Houses in Women's Literature: Alternative Domestic Spaces* (London and New York: Routledge, 2017) pp. 48–81; Nicola Humble, *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel, 1920s to 1950s: Class, Domesticity and Bohemianism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).
32. Simone Murray, "Deeds and Words", p. 207.
33. Rasoul Aliakbari, ed., *Comparative Print Culture: A Study of Alternative Literary Modernities* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), p. 6.
34. Aliakbari, *Comparative Print Culture*, p. 18.
35. Patrick T. Giamario, *Laughter as Politics: Critical Theory in an Age of Hilarity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes on contributor

Dr Meredith Miller is a Lecturer in English Literature at Cardiff University. She has published numerous scholarly articles on gender, sexuality, and popular fiction. Her monograph *Feminine Subjects in Masculine Fiction: Modernity, Will and Desire, 1870–1910* was published by Palgrave in 2013. She has also published two novels and numerous short stories. Her third novel, *Fall River*, was published by Honno Press in March 2024. She is the lead for the international research network Culture and the Reproductive Body. Her current critical project is a monograph entitled *Abortion and Aesthetics in 1920s Britain*.