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Little Magazines

Suzanne W. Churchill

The Little Magazine and the Making of New Artistic Forms

New York, 1917: Patriotism is surging as fighting rages across Europe and the United States gears up to join the Great War. Democracy is at risk. To strengthen its foothold and “bring democracy to the art world,” a group of Americans and Europeans form the Society of Independent Artists and host an unprecedented event: an art exhibition with no jury or prizes, no arbiters of taste or hierarchies of value (Watson 280–81). For a \$6 fee, any artist can exhibit work at the Grand Central Palace. French émigré and *agent provocateur* Marcel Duchamp determines to test the Society’s democratic principles. Under the pseudonym “R. Mutt,” he submits an overturned urinal, set on a black pedestal and entitled *Fountain*. An argument erupts among the directors about whether to accept the submission: one faction condemns it as an obscene joke, while the other defends it as an expression of artistic freedom. In the heat of the moment, no one recognizes that it is both. The board rejects *Fountain*, with director William Glackens declaring, “It is, by no definition, a work of art” (qtd. in Watson 314).

The urinal disappeared, and no one knows what exactly happened to it (Watson 318). But *Fountain* was preserved in a photograph taken by Alfred Stieglitz and published in the *Blindman*, a little magazine issued shortly after the Independents exhibition opened. By publishing this photograph, along with essays defending the artistic legitimacy of *Fountain*, the *Blindman* initiated a process through which an irreverent new form – in this case a utilitarian, mechanically produced object – could be recognized, circulated, and ultimately sanctified as one of the most important artworks of the twentieth century. Although *Blindman* probably reached no more than a few hundred readers at the time, the little magazine changed the course of art history.

If the little magazine shaped art history, one could argue that its influence on modernist poetry was even more profound, since, unlike a painting or sculpture (but rather like a lost urinal that exists only in photographic reproductions), a poem has no material form other than the medium of its publication: a poem exists in print. Little magazines allowed new kinds of poetry – poems that were, like *Fountain*, initially deemed “by no definition, a work of art” – to be printed, recognized as poetry, and eventually canonized. At a time when fiction and film were displacing poetry in the popular imagination and mass market magazines were devoting scant attention to the genre, little magazines served as laboratories for poetic experimentation, showcases for display, forums for criticism, and archives for preservation. In the US, little magazines served as incubators for a nascent tradition of modern American poetry, and in the UK, they helped transform the hallowed genre of high art into something responsive and relevant to modernity. This chapter focuses on Anglo-American contexts, with the recognition that little magazines were purveyors of modernist poetry all over the world. As Eric Bulson argues, “little magazines functioned as . . . a place in which writers, readers, critics, and translators could imagine themselves belonging to a global community” (267). Little magazines – and the broader print cultural boom of which they were a vital part – made modernist poetry possible.

Definitions

I have been using the terms “little magazine” and “modernist poetry” as if they were unambiguous, when in fact, their definitions are evolving and controversial. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “little magazine” as “a name designating any of various periodicals devoted to serious literary or artistic interests,” pinpointing its earliest usage to 1900, on the back cover of the San Francisco-based quarterly *Book-Lover* (1899–1904). Circulating through various spheres of twentieth-century print culture, the term rapidly became associated with low-budget periodicals promulgating radical ideas, experimental artistic forms, and resistance to mainstream values and tastes. Across periodicals as diverse as the *Little Review*, the *Saturday Evening Post*, and the *New Yorker*, little magazines served as persistent markers of modernism (Churchill and McKible, “Modernism” 350). However nebulous the definition, there is a general feeling in the first decades of the twentieth century that “you know it when you see it,” and if you are holding a little magazine in your hands, you are grasping something new – and maybe a bit dangerous.

The loose connotations of “little magazine” are codified in the first scholarly study of the genre, Hoffman, Allen, and Ulrich’s 1946 *The Little Magazine: A History and a Bibliography*, which offers this definition: “a magazine designed to print artistic work which for reasons of commercial expediency is not acceptable to the money-minded periodicals or presses” (2). Hoffman, Allen, and Ulrich locate little magazines squarely in the avant-garde, in defiant opposition to the commercial sphere. They also establish a pattern in criticism of associating little magazines with the individual personalities

of their editors and the artistic geniuses they discovered. Little magazines emerge in this study as a proving ground for modernist greats, rather than a playground for new ideas and forms.

