

Small Magazines, Large Ones, and Those In-Between

This is the Afterword to *Little Magazines and Modernism: New Approaches*, (forthcoming from Ashgate), edited by Suzanne W. Churchill and Adam McKible.

By Robert Scholes

The elder magazines, the *Atlantic*, *Harper's*, *Scribner's*, *Century*, had even in their original titles more or less and in varying degrees abjured the pretensions of the London "Reviews," i.e., to serious and consecutive criticism of literature. They had grown increasingly somnolent, reminiscences of General Grant being about their maximum effort toward contemporaneity. About the beginning of this century there was a new and livelier current in the trade. The methods of Armour's meat business were introduced into distribution. A commercial talent blossomed in the great firm of Conde Nast. A bright young man observed a leakage in efficiency. The advertising men had to collect such ads as the contents could attract. In the new system the contents were selected rigorously on the basis of how much expensive advertising they would carry.

(Ezra Pound, "Small Magazines," *English Journal* 19, no. 9, (Nov., 1930, 690)

Ezra Pound, as was so often the case, was brilliant and accurate in his appraisal of the magazine scene at the beginning of the twentieth century; however, as was also often the case, his view, as presented in his essay, "Small Magazines," that appeared in the NCTE's *English Journal* in 1930, was overstated, misleading, and unfair. Let us consider his truth first, before turning to the errors concealed within it. Hoffman Allen and Ulrich, in *The Little Magazine: A History and a Bibliography* (Princeton UP, 1946), date the start of this phenomenon in the 1890s. Theodore Peterson, in *Magazines in the Twentieth Century* (Illinois UP 1956), dates the start of American mass magazines in the 1890s. And this concurrence of the two main authorities on these two types of magazines is of enormous importance for periodical studies and studies of modernism. Modernism, as we have come to understand it, is the result of two forces in modern culture, two aspects of modernity, whose antagonism can be seen as working dialectically to construct modernism itself. On the one hand we have what José Ortega y Gasset called *The Revolt of the Masses* (1930), and, on the other, we have the counter-revolution of the elites. My thesis here is that these two forces, in the world of arts and letters, produced the mass magazine and the little magazine, forever interconnected by a dialectical process of historical development.

In our studies of modernism we tend, perhaps rightly, to privilege the little magazines, but we cannot understand even them adequately without an understanding of the mass magazines and those Pound called "the elder magazines," against which they situated themselves. Pound himself pointed the way for academic scholars in the essay from which I drew my epigraph--and he was well aware of his audience of teachers in writing for the *English Journal*. He defined the small magazines against the large ones,

in terms of relative importance of advertising to each kind of periodical. But Pound had a way of turning relative differences into absolutes, and this, as I argued in my book, *Paradox of Modernism* (Yale UP, 2006), was the modernist way par excellence. Paradoxically, perhaps, this modernist way of thinking is precisely what we must undo in order to understand modernism--in the magazines as in every other field of modernist studies. And that is just what I shall attempt to do here. But let us start with some definitions and examples.

Improvements in printing technology and an increase in postal capabilities paved the way for the mass magazines that arose in the 1890s. But the most important single factor was economic. Publishers like Frank Munsey, S. S. McClure, John Brisbane Walker, and Cyrus Curtis realized that they could lose money on magazine sales and more than recoup it in advertising revenue, because advertisers would pay to reach large numbers of subscribers. In 1893 *Munsey's Magazine* announced that it was dropping its price per issue to from twenty-five to ten cents, its yearly subscription from three dollars to one dollar. At his death Munsey was accused (by William Allen White) of having brought to journalism "the talent of a meat packer, the morals of a money changer, and the manner of an undertaker" (Peterson *Magazines*, 8), but he led the revolt of the masses in the magazine world. *McClure's Magazine* followed suit, and saw its circulation rise from 8,000 for its first issue in 1893 to 250,000 in December of 1895, topping the combined circulation of three older serious magazines--*Century*, *Harper's*, and *Scribner's*--in that year. Meanwhile *Munsey's Magazine* hit half a million in that same year of 1895 (Peterson, 10). The mass magazine was fully fledged before the twentieth century began, and the older serious journals (Pound's "elders") had to adjust or die.

