

HATHERSAGE NUMERICAL IDENTITY LAB: MARSDEN, *THE NEW FREEWOMAN*, AND *THE EGOIST* AGAIN

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Abstract: -

*In this paper, I respond to Scholes's question of whether *The Freewoman*, *The New Freewoman*, and *The Egoist*, all of which were edited by Dora Marsden, were one journal or three.*

Recently the University of Manchester has put a series of inspiring quotations on purple flags attached to lampposts.¹ But there is no quotation from one of its most literary of alumni, Dora Marsden: critic, pasticheur, and midwife of high modernism. Of course not everyone can be included. But perhaps there have been some troubles in the past. Online, there is a vivid photograph of Marsden being arrested by strangely familiar-looking policemen, at the university I believe.

Who was Marsden? This is how I would briefly describe her: Marsden was a Nietzsche imitator, who edited a number of issues of the modernist literary review *The Egoist*, which attracted key figures in the modernist literary world.²

Before *The Egoist*, Marsden edited *The New Freewoman* and before that *The Freewoman*. A question which has been posed, by Scholes in his introductory commentary, is whether these should be counted as one journal (or magazine or newspaper, etc.) rather than

¹ For the “out of place” March and April graduations? I have written a little poem concerning the former: “Under the graduation arch/In March.”

² I suppose the figure most comparable to her today is Brian Leiter. Leiter writes a blog with information about the philosophy profession and is well-known as a Nietzsche scholar and for ranking departments.

three. It is a question one might call in a philosopher for. Analytic philosophers refer to it as the question of numerical identity.

From my research, I can see two main arguments for counting these journals as one.

1. Next installment argument. The first argument relies on the observation that there were chapters of a text translated from French in *The New Freewoman* and the next installment appeared in the first issue of *The Egoist*. The best explanation for that is that issues of *The New Freewoman* and *The Egoist* are issues of one journal. But then, given the “proximity”³ between *The New Freewoman* and *The Freewoman*, the default position is that all three titles are just different names for one journal. And there is no good reason for departing from it. (But in his commentary on the journal, Scholes sounds as if he may wish to depart from that position, and Susan Solomon does depart from it.)

2. Function-social obstacle argument. The other argument is more difficult to spell out precisely, but it starts with a plausible speculation: the actual purpose of these journals was to criticize Christabel Pankhurst. In *The Freewoman*, Marsden attacked Pankhurst for her campaign tactics and secrecy levels. Pankhurst was using tactics of militant protest when parliamentary means of achieving her feminist ends were available (1911). The change of “format” to a more literary review, eventually *The Egoist*, was because of a decision to pursue more literary lines of attack, says the speculator. Marsden would criticize the literary quality of Pankhurst (and also make attacks on Pankhurst’s intelligence; but didn’t she get a first class in law, before grade inflation, and didn’t she like logic as well?⁴). Pankhurst’s slogan was votes for women and chastity for men. Her view was that women were not being given the vote because most women

³ Temporal proximity, same editor, similar title, similar themes discussed, same layout, and more.

⁴ I suspect the problem is that Pankhurst was having difficulty fulfilling both highbrow literary norms and populist political norms at once.

will vote in favour of banning prostitution, which is a danger to them. Here is Marsden’s criticism, or one of them:

Miss Pankhurst does not once venture the indiscretion of an individual observation, but contents herself with the repetition of the tale of social illnesses such as the maiden of sixteen on the orange-box at the corner has for a long time made us familiar with, alongside generous extracts from various medical works which the reader can consult for himself... (1914: 45)

This is both a criticism of substance (where is the realistic detail, based on observation of prostitution or its social effects?) and of the style (it is all clichés). I don’t know if the sentence structure quoted is “permissible” today, but Pankhurst’s book is then summarized in quite a good verse by Marsden.

The second argument is that these journals are one, because we should look beyond the title to their intended and actual function, or chief function, and how that chief function relates to social norms. It is the same intended and actual function and under other circumstances, Marsden would have used the same title, but because of certain social norms, she needed to change the title to pursue other criticisms.

References

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- [3]Marsden, D. 1914. Views and Comments: The Chastity of Women. *The Egoist* 1 (3): 44-46.
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