Western College Magazine: The literary garden is being overrun with rag-weeds in the form of miniature magazines... [a] bilious outburst of disordered sentiment in the form of red and yellow colored pamphlets... Their tone is melancholy, and their typical stories are vague, inconsistent, bombastic ravings.

(“Bubble and Squeak,” December 1896, 295)

Between 1894 and 1903 a barrage of inexpensive, artistically designed periodicals – over 250 in number, with such quirky titles as the Dilettante, Miss Blue Stocking, M’lle New York, the Clack Book, the Enfant Terrible, the Bohemian, and Whim – flooded the newsstands of America (Figure 11.1).

Mainly literary and belletristic periodicals, many of them modeled on British and French magazines, these publications were established by literary aspirants and amateurs from all parts of the country – from New York and Boston to Wausau, Wisconsin and Muskegon, Michigan. They came in a variety of formats, though usually they were small – chap-book or pamphlet size – and slim – containing between 16 and 48 pages. Their intention, according to one little magazine founder, was to “raise...an intellectual revolt against the tyrannical, intolerant Smugocracy in letters,” to “create a more catholic taste in letters in America,” and to bring about a “modern era in English letters” (“Bubble and Squeak,” February 1897, 60). These magazines represented a new, as yet undefined genre, their novelty attested to by the numerous labels ascribed to them, including chap-books, fadazines, fadlets, mush-room magazines, ephemerals, bibelots, brownie magazines, periodical...
bantlings, decadents, freak magazines, magazettes, greenery-yallery periodicals, dinkeys, toy magazines, and so on.

As both high art and a popular fad, as an American phenomenon greatly indebted to British and continental European literature and the arts, as artistically produced yet ephemeral and irregular publications, and spanning the transition years between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, these magazines challenge what Ann Ardis has called the “four great divides” that have structured modernist studies: the high/low cultural divide; the British/American divide; the divide between “literature” and periodical press writing; and the divide between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (“Before the Great Divide[s]”). It is perhaps this uncategorizability that has led to their neglect, both in modernist studies and in scholarship on the periodical press of this era. Though extensively documented in bibliographies by Frederick Winthrop Faxon in 1897 and 1903, the turn-of-the-century American little magazines disappeared from view in subsequent bibliographic histories. David Moss’s 1932 bibliography of 376 little magazines, for example, includes only 41 turn-of-the-century titles. Fifteen years later, Frederick Hoffman, Charles Allen, and Carolyn Ulrich – whose history and bibliography of the little magazine is still regarded as the definitive account of the genre – deem only three turn-of-the-century titles worthy of “significant recognition”; the rest are dismissed as “not very inspiring” (7). A similar neglect has also characterized recent American periodical history, which has been largely concerned with mass-market magazines and their link