Attempting to broaden Hoffman, Allen, and Ulrich's definition to reflect the diversity of modernist artistic, social, and political practices, Adam McKible and I propose the following:

little magazines are non-commercial enterprises founded by individuals or small groups intent upon publishing the experimental works or radical opinions of untried, unpopular, or under-represented writers. Defying mainstream tastes and conventions, some little magazines aim to uphold higher artistic and intellectual standards than their commercial counterparts, while others seek to challenge conventional political wisdom and practice. (Churchill and McKible, *Little Magazines* 6)

This broader definition does not satisfy Robert Scholes and Clifford Wulfman, however, who reject the category altogether: "We must learn to stop talking, writing and thinking as if the category of 'little magazines' represented something real in the textual world. It is a dream category, an attempt to unite periodicals of which the uniter approves and exclude those lacking such approval" (60). They argue that the "little magazine" designation lacks specificity and imposes a false and elitist division between high and low cultural spheres (61).

Yet there is another way of understanding the "little magazine," not as a separate, elite sphere, but as a niche within a diverse, dynamic print market – a provisional position within a protean network of periodicals. Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker assert "the need to view magazines and the variety of tendencies comprising ideas of the modern as a lively congress of opinion and exchange, rather than a flat segmented map or set of inflexible hierarchies" (*Oxford* 16). Reflecting recent trends in modernist periodical studies, this paradigm redirects the focus from individual geniuses to multifaceted dialogues and negotiations, highlighting the interplay between avant-garde and commercial spheres.

Understood this way, "little magazine" is not a strict typology, but a strategic marker within the burgeoning print culture of modernity – the "mediamorphosis" that transformed the literary landscape in the twentieth century, fueled by technological advances in printing and paper production, the growth of the modern advertising industry, rising literacy rates, and more efficient transportation systems.¹ Thousands of periodicals emerged in the first decades of the twentieth century, and as the market expanded, it also diversified. Although the glossies appeared to cater to the crowd and the "littles" to stake out the margins, as Mark Morrisson shows, little magazines often had just as much interest in the popular marketplace. It is thus more accurate to describe the little magazines as tributaries of the mainstream, rather than separate factions – tributaries that waxed and waned, fed back into the main current, or dried up before another torrent of activity overflowed. Modernist poetry navigated these currents, kept afloat by periodicals of all sizes.

Of course, the definition of “modernist poetry” is equally vexed. The term “modernist” was a relatively late descriptor of the poetry boom that began early in the twentieth century, one of its earliest usages occurring in Laura (Riding) Jackson and Robert Graves’s 1928 *Survey of Modernist Poetry*. Prior to that, what many readers now associate with the term “modernist poetry” – experimental verse that defies conventions in favor of formal innovation and individualistic self-expression – was loosely and derogatorily referred to as “*vers libre*” or “futurist verse.” Associated with writers such as Ezra Pound, Wallace Stevens, and Mina Loy, such experimental poetry was viewed as an extreme wing of a broad and eclectic “new poetry” or “new verse” movement that encompassed both traditional and innovative forms, from the sonnets of Edna St. Vincent Millay to the cinquains of Adelaide Crapsey, from the pastoral meditations of the Georgian poets to the chiseled perspectives of the Imagists, and from the spirituals of James Weldon Johnson to the blues of Langston Hughes. Arguing that the term “modernist” anachronistically limits poetry to an elite canon that emerged in the 1940s, John Timberman Newcomb suggests that we return to the popular coinages of the 1910s, the “new poetry” and the “new verse,” which “imply an inclusive field of many styles, political positions, and attitudes toward modernity” (2). These terms connote poems with progressive outlooks, urban themes, modern diction, and contemporary topics ranging from skyscrapers to psychoanalysis.

What we call “modernist poetry” today was initially part of a broader new poetry movement, just as little magazines were part of a giant “mediamorphosis” – all of which were enabled by technological advances of modernity. Rather than emphasizing divisions and hierarchies, we should recognize the productive interdependence of these classifications.