One way they adjusted was by lowering prices and increasing advertising revenues. They moved, that is, toward the mass journals, becoming what I call "intermediate" magazines. There is a strong tendency in modernist discourse to exclude middles and emphasize extremes. We do this at the risk of never understanding modern culture properly, for magazines like *Scribner's* did important cultural work in the first decades of the twentieth century. As students of modern culture, then, we must note that serious literature and art continued to appear in the older magazines as they partially massified themselves and also appeared in the new mass magazines themselves. But this art and literature tended toward the traditional and established. Circulation-minded editors and publishers wanted, then as now, names--figures with reputations--writing and drawing for them. The heavy presence of advertising worked to make life more difficult for aspiring but unestablished talent. At the same time, the essence of art was being re-defined as something that required novelty. Causes and effects in this world cannot be distinguished easily. But the need to reach audiences in print drove many aspiring writers and artists to seek new outlets, to find a fit audience, though few, for their works. What we call avant-gardism became a part of the cultural mixture that was modernity.

Ezra Pound saw what he called the "small magazine" as a response to this failure in the "elder magazines," and he saw *Poetry* as the right sort of response--up to a point. As he put it, "The active phase of the small magazine in America begins with the founding of Miss Monroe's magazine, *Poetry*, in Chicago in 1911" (Pound, "Small Magazines," 689). But he also argued that *Poetry* did not sustain its original energy for long. John T. Newcomb has demonstrated the injustice of this charge in his essay on *Poetry* in this book, but the form Pound's charge took is interesting. He claimed that

"Miss Monroe never pretended to adopt either a contemporary, European, or international criterion. Certain principles that Europe had accepted for eighty years have never penetrated her sanctum. It is possible that recognition of these ideas would have prematurely extinguished her magazine. On the other hand, she may never have grasped these ideas." (691). And he added that the magazine "served as a forum from 1912 to 1914, perhaps to 1917. It served, and probably still serves, as a meal ticket; and among its now unknown writers there may be some who will emerge as formed literati" (692).

Pound's modernism involved accepting without question his own work and the work of others he favored, and rejecting the work of those he looked upon with disfavor. Of course, he was right a lot, and he was an extraordinary critic and polemicist, but I find Newcomb's rejection of Pound's view of Harriet Monroe and *Poetry* very persuasive. Pound's modernism is not all of modernism, and there are examples of good modern writing in the "elder" magazines and in the small ones. We need only look with some care at both to see this, which means that we need to examine more carefully the intricate cultural dance that becomes visible when we seriously investigate the rich field of periodical literature of the early twentieth century. This process becomes more clearly visible there, I would argue, than anywhere else in all of print culture during those years, because the variety of periodical culture allows us to track a writer like Amy Lowell, for example, as she moves between *Poetry* and *Scribner's*, publishing serious poems in both, and because the co-presence of advertising and fiction in the larger magazines allows us to see the world that inspired and informed the work of writers like Edith Wharton and F. Scott Fitzgerald.

Pound was right, no doubt, that what we now recognize as little magazines emerged from this combination of elements: the rise of mass magazines with their emphasis on advertising and their consequent need for marketable writers, artists, and texts--and the contrary pressure felt by many writers and artists to find new forms in which to represent this new world. We may wish to see the little magazines as all pure and experimental--but they weren't--and Pound knew this. Nor were the mass and intermediate magazines really blind to new talent and opposed to serious art and literature, though Pound refused to acknowledge this. The amount of advertising in the mass magazines was actually enormous, to be sure, and it inevitably exerted pressures on editorial decisions. But there was advertising in the little magazines as well, though we may not be fully aware of this because the ads have been largely left out of all reprints of those magazines--and even discarded from the original copies when they were bound for permanent collections in libraries. Still, the really tiny little magazines published only a few issues, for a few people, putting a few writers into print who might not otherwise have seen themselves there. Others lasted longer, supported by patrons, sometimes reaching larger audiences, and some, like Chicago's *Poetry*, have lasted for nearly a century.

We should also notice, of course, that some little magazines, like Lord Alfred Douglas's *The Antidote*, were fiercely opposed to experimentalism in literature and the arts, as conservative in this way as the mass magazines, but without the advertising and the revenue of the bigger journals. The world of periodicals was complicated and fascinating. For us, the Arnoldian problem--of seeing this world both steadily and whole--is indeed a serious one. And the first stage in any solution to this problem must involve


actually seeing these journals as they were, not in bound copies with nearly half their pages stripped out as irrelevant, or in reprints that include only the "text" and not the advertising. The case for seeing a journal whole was made powerfully by a short editorial in the *New York Times*, welcoming the release of a digital version of *The New Yorker*:

But the most visceral pleasure in these discs comes from the advertising. It is so interesting that you can be forgiven for confusing the real relation between advertising and editorial content, for supposing that ocean of warm, gray ink existed just to support those astonishing ads. Who remembered that Exxon made an "intelligent typewriter"? Why should an ad for laser discs feel so cruelly ancient, more ancient than an ad - "Ask the man who owns one"- for the Golden Anniversary Packard? There is quicksand here, and some of us are sinking fast.

