4-2011

Transatlantic Print Culture, 1880–1940: Emerging Media, Emerging Modernisms [Review]

David Rando

Trinity University, drando@trinity.edu

Alexander Search, one of the first heteronyms developed by the Portuguese writer, wrote in English, reflecting Pessoa's bilingual background, and composed in 1907 an intriguing short story, "A very original dinner," in which Pessoa "combined qualities of the gothic novel—madness, the supernatural, and decay—with those of mystery and detective fiction, particularly the use of intuition and astute logic" (29).

If Álvaro de Campos, engineer and modernist poet, "one of the most exuberant and self-expressive persons created by Fernando Pessoa" (77), adopted a genre refined by Walt Whitman, he nonetheless gave to it an unexpected turn by writing "songs of the non self." The subversive effect of the exercise is evident, and helps to enlighten one of the aims of the technique of the adverse genres, namely, producing a short circuit between the laws of a given genre and its usual reception through the deliberate introduction of rhetorical elements alien to the literary genre. In the same vein, when Ricardo Reis resorts to the classical form of the ode, he mainly wants to produce "a feigned pastoral, governed by artful illusion and avant-garde taste for paradox and opposition" (145). Similarly, Alberto Caeiro's systematic usage of the pastoral allows David Jackson to examine "Pessoa's use and rebellion against the genre" (117).

Finally, another conspicuous example of the technique of adverse genres may be found in Fernando Pessoa's only play, *O marinheiro* (*The Mariner*), written in 1913. As the reader of *Adverse Genres* already suspects, Pessoa's play takes advantage of the theatrical discourse "in order to create its adverse" (39), namely, a static theater where nothing actually happens, as if Pessoa had always already been waiting for Beckett.

Let us then conclude this review by referring to a paradox that unfortunately David Jackson has not paid attention to, although his remarkable book allows us to formulate it. Supposedly, the technique of the adverse genres would undermine the notion of "personality and authorship" (15), an effect only increased by the very multiplication of heteronyms, which should suggest the ultimate dispersion of the central figure of authorship. However, in spite of the legion of heteronyms created by Fernando Pessoa *all of the heteronyms employ the same technique of adverse genres*! In other words, Pessoa is metamorphosed into a writing machine with an undisputed coherence, forming a unified system based on the creation of adversities. If this is the case, then, it does not really matter how many heteronyms have been invented; after all, they can be subsumed under the law of the adverse genres. If David Jackson is right, we have finally found the literary person of the multifaceted Fernando Pessoa and with this discovery comes a radically new way of reading his literature.

Note

1. Jorge Volpi, *El insomnio de Bolívar: Cuatro consideraciones intempestivas sobre América Latina en el siglo XXI* (México: Random House Mondadori, 2010) 172. My translation.

***Transatlantic Print Culture, 1880–1940: Emerging Media, Emerging Modernisms.* Ann Ardis and Patrick Collier, eds. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008. Pp. xi + 259. $80.00 (cloth).**

Reviewed by David Rando, Trinity University

It appears that the moderns are catching up to the Victorians at last. Ann Ardis and Patrick Collier's edited volume, *Transatlantic Print Culture, 1880–1940*, represents the most forceful statement to date about the possibilities and opportunities for print culture studies in the mod-

ernist period. While the study of print culture has flourished in Victorian studies for decades, particularly through the Research Society for Victorian Periodicals and its journal, *Victorian Periodicals Review*, modernist studies has been slower to embrace print culture studies. There are many historical and theoretical reasons for this, but even field nomenclature may make a difference. "Victorian studies" indicates interest in a period and was therefore primed to embrace the period's extra-literary products and cultural artifacts. In contrast, from the time modernist texts were canonized in the academy, "modernist studies" referred not to the modern period and the sum of its cultural and signifying practices, but rather to the modernist artistic response to the period. The name still seems stubbornly attached to aesthetic objects in spite of the massive cultural and material turns of the field in recent decades.

Despite this later start, interest in twentieth-century print culture has intensified in the last decade. Books coming in the wake of Mark Morrisson's influential *The Public Face of Modernism* have been more attentive to the period's "unprecedented proliferation of mass market magazines and newspapers."[1] Whereas modernist studies might once have seen mass publications as the handmaidens of literary texts, these publications are increasingly becoming objects of scholarly attention in their own right and on their own terms. Sean Latham and Robert Scholes's online Modernist Journals Project has made periodicals from the modernist period more accessible than ever to scholars and students. Latham and Scholes also chart the emergence of this field in their useful overview, "The Rise of Periodical Studies," arguing that "as digital archives become increasingly available, we must continue to insist on the autonomy and distinctiveness of periodicals as cultural objects (as opposed to 'literary' or 'journalistic' ones) while attempting to develop the language and tools necessary to examine, describe, and contextualize them."[2]