Places for Poetry

The very “mediamorphosis” that spurred the production of little magazines, which in turn boosted the production of poetry, seemed paradoxically to threaten the genre’s very existence. Could poetry survive in the modern mechanized, industrialized, commercialized world, or would it be “lost in the criss-cross of modern currents, the confusion of modern immensities,” as Harriet Monroe feared? The London-based Poetry Society and the Poetry Society of America were both formed in 1909 to protect an art that seemed in danger of extinction. Of course, it’s a fine line between conservation and conservatism, and these societies quickly became known as bastions of literary conservatism (Newcomb 13–14; Hibberd 178–89). Little magazines cropped up in reaction to the societies’ elitism, aiming to restore poetry’s popular appeal. In January 1912, Harold Monro launched the *Poetry Review* from London, and in October 1912, Harriet Monroe issued *Poetry* from Chicago. Despite the similarities of their names, aims, and timing, however, Harold Monro and Harriet Monroe were unrelated, working independently to create venues in which modern poetry could thrive.

In her editorial "The Motive of the Magazine," Monroe asserts that every art requires "an entrenched place" in order to flourish; whereas painting, sculpture, and music are housed in "great palaces," a magazine gives "poetry her own place." Just as eager to create a place for poetry, Monroe backed his magazine venture with the Poetry Bookshop – "or 'Poetry House,' as he sometimes called it" (Hibberd 185) – which "opened in January 1913 [and] featured both new and old poetry for sale, rooms to lodge visiting young poets, and a room for verse readings" (Morrisson 72). Alfred Kreymborg was similarly motivated to create a house for poets. Inspired by Alfred Stieglitz's *Camera Work* and corresponding gallery and gathering place, 291 (the name signaled its Fifth Avenue address), Kreymborg founded *Others* (1915–19) and its offshoot artistic colony in Grantwood, New Jersey, to provide arenas for unrestricted poetic experimentation.

These magazines were not the only ones, or even the first, to champion modernist poetry: as if to prove Marianne Moore's suggestion that imagination "has never been confined to one locality" (130), many others joined in. Ezra Pound probably had his hand in more little magazine ventures than anyone else, and Hugh Kenner's influential *The Pound Era* (1971) gives him the lion's share of the credit for deploying little magazines in service of modernist poetry. But though Pound's mane was glorious and his roar echoed across the new poetry field, other editors played equally significant roles, many of them women and African Americans. W. E. B. Du Bois's *Crisis* opened doors to African American poets in 1910; Max Eastman launched the *Masses* in 1911, creating a forum hospitable to radical leftist poets; and the same year, John Middleton Murry founded *Rhythm*, a journal receptive to Georgian poets. Defying Jim Crow-era color lines, African American poet and editor William Stanley Braithwaite began issuing the *Poetry Journal* from Boston in December 1912. Across the Atlantic in London, Rebecca West joined Dora Marsden on the *New Freewoman*, where she began championing the Imagists in 1913, the same year Kreymborg launched the *Glebe* in New York, affording chapbook-sized space to individual writers. Margaret Anderson opened an avant-garde forum for the arts with the *Little Review* (1914–29). Meanwhile, magazines like the *New Age* (1907–22) and the *Seven Arts* (1916–17) created forums for rigorous poetry criticism, and Braithwaite's next venture, *Poetry Review of America* (1916–17), fostered consensus for a catholic modern poetry tradition.

Diverse magazines cultivated diverse forms of poetry, and the anthologies they spawned helped elevate the status of the nascent modernist poetry tradition: five *Georgian Poetry* anthologies, issued between 1912 and 1922; William Stanley Braithwaite's annual *Anthology of Magazine Verse* (1913–29); Houghton Mifflin's Imagist anthologies (1915–17); Alfred Kreymborg's *Others* anthologies (1916, 1917, 1919); and Harriet Monroe's *The New Poetry: An Anthology* (1917). Larger, more commercial magazines and newspapers also contributed to the development of modernist poetry. Periodicals ranging from *Vogue* and *Vanity Fair* to the *Duluth News Tribune* reported on the antics of the little magazines, often ridiculing or parodying their contents. But in doing so, they made the strange new forms more familiar to popular audiences, helping modernist poets like Gertrude Stein, Amy Lowell, and Ezra Pound to become household names. By studying modernist poetry in the context of maga-

zines, we can see the dialectics of rebellion and consensus building that enabled modernist poetry to emerge, gain popular acceptance, and enter the canon.

