



Donal Harris, *On Company Time: American Modernism in the Big Magazines*

Donal Harris. [*On Company Time: American Modernism in the Big Magazines*](#). New York: Columbia University Press, 2016. 275p., ill. ISBN 9780231177726. US\$ 60 (hardcover).

On Company Time: American Modernism in the Big Magazines provides a valuable addition to the history of American literary modernism by highlighting the ways it “evolve[d] within rather than against the mass print culture of its moment” (8). Using a “literary-historical interpretation” that seeks to transcend traditional periodical genres, Harris convincingly demonstrates the interrelationship between a subset of commercial periodicals he identifies as distinct for their focus on textual and visual style above content (which he labels “big magazines”) and stylistic innovations and cultural understandings of American modernism in the first half of the twentieth century.

Employing literary, historical, paratextual, and material evidence, the first three chapters travel inside the editorial offices of three types of periodicals “the muckraking journal, the African American monthly, and the newsmagazine” (23) “to demonstrate the confluence of editorial policies and practices and modernist style. Chapter 1, “Willa Cather’s Promiscuous Fiction,” traces the origins of Cather’s theories of authorship evident in her later novels (most notably *The Professor’s House*) and short stories (such as “Ardessa”) to her invisible hand as editor at *McClure’s* (1906-1912). Chapter 2, “Printing the Color Line in *The Crisis*” shifts to a consideration of the materiality of magazine publication enabled by new printing technologies, which “influenced the magazine’s portrayal of racialized bodies and racialized intellectual work” (24) in Du Bois’s editorial content and other paratextual features. Of particular note is Harris’s analysis of Frank Walts’s covers, which have been largely ignored by critics despite his popularity at the time. Chapter 3, “On the Clock: Rewriting Literary Work at Time Inc.,” analyzes the development of *Time* style, which simultaneously novelized the news and decoupled the artist from his/her work in response to the overproliferation of information. This style influenced the work of two of *Time*’s employees, Kenneth Fearing and James Agee. While Harris has made strides to demonstrate how these chapters all contribute to a larger trajectory within American literary modernism, at times they seem somewhat loosely linked under his umbrella concept of the “big magazine.” This minor criticism does not, however, detract from their individual usefulness, and each chapter makes a significant contribution to our understanding of the relationship between modernism and popular periodicals.

The remaining two chapters shift focus from the work of modernist authors in editorial offices to how

modernist authors themselves become editorial content in the big magazines, and it is here that Harris makes the most significant contribution to studies of print culture by evocatively theorizing an emerging postwar *mass modernism*, where the tropes of modernist exile and alienation become part of US postwar culture (150). Building on the groundwork established in the previous chapter, chapter 4, “Our Eliot: Mass Modernism and the American Century,” provides a genealogy of T.S. Eliot as a mass-cultural artifact (149) by tracing the shift in his reputation in *Time* from anti-American in his opaqueness in the 1920s to exemplifying America in the 1950s. Chapter 5, “Hemingway’s Disappearing Style,” analyzes the *Life* edition of *The Old Man and the Sea*, other contemporary print materials such as popular articles and interviews featuring Hemingway, and advertisements for the book and other products to demonstrate how Hemingway’s style and “by extension” literary modernism became mainstream American culture.

On Company Time provides a fascinating and important contribution to studies of modernism, print culture, and periodical studies by further complicating the relationship between literary modernism and the cultural context that surrounded and produced it.

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