Transatlantic Print Culture may be seen as a direct response to the challenge that Latham and Scholes pose, aiming specifically to develop a theoretical language and the methodological tools necessary for the study of early-twentieth-century print culture as an autonomous object. One of the first things one notices in the volume's attempt to develop such a language is its preference for "early-twentieth-century studies" over "modernist studies." Co-editor Ann Ardis has elsewhere called for "turn-of-the-twentieth-century studies," and both of these (rather cumbersome) field designations are designed to challenge the perception of a radical break from the nineteenth century that some modernists and scholars helped to foster.[3] Ardis and Collier explicitly challenge the centrality of literary modernism in scholarship of the early twentieth century: "This collection in its totality raises the question of whether the field of modernist studies—newly invigorated as it is, and newly focused on the production of 'thick' histories—is prepared to accommodate what we find when we focus our inquiry on the more anonymous, more collaborative, less coherent authorial environments of magazines" (7).

While *Transatlantic Print Culture* aims to push Victorian print culture studies into the early twentieth century, Ardis and Collier also have two other interdisciplinary border-crossings in mind. In addition to the interdisciplinarity between Victorian and modernist studies, the volume also exemplifies British-American border-crossing, foregrounding "foundational economic connections and networks of circulation and reception between the national print cultures" (4), in deliberate contrast to the "cosmopolitan model" that emphasizes a distinctly metropolitan version of modernism. Finally, it tries to respond to Latham and Scholes's call for a truly cross-disciplinary research team necessary to study periodical culture. To this end, Ardis and Collier have assembled scholars who identify themselves as "Americanists, Victorianists, modernist studies scholars, and/or media historians" (5), although the great majority of contributors are from English departments.

Transatlantic Print Culture claims to represent "the next frontier of material historical research in the field" (7). Most of the essays do, as Ardis and Collier write, "recognize the vastness of the task of mapping this print culture and interpreting its artifacts in suitably rich, empirically grounded contexts while using theoretically sound methods" (7). The thirteen essays are divided

into four parts that define the range of approaches. The first part, "History, Culture, and the Public Sphere" focuses primarily on theory and method, while parts two and three, "The Cultural Work of Print Media" and "Modernism on/in Print Media, Print Media in/on Modernism" attempt to map the print culture and to explore its intersections with literary modernisms. While all of the essays are absorbing, and I regret not having space to review them in detail, it's clear that those whose sole purpose is to map territory in the print culture (however vast) participate in what is ultimately a finite endeavor, because, at least theoretically, all of it can and will eventually be mapped. In contrast, those essays whose purpose is to open conversations between the larger print culture and various elements of literary modernism are most likely to lead to further discoveries. The final section, "An Experiment in Pedagogy," consists solely of Suzanne W. Churchill's collaborative essay, which "lay[s] out theoretical grounds for teaching modernism with magazines, discuss[es] practical applications, and offer[s] a case study of an experimental undergraduate seminar" (217). This section is particularly valuable because by the time we reach the final essay in this absorbing volume, our question will be not *whether* magazines can be vital to the study of modernism, but rather *how* we will incorporate them into our syllabi.[4]

While *Transatlantic Print Culture* positions modern print culture studies as broader than modernist studies, the collective effect of this volume, in spite of the range of materials and approaches, suggests a world of study that is often more narrow. Moreover, its rhetoric of challenging or decentering modernist studies contrasts with the tantalizing points of contact with literary modernism to be found here, as when Laurel Brake reads W. T. Stead's annuals as modernist texts, or when Patrick Collier examines how contradictory attitudes toward authorship in *John O'London's* were exemplified by its associations with Thomas Hardy and H. G. Wells. It is easy to imagine that the future of modernist and print culture studies will be one of mutual nourishment and productive engagement, much as one finds within Victorian studies, rather than of displacement. Indeed, the essays that map theoretical or material areas largely outside of literary modernism are likely to precipitate our enthusiastic return to literary modernism, informed by better knowledge of its place within a greater "print ecology." Likewise, the essays that situate literary texts within the larger print culture are likely to help us develop a new appreciation and new methodologies for understanding how literary modernism both reflects and participates in the massive new print ecology that emerged along with it.

Notes

1. Mark Morrisson, *The Public Face of Modernism: Little Magazines, Audiences, and Reception, 1905–1920* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), 3.

2. Sean Latham and Robert Scholes, "The Rise of Periodical Studies" *PMLA* 121.2 (March 2006), 519–520.

3. See Ann Ardis, *Modernism and Cultural Conflict 1880–1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002), 174.

4. Churchill helpfully examines the strategies and syllabi of other scholars as well. Further ideas for pedagogically incorporating periodical studies as well as sample syllabi and assignments are offered on the Modernist Journals Project website.