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Bartholomew Brinkman

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Goldsmiths
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

Brad Evans, *Ephemeral Bibelots: How an International Fad Buried American Modernism*
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Bartholomew Brinkman

Framingham State University

As the subtitle of Brad Evans's *Ephemeral Bibelots* provocatively suggests, this is a book about some long-observed origins of American Modernism, about the relationship between the American and the international, and about the faddishness of fin-de-siècle ephemeral bibelots that largely have been ignored in studies of the period. As such, this book deepens our understanding of modern periodical studies and of long Modernism as it recovers a transformative print-cultural moment.

Evans depicts the ephemeral bibelots as proto-Modernist little magazines that are part of an international movement rooted in the cabarets of Montmartre and steeped in decadence and campy queerness. These bibelots challenge our understanding of the period as one dominated by home-grown realism and Naturalism as they underscore the importance of an allusive 'relational aesthetics' and a fleeting sense of artistic community. As Evans puts it, serious attention to the ephemeral bibelots compels us to recognize that the 'notion of the late arrival of Modernist aesthetics to the United States is simply wrong as a historical fact' (p. 29) and in serious need of correction – as this book sets out to do.

Chapter one focuses on one of the central editors of the bibelot movement, Gelett Burgess, who largely has been written out of the history of the American avant-garde (in part because of his emphasis on childhood), but who can be seen to anticipate such movements as Primitivism, nonsense, and Dada. Highlighting Burgess's editorial practices calls attention to the burgeoning networks of print reception that would come to characterize later Modernist literary production and serves to remind us that the newness of artistic works emerges from their 'repetition through particularly tight-knit, highly recursive publics' (p. 58), such as those generated by the bibelots.

Chapter two most fully theorizes bibelot networks with particular attention to ‘blockages’ and ‘gaps’ in circulation that would become the means of aesthetic innovation and infrastructure of Modernism. Drawing on Bruno Latour’s actor-network theory, Evans suggests that although the ephemeral bibelots themselves generally did not circulate widely, we can understand their interconnectedness through ‘an expanded definition of citational practice’ (p. 69) invested in shared points of reference happening in the ‘linkages’ or ‘edges’ between magazine nodes. There are a number of candidates for these network edges – including authors and artists, translations, such genres as blurbs and stories-without-words, and markers of shared style. While citational practices helped stitch together a bibelot network, Evans suggests that the bibelots existed on a parallel (rather than intersecting) plane with more mainstream magazines, frequently citing such magazines but not being cited in return. The point would seem to hold for such quality magazines as *The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine*, but it is complicated by Evans’s own attention to *Vogue* (in the prologue and in Chapter four), which more directly participated in a network of citations with the ephemeral bibelots. Future studies might also consider the extent to which these bibelots engaged in citational practices with other kinds of magazines that typified the period – such as the snippet, humour, and bibliographical magazines – to paint a more detailed picture of the bibelot’s place in the turn-of-the-century periodical field.

The third chapter closely reads two canonical works from a major literary figure, focusing on the novels *What Maisie Knew* (originally published in the bibelot the *Chap-Book*) and *The Ambassadors* to argue for Henry James as a ‘theorist of the artwork of networks’ who can help us differently understand the aesthetics of assemblage explored in the previous chapter (p. 111). James’s emphasis on narrating connections in his novel – embodied elsewhere in the period by the dancer Loïe Fuller and alluded to in swirling images by such bibelot illustrators as Will Bradley – emphasizes the importance of relation even as it offers a critique of network models that struggle to represent circulation over time.

Chapter four examines gender in the bibelots with a focus on the women writers Kate Chopin, Carolyn Wells, and Juliet Wilbor Tompkins. Meditating on the cultural image of the butterfly and highlighting a continuity between *Vogue* and *Mlle New York* through a shared focus on consumer fashions, linking of feminism and faddishness, and promotion of Chopin, Evans considers the ways in which depictions of the New Woman were themselves in danger of being reduced to a fad. Evans then turns to the fiction of the lesser-known and underrated writers Tompkins and Wells to chart a ‘literature of flirtation’ centred on young women and sexual desire that would eventually make its way to more mainstream magazines.

The final chapter portends the end of the ephemeral bibelots in relation to the poetry of Stephen Crane, suggesting that Crane’s identity as an author of Naturalist fiction and posthumous attempts by Amy Lowell and other Modernist figures to recover him as a *sui generis* proto-Modernist have obscured his connection to the bibelots. Such connections are evident, however, in a Philistine Society banquet held in a young Crane’s honour (accompanied by a *Roycroft* souvenir volume) and through poetical allusions to Charles Baudelaire and Jules Laforgue, who were central nodes in bibelot citation networks and who later served as inspiration for high Modernists such as T. S. Eliot. Evans suggests that one way to understand how the ephemeral bibelots disappeared from accounts of Crane and from literary history more generally is to acknowledge their success in migrating authors and themes to the more mainstream presses. But their disappearance can also be understood as ‘the end of the relational era’ that would be overtaken by a later Modernist turn to local avant-gardes and a preference for blowing up wispy connections (p. 156). In its quest for an origin myth that demanded a clean break from the past, ‘Modernism buried the bibelots, and, in so doing, cut ties to what had been modern about American art in the preceding decades’ (p. 156). Of particular relevance to this journal, Evans also notes that ‘there could be a temptation to make a connection between the bibelot vogue and the early twentieth century by way of reasserting the place of Decadence in the constitution of Modernism’ (p. 175) but concedes that there is no evidence of the bibelots being directly cited in the decadent Greenwich Village of the 1910s.

It is worth noting as well the companion [website](#). In addition to providing digital versions of the many images taken from ephemeral bibelots that appear throughout the book, the website makes available for the first time full runs of *The Lark* and *M'lle New York* and provides a bibelot index that traces a citation network across approximately twenty bibelots through shared titles, author and artist contributions, images, and themes. These are important resources for future scholarship and teaching (I hope to bring them into my own classes), and serve as the basis for a number of network visualizations available on the site that did not make their way into the printed book. In addition to being of some interest in themselves, they also offer a glimpse of a critical road not taken. As Evans explains on the website: 'Early on in the project, I thought that using network visualization tools would answer many of my questions about the ephemeral bibelots. As it turns out, learning more about the tools led me to think less of their potential' for explaining an archive's meaning. While I think there still might be untapped potential for more dynamic network visualizations, this decision helps us to see that Evans's ultimate theorizing of network aesthetics is an evolved one, informed by extensive work (and frustrations) with networking tools and the limits of digital scholarship.

To close at the book's introduction, Evans explains that what he aims to demonstrate in this book is that forgetting the bibelots

was not only unjustified but also that the story of how an art movement like this one is forgotten is almost as fascinating as how it is produced. In a sense, this is a story not only about the anonymity of a proto-Modernist American art movement but about the curiously beautiful dynamic of cultural evanescence (p. 24).

Later, in a telling aside, Evans offers a powerful formulation for the Humanities as a whole, noting that 'literary relations can move beyond immediate historical contexts, be they publication histories or political ideologies, and I take it that the project of the humanities in its most ambitious formulation is that of tracing new relations to older ones' (p. 94). *Ephemeral Bibelots* is itself an ambitious tracing of relations that has importantly uncovered a key literary and cultural movement

while attending to the forces that led to its cover-up, even as it grasps at the ephemeral connections between the bibelots and our own fleeting cultural moment.