‘Waiting for No Man’

Review of Catherine Clay *Time and Tide: The Feminist and Cultural Politics of a Modern Magazine* Edinburgh University Press 306pp. ISBN: 978-1-4744-1818-8.

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*Time and Tide* which was founded, initially staffed and directed by women is Britain’s most important feminist periodical of the early twentieth century. Ironically, while scholarly interest in print culture and modern periodical studies magazines has expanded greatly in recent years *Time and Tide* has received very little critical attention and has been overshadowed by interest in the modish and often short-lived modernist ‘little magazines’ which came nowhere near to matching *Time and Tide’s* perspicacity, influence or longevity.

Catherine Clay’s insightful new study, Time and Tide: *The Feminist and Cultural Politics of a Modernist Magazine* restricts itself to analysis of the heyday of the journal in the 1920s and its changes of editorial direction in the 1930s. The book constitutes an important new intervention in media history and periodical culture and enhances our understanding of the lively feminist debates between the wars which were conducted in its columns. Its most important achievement is to rescue this remarkable pioneering publication from what Maria diCenzo terms the ‘“narratives of failure and disappointment” which figure so prominently in the history of interwar feminism’ (p.4).

The paper began ambitiously with offices in Fleet Street at the hub of the British newspaper industry in 1920 and was relocated to new premises in Bloomsbury, at the centre of literary London, in 1929. It was the progeny of the Welsh suffragette, Margaret, Lady Rhondda, who oversaw the editorial direction closely until her death in 1958. For much of its history the magazine’s fortunes were guaranteed by Rhondda’s seemingly limitless personal subsidies emanating from her vast family wealth. Lady Rhondda’s ambitions for the paper were large; to compete with all the leading intellectual weeklies of the day such as *The New Statesman* which were all edited by men with women having little influence over their editorial policy and content.

This meticulously researched volume emphasises the importance of women as critics, journalists and creative writers drawing extensively on archival material, much of which is completely unknown. The book takes issue with the narrative whereby *Time and Tide* is often assumed to have severed its connections with feminism by the mid-1930s, and its proprietor to have performed some kind of ‘deal with the devil’ in inviting men to write in its pages and by publishing subject matter with a traditional appeal to men.

Clay begins by outlining how *Time and Tide* owed many of its foundational ideas to the feminism of the women’s suffrage movement. It was staffed in the 1920s by a succession of talented women, some being veterans of the suffrage campaigns as well as established authors in their own right. They included the directors Cicely Hamilton and Elizabeth Robins, and its first theatre critic, Rebecca West. The magazine initially concerned itself largely with ‘unfinished business’, ie with working for the extension of the vote to encompass all women over the age of 21 (the voting age for women set in 1918 was 30), reform of the divorce and marriage laws, guardianship, and equal pay in teaching and the civil service along the lines advocated by the Six Point Group which was founded by Rhondda in 1922. The paper flourished with its influence out of proportion to its relatively modest circulation figures with former suffragists and suffragettes constituting a loyal and dependable cohort of early subscribers.

For the historian today *Time and Tide* is of as much interest for its cultural commentary and its coverage of the arts and literature as for its social and political coverage. Indeed the two are inextricably intertwined for much of the time. The book review columns are especially helpful to the literary critic in intimating the reviewers’ different attitudes to the high and middle brow publications they discussed. *Time and Tide* which aimed to be readable, well informed, lively, progressive in its politics, and at times provocative, provided an important forum for aspiring professional female journalists and published poems, sketches and short fiction by emergent and established female authors with literary ambitions. E. M. Delafield’s *Diary of a Provincial Lady*, for example, was first serialised its pages.