1910s: New Forms, Modern Themes

Though modernist poetry has roots in the nineteenth-century French Symbolist and Decadent movements, it really began to ferment in the first decade of the twentieth century, an eclectic period characterized by a wide variety of forms, themes, and attitudes that were rapidly disseminated through little magazines. Nowhere is the swift spreading of interest and excitement more apparent than in the clamor about Imagism, which first erupted in little magazines, igniting a firestorm of attention that soon spread to the mainstream presses.

The story of Imagism begins in that *annus mirabilis* 1912, not far from Harold Monroe's Poetry Bookshop, in the tearoom of the British Museum, where H.D. meets her high school sweetheart Ezra Pound to show him her writing. H.D. describes the encounter thus:

"But Dryad," (in the museum tea room), "this is poetry." He slashed with a pencil. "Cut this out, shorten this line. 'Hermes of the Ways' is a good title. I'll send this to Harriet Monroe of *Poetry*. Have you a copy? Yes? Then we can send this, or I'll type it when I get back. Will this do?" And he scrawled "H.D. Imagiste" at the bottom of the page. (qtd. in Pondrom 87)

H.D. renders herself curiously passive and silent in the scene, casting Pound as the inventor of Imagism. But what's important here is not who invented Imagism, but the role of the little magazine in its creation. A crucial step in making the poems is sending them to *Poetry*.² Imagism enters the world via the little magazine.

F. S. Flint's essay "Imagisme" and Pound "A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste" appear in the March 1913 issue of *Poetry*, and in August 1913, Rebecca West introduces "Imagisme" to readers of the *New Freewoman*. Pound sends a packet of Imagist poems to Alfred Kreyborg with the instructions "unless you're another American ass, you'll set this up just as it stands!" (qtd. in Bochner 136). Kreyborg enthusiastically complies, dedicating the February 1914 issue of the *Glebe* to *Des Imagistes: An Anthology*. Soon after, the movement is featured in the *Little Review* and the *Egoist* (formerly the *New Freewoman*). By 1915, word spreads to the *New Age*, and in 1916 *Scribner's* takes up the topic. Little magazine coverage of Imagism attracts the attention of the daily presses, where denunciation soon gives way to acceptance. A 1914 *New York Times* article cites *Blast* and the *Egoist* as the mouthpieces for rebel artists and poets, dismissing Imagism and its avant-garde cousins as "nonsense" – "the *reductio ad absurdum* of mad modernity" ("Vorticism"). But by 1917, the *Times* gives serious, laudatory reviews to Imagist collections by H.D., John Gould Fletcher, D. H. Lawrence, and the 1916 anthology *Some Imagist Poets*, concluding:

The Imagists of 1916 have made a good showing. Some of them have complained with bitterness of their reception by the public. We do not think such complaint is justified. The magazines print free verse and pay for it . . . publishers publish volume on volume of it, and the public buys them and talks about them. (“Battle”)

What exactly was everyone talking about? Ezra Pound’s classic Imagist poem, first published in the 15 August 1913 issue of the *New Freewoman*, exemplifies what made the movement seem so modern:

IN A STATION OF THE METRO

The apparition of these faces in the crowd :
 Petals on a wet, black bough .

First, there is the urban setting, a metro station, a site of new technologies of transportation, of crowds that allow each individual, including the poet/flâneur, to become anonymous, less a person than an apparition – the ghost of a self, whose limits dissolve in the modern city. But the exhilaration of modernity also induces nostalgia for the past, manifest in a return to the pastoral: human faces become flower petals, and the long, curving train track “a wet, black bough.” Whereas the setting is the Paris Metro, the form resembles the Japanese Haiku, intimating a global scope. Gaps in the phrasing accent visual technique, insisting that the poem itself is a modern, mechanically typed unit. The concision signals efficiency. Intense moments of multi-sensory insight are all we have time for in the fast-moving, modern world. The poem is scarcely a couplet, with rhyme attenuated into the assonant echo of “crowd” and “bough.” The iambic rhythm of the first line breaks down in the second, coming to a halt in a three-beat spondee. There is no turning back.

