



Howard Cox and Simon Mowatt, *Revolutions from Grub Street: A History of Magazine Publishing in Britain*

Howard Cox and Simon Mowatt. *Revolutions from Grub Street: A History of Magazine Publishing in Britain*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. xii, 276p. ISBN 9780199601639. £37.50 / US \$58.00 (hardback).

Covering magazine publishing from Grub Street until the recent past, Howard Cox and Simon Mowatt have produced a magisterial account of the industry. Throughout this study, the focus is on consumer magazines and the publishing companies that bring them to market. The result is a book that manages to weave together the various technical innovations, magazine launches, labour disputes, and corporate takeovers into an enthralling narrative that takes readers from the small print shops and jobbing journalists of the hand-press era right up to the emergence of the iPad. Well-researched and packed with insight, the book casts new light on the magazine by shifting attention from its pages and considering, instead, the broader business of publishing.

This important book lays bare the current methodological biases that dominate in studies of magazines (and periodicals more broadly). By approaching magazine publishing as a business, Cox and Mowatt are able to do justice to those aspects of publishing that are, at best, mentioned as an aside before scholars get down to analysing the text. While the authors do consider matters such as format and layout, and situate rival magazines alongside one another in the market, there are few mentions of individual journalists here and content is only discussed in the broadest terms. Some readers might wonder whether such a determinedly externalist account of the magazine can provide sufficient analysis; however, for me what the book does is make clear how satisfied we have been with studies that relegate printers, publishers, and distributors to the background, care little about finance, and see what goes on in boardrooms as separate from what happens on the page. While this study offers a full analysis of the industry, its real contribution is that, after reading it, one can no longer be satisfied with accounts that ignore the business case for particular magazines, or that pay insufficient attention to the way revenues stack up against the costs of production.

Revolutions from Grub Street will be required reading for those interested in any aspect of magazine publishing in Britain. As a book, though, it can be a little frustrating. The organization is broadly chronological, but chapter titles have been chosen thematically rather than as labels for periods of time. While this adds an analytical dimension to the account, as the authors pick out key themes from the period under discussion, the chapters themselves



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are not written in a way that makes the argument. So, chapter 4 is entitled “The Dominant Female,” but women, whether journalists or readers, do not appear for the first 10 pages. The book is also curiously repetitive, with key pieces of information presented repeatedly as if for the first time. Finally, the afterword should really be the introduction. This book is pioneering stuff, but leaving the explanation of its methods and scope until the end plays down its significance. That said, *Revolutions from Grub Street* remains an important—perhaps even paradigm-shifting—contribution to the field. It makes clear both how much more there is to learn about the press and what there is to gain from a fuller, interdisciplinary examination of its products.

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