Clay offers an excellent case study of the socialist and pacifist Eleanor Farjeon, a poet who if not forgotten, is remembered only for the hymn ‘Morning has Broken’, but is perhaps the most important poet of the labour movement in the 1920s, and one of the writers on the ‘literary left’ who contributed topical poems regularly to the paper over the years. The principal critics of the 1920s, Rose Macaulay, Sylvia Lynd and Naomi Royde-Smith represent an alternative to the literary network associated with ‘high’ modernism and Clay provides numerous instances of ways in which its key writers such as Naomi Mitchison, Vera Brittain and Winifred Holtby, and Hilda Reid knowingly ‘“talked back” to the very modernist paradigms by which they would themselves be eclipsed’ (p.9).

It is worth noting the number of women who had, or were to go on later to achieve, national reputations associated with *Time and Tide* in orderto convey a sense of the journal’s unique importance in the world of early twentieth-century arts and letters.They include Valentine Ackland, Rose Allatini, Stella Benson, Elizabeth Bowen, Kay Boyle, Frances Cornford, Richmal Crompton, E. M. Delafield, Susan Ertz, Eleanor Farjeon, Stella Gibbons, Susan Glespell, Beatrice Harradan, Winifred Holtby, Pamela Hansford Johnson, Marganita Laski, Sylvia Lynd, Ethel Mannin, Naomi Mitchison, Kate O Brien, Hilda Reid, Jean Rhys, May Sarton, Sylvia Townsend Warner, Dorothy Whipple, Vita Sackville-West, E. H. Young, Virginia Woolf and Edith Zangwill.

The feminist mission and purpose of *Time and Tide* appeared to be clear until the full enfranchisement of women in 1928 presented it with an existential crisis of great magnitude. Clay identifies 1929 as a crucial turning point when the size and price were increased to improve its cultural coverage and bring it into line with other competing weekly reviews. In its second decade a balance was sought between male and female signatures in its pages and articles by prominent men were frequently included. For example, a piece written by George Bernard Shaw was heralded as a great ‘scoop’.

Clay demonstrates how *Time and Tide* continued to uphold a feminist commitment to women’s participation in public life long after the point which in the 1930s in which it is said to have lost its identification with feminism and with women. Instead she analyses the turns in editorial priorities, the emphasis on foreign policy, the magazine’s increasing international focus, its graphics, content, advertising, and marketing, and the use of male contributors as a ‘strategic response to the difficulties faced by a female run paper in a world still hostile to women’s participation in the political sphere’ (p.212).

With specific reference to features on black culture, travel supplements, and the coverage of the League of Nations, Clay traces how the paper broadened its scope to address issues of international importance in order to construct the intelligent, thoughtful modern woman as both a national and a global citizen with responsibilities alongside men in the public sphere. *Time and Tide’s* claims to be a progressive review is supported in its book pages by writers like Ralph Bates, Phyllis Bottome, Lettice Cooper, James Hanley while It also published W. H. Auden, C. Day Lewis and Stephen Spender reflecting the radical currents of the later part of the decade. l had very little previous understanding of the socialist-feminist dimensions of the journal, nor of the overlap between contributors *to Time and Tide* and the *Left Review* in the 1930s, to which Clay draws attention, and found this excavation particularly revealing.

From 1935 to 1958 Theodora Bosanquet, at one time the amanuensis of Henry James, became literary editor and attracted a small nexus of reviewers who shared her own interest in spiritualism, mysticism and religious and psychic research. Clay’s analysis of the relationship between feminism and religion under Bosanquet’s literary editorship is suggestive and sophisticated. Rather than demonstrating a conservative shift away from the paper’s radical political commitment Clay shows the dialogue between the politically radical and the religious/ mystical not to be as diametrically opposed as this might first appear. The letter columns at the outbreak of the Second World War are used to provide evidence of the ways in which feminists such as Naomi Mitchison and Rebecca West engaged in public debates about peace and war.

*Time and Tide* changed hands on Rhondda’s death but a pallid version continued to be published in the 1960s accruing financial losses and with a much diluted interest in social reform. Ironically, it was still appearing in the news-kiosks at the height of the women’s liberation movement in the 1970s, albeit monthly, but with its feminist origins which Clay discusses so lucidly in this volume by then largely unremarked upon and unknown.

(1486 words)