Yet Pound’s Imagist poem, in all its richness, does not tell the full story of modernist poetry in the 1910s. It does not reflect the social and political concerns of the day – ranging from the rise of the New Woman to the calamity of World War I – which inspired so many poems. Jeanne D’Orge’s “The Meat Press,” published in the May–June 1916 *Others*, links the body of the modern poem to the female body, expressing “a longing / To strip raw live flesh / From my bones” in order “to write a few lyrics.” In Carl Sandburg’s antiwar poem “Grass,” published in the March 1917 *Seven Arts*, grass functions as a symbol of human indifference to the deaths of so many soldiers, while at the same time suggesting the naturalness and inevitability of the cycle of loss and forgetting. The simple diction and flat tone imply a callous attitude toward the carnage, and the repetition of key phrases (“I am the grass,” “pile them high,” “let me work”) emphasizes the relentless action. Whereas for Pound, modern poetry is a form of condensation, and for D’Orge, it is a rite of stripping down, Sandburg’s composition mimes a process of decomposition, grinding down language into bits to make it work. Such poems, brought into the world by little magazines in the 1910s, contributed to the transformation of poetry into a harder edged, more incisive

form of expression, better suited to the experiences, demands, and devastating losses of modernity.

1920s: Consolidating Modernist Aesthetics

After the explosion of new themes, styles, and forms of poetry in the 1910s, the 1920s was a decade of “consolidation . . . of a modernist aesthetic,” a process facilitated by little magazines such as the *Egoist*, the *Dial*, and the *Criterion*, and presided over by T. S. Eliot (Brooker and Thacker, *Oxford* 339). The *Egoist* published Eliot’s essay “Tradition and the Individual Talent” in September and December of 1919, bringing a tumultuous decade for poetry to a solemn close with its appeal to restore the value of “tradition.” Eliot published *The Waste Land* in the inaugural October 1922 issue of his *Criterion*, and Scofield Thayer and James Sibley Watson, Jr. secured the American publication of the poem for the November 1922 issue of the *Dial*, giving him the prestigious \$2,000 *Dial* Award, and thereby certifying the literary value of his cacophonous, disjunctive poetics. With such acts, the *Dial* “helped change literary modernism from a form of radical dissent to a culturally central form of expression” (Schulze 37). Eliot’s influence was felt as far away as Nashville, Tennessee, where a group of young poets including Allen Tate, Robert Penn Warren, and Laura (Riding) Jackson founded the *Fugitive* (1922–25), “decorating their room with murals depicting the inspiring sights of *The Waste Land*” (Hoffman, Allen, and Ulrich 118).

Mina Loy’s “Brancusi’s Golden Bird,” which also appeared in the November 1922 *Dial*, exemplifies the modernist aesthetics that coalesced in the 1920s. A homage to the work of a Romanian sculptor living in Paris, whose work had recently been featured in both the *Little Review* and *Vanity Fair*, “Brancusi’s Golden Bird” reflects the international sensibility of modernism, as well as its rapid dissemination through magazines. Published adjacent to a photograph of Constantin Brancusi’s sculpture, the poem also evinces the influence of the visual arts on modernist poetry. Loy depicts *Golden Bird* as the perfect fusion of word and image, sound and sight, male and female: “the absolute act / of art” (507). A striking contrast to her personal, feminist interventions of the 1910s (e.g., “Parturition,” “Love Songs,” and “The Effectual Marriage”), “Brancusi’s Golden Bird” offers a detached, impersonal exaltation of a consummate work of art. In this way, it completes a trend begun back in 1914, when the *New Freewoman* reimagined itself as the *Egoist*, shifting its focus from women’s issues to an individualist ethos that sought to transcend the gender division.

The 1920s also witnessed the consolidation of the Harlem Renaissance via little magazines, with Langston Hughes debuting in the *Crisis*, Claude McKay publishing in the *Liberator*, and Jean Toomer appearing in *Broom*. This was the decade in which *Fire!!* appeared, issuing a youthful challenge to the more established journals, *Crisis* and *Opportunity*, with a substantial poetry section entitled “Flame from the Dark Tower.” Of course, African American writers had been contributing to the new poetry movement throughout the 1910s: Braithwaite edited two little magazines and annual

anthologies of magazine verse, James Weldon Johnson appeared in *Poetry*, and Fenton Johnson published prose poems in *Oibers*, to name just a few. But free verse, which was the hallmark of modernist poetry in the predominantly white little magazines of the 1910s, did not catch on in African American periodicals until the 1920s.

Langston Hughes's debut poem, "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," published in the June 1921 *Crisis*, sounds a significant new note in modernist poetry. The rhythmic lines comprise a Whitmanesque catalogue that formally asserts the speaker's American inheritance, even as it thematically embraces his African heritage in the continuous rivers of the Euphrates, Congo, and Nile. "I've known rivers: / Ancient, dusky rivers," the speaker declares; "My soul has grown deep like the rivers." The confident "I" proclaims the vitality of the "New Negro," affirming the beauty of a color palette of blacks, browns, and golds; demonstrating experiential wisdom and erudition; and forging a distinctly modern idiom.

1930s: Reaffirming Political Commitments

Just as little magazines enabled new forms to emerge in the 1910s and modernist aesthetics to consolidate in the 1920s, they created forums in which a modernist poetics of political engagement could develop in the 1930s. If the 1920s purged modernist aesthetics of some of the previous decade's political energies, the 1930s reaffirmed political engagement. Many little magazines, along with the poetry they published, took a marked leftward turn, and new leftist magazines, including the *Partisan Review*, the *Left Review*, and *Poetry and the People*, were founded. Strikingly, women, who were a visible and vocal presence in modernist poetry of the 1910s and 1920s, play a less prominent role beginning in the 1930s, suggesting that feminist politics are superseded by geopolitical and economic crises.

T. S. Eliot's influence remains strong, championed by F. R. Leavis's *Scrutiny*, founded in 1932. Eliot's impact on the proletarian poetry of the 1930s comes as more of a surprise, however, given his conservative drift, exemplified in his statement that the "general point of view" of his 1928 essay collection "may be described as classicist in literature, royalist in politics, and anglo-catholic in religion" (vii). Nevertheless, Eliot's stamp is palpable in the Feb.–Mar. 1934 issue of the Communist-leaning *Partisan Review*, in Alfred Hayes's "In a Coffee Pot," a poem about the plight of unemployed laborers in the Depression. The title betrays a debt to Eliot, evoking Prufrock's famous lament, "I have measured out my life with coffee spoons," but Hayes translates Prufrock's sophisticated European ennui into plain old working-class American boredom. Whereas Prufrock broods in salons upon divans, Hayes's speaker complains: "I brood upon myself. I rot / night after night in this cheap coffee pot" (12). Borrowing urban settings, slang idioms, ironic rhymes, and resonant images from Eliot, Hayes adapts modernist aesthetics to the cause of the unemployed masses.

As Eliot expands his dominion, W. H. Auden rises to prominence, becoming "the principal example and touchstone – indeed, for some, [the] *raison d'être*" for British

magazines such as *New Verse* and *Twentieth Century Verse* (Brooker and Thacker, *Oxford* 592). According to Stan Smith, the November 1937 Auden double issue of *New Verse* is “primarily a manifesto for a whole new way of relating poetry to the pressures of the time, for which Auden [is] the stalking horse” (650). The issue includes essays and comments by literary luminaries such as Christopher Isherwood, Ezra Pound, Dylan Thomas, and Graham Greene (651). Editor Geoffrey Grigson’s contribution, “Auden as a Monster,” salutes the singular poet who “does not fit,” is “no gentleman,” and “does not write, or exist, by any of the codes, by the Bloomsbury rules, by the Hampstead rules, by the Oxford, the Cambridge, or the Russell Square rules” (13). Although the rebellious spirit of early modernism resurfaces in the magazine’s blustery rhetoric, the tone of Auden’s poetry is subdued.

The double issue features Auden’s “Dover,” a meditation on the state of the nation in a time of impending war: England is “of little importance . . . / With half its history done” (3). With its familiar seaside setting by the “historical cliffs” of Dover, its deceptively straightforward syntax, and its characteristically ambiguous declarative statements, the poem is a marked deviation from the dry, fractured, transnational terrain of *The Waste Land*. “Nothing is made in this town,” and nothing momentous occurs in its “unremarkable” routines (2–3), yet Auden remarks them with precision, imbuing the scene with a sense of foreboding:

The soldiers swarm in the pubs in their pretty clothes,
As fresh and silly as girls from the high-class academy.
The Lion, the Rose, the Crown will not ask them to die,
Not now, not here. (3)

The ironic implication is that soon, somewhere, “the Crown” will ask the soldiers to die on the battlefields of World War II. Auden’s “Dover,” like Hayes’s “In a Coffee Pot,” puts modernist ironies in service of the workers, immigrants, and soldiers who are disenfranchised, exploited, or exterminated by the inhumane economic and political mechanisms of modernity. Despite the urgency of the political crises, modernist poetry in the 1930s is more muted, cynical, and resigned, less assured that poetry can achieve meaning and order in a chaotic world. The little magazines promulgating this poetry nevertheless retain a sense of the urgency of their mission.

1940s: Modernist Poetry Enters the University

World War II arrived as predicted and feared. Unlike the first world war, World War II did not generate an outpouring of celebrated war poetry, though H.D.’s *Trilogy* and Eliot’s *Four Quartets* evince the continued relevance of modernist aesthetics to the demands of wartime. Although the outbreak of another catastrophic war put a strain on the production of modernist poetry, coinciding with the demise of the *Criterion*, *New Verse*, *Twentieth Century Verse*, and the *Southern Review*, it created an opportunity

for magazines that survived the war to contribute to institutionalization of modernist poetry in the academy. Little poetry magazines gave way to more distinguished literary reviews, which were frequently associated with professors and universities that could provide them more stable financial backing.

F. R. Leavis edited the long-running, canon-making *Scrutiny* (1932–53) from Cambridge University, at a time when I. A. Richards was introducing the methods of “practical criticism” to the educational establishment. Much of the work of *Scrutiny*, in fact, involved shaping a modernist poetry canon in which Eliot reigned supreme, and “difficulty” and “impersonality” were the watchwords. In the US, the *Kenyon Review* performed a similar function. Founded in 1939 by John Crowe Ransom – who two decades before had been one of the Fugitives – the *Kenyon Review* picked up where Cleanth Brooks’s *Southern Review* (1935–42) left off, helping to institute New Criticism and forge a canon of modernist poetry around men such as Eliot, Pound, Yeats, Stevens, and Auden. In the next decades, the diverse field of modernist poetry would be winnowed to a select canon. Returning to little magazines today allows us to recover that diversity, and to understand the processes by which it was, temporarily, forgotten. As William Carlos Williams attests, “Nothing could be more useful to the present day writer, the alert critic than to read and reread the actual work produced by those who have made the ‘small magazine’ during the past thirty years. The measure of the intelligent citizen is the discretion with which he breaks the law” (89–90).

New Technologies and New Genres

Today, in the digital age, it’s easy to see how new technologies spawn new genres: the “blog” and the “tweet” are two prominent examples. The blog, or “web log,” is a form of intimate yet public commentary – episodic entries linked not by a coherent narrative, but by the idiosyncrasies of personality or passions, whether for gluten-free cooking or celebrity gossip. The interactive format allows readers to post comments, introducing a dialogic element to the form, not unlike the social networking little magazines provided modernist poets. The social dimensions of the new digital genres are perhaps even more pronounced in the tweet, a message of up to 140 characters posted to the social networking service Twitter, which distributes the message to any number of subscribers, who can forward it to their followers. Especially prized is the ability to condense wit and wisdom into the compressed form. In this way, the “tweet” can be seen as a distant cousin of that concentrated modernist poetic form, the Imagist poem.

Like modernist poetry, “blogs” and “tweets” are made possible by new technologies of discursive production. As personal computers, smartphones, the World Wide Web, and social networks spawned the blog and the tweet, modernist poetry was fostered by automated printing presses, typewriters, cheap paper, and, above all, little magazines. And just as the blog and the tweet have aroused fears about the degeneration

of language into unschooled, self-indulgent babble, so Imagism and free verse, in their heyday, stirred up fears about the decay of poetry into decadent, hedonistic prattle. But the enduring value and interest of modernist poetry should make us optimistic about the possibilities for poetry in the twenty-first century. With new tools and technologies for the production and dissemination of poetry, we may be on the verge of another revolution.

NOTES

- 1 The term “mediamorphosis,” coined by Roger Fidler, has been adopted by some cultural critics; see, for example, Ardis and Collier 12.
- 2 According to Cyrena Pondrom, Pound sent H.D.’s poems to Monroe in early October 1912. Since the first issue of *Poetry* was issued that same month, H.D. could not have had a copy of *Poetry* at the time of her meeting with Pound at the British Museum. But the anachronism only underscores the importance of the little magazine to the emergence and recognition of Imagism. In H.D.’s memory, the rise of the new form coincides with the appearance of the magazine.

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