(Nov. 6, 2005)

The Art of Versification
By J. BERG ESENWEIN and
MARY ELEANOR ROBERTS

This new book is the most complete, practical, and helpful working handbook ever issued on the Principles of Poetry and the Composition of all forms of verse.



Clear and progressive in arrangement. Free from unexplained technicalities. Indispensable to *every* writer of verse. *Sent on approval* to any who wish to examine before ordering.

Cloth. 312 pages. Uniform with "Writing the Short Story."
Price \$1.50, by mail \$1.62.

The 60-page chapter on "Light Verse" alone is worth the price to writers.

THE HOME CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOL
DEPARTMENT 215 - - - SPRINGFIELD, MASS.

Even *Poetry*, that ideal example of the little magazine, had some advertising, even in those early years when it was still, in Pound's view, "a forum," and not just a meal-ticket. In

Vol. 2, No. 4 of July, 1913, for example, an advertisement for *The Art of Versification* appeared. This advertisement is interesting not only because it tells us about one source of income for the magazine, but because it connects *Poetry* to the world of popular periodicals. From 1907 to 1915, one author of this handbook, Mary Eleanor Roberts, published stories in *People's Magazine*, *The Cavalier*, *Harper's*, and *McCall's*. Her co-author in *The Art of Versification*, J. Berg Esenwein, is even more interesting. He wrote, with Dale Carnegie (or Carnegey) *The Art of Public Speaking*. Carnegie gained fame two decades later, of course, through his enormously popular book, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, published in 1936 and still in print. Esenwein also wrote *The Art of the Photoplay* in 1913, one of the first books on writing for the movies. *Poetry*, itself, we should remember, was subtitled *A Magazine of Verse*. That is, this distinguished avant-garde little magazine did not, in its title, reject a connection with mere verse, though Harriet Monroe might not have wished to endorse this advertisement's stress on the book's "60-page chapter on 'light verse'" as being important to those submitting poems to her magazine. But she accepted the ad and put a subscription form for *Poetry* itself on the back of the same page. People who see only the bound copies or reprints of this magazine will not know these things.

On the other hand, the more popular magazines frequently published literary works and visual art of high quality. Authors who appeared in *Everybody's Magazine*, for example ranged from the Baroness Orczy and Rafael Sabatini to Dreiser, Jack London, Frank Norris, Kipling, O. Henry, Mary E. Wilkins, Booth Tarkington, and Upton Sinclair. Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* appeared in *Everybody's Magazine* in 1914. This magazine had been founded in 1899 by the New York department store,

Wannamaker's. It was connected to a London publishing house as well, and it published a lot of material that had appeared previously in the London based *Royal Magazine* (Mott 1968, 72). Some of the mass and intermediate magazines, however, published much more American writing, though British writers were always in the mix. *Scribner's Magazine*, for example, in the years between 1910 and 1922, published writing by Kipling, Galsworthy, and R. L. Stevenson, but also the work of such Americans as E. A. Robinson, Amy Lowell, Edith Wharton, Sara Teasdale, and F. Scott Fitzgerald. The mix in *Scribner's* also included popular authors like A. Conan Doyle and E. W. Hornung, and public figures like Theodore Roosevelt and Fridtjof Nansen. N. C. Wyeth was a regular artist/illustrator for the magazine, but *Scribner's* also published images by Manet, Picasso, and Matisse. The writers who worked for this magazine were not the modernist avant-garde, to be sure, except, perhaps, for Amy Lowell, but serious writers--some of them new, like Scott Fitzgerald--appeared regularly in this "elder" magazine.

The complexity of relations between the little magazines and the publishers of the big ones is perfectly embodied in an ad that appeared in John T. Frederick's regional little magazine, *The Midland*. Apparently Frederick had been soliciting advertising from Doubleday and Company. They agreed to give him some

Will the Readers of The Midland Read Advertisements?

In an unusually persuasive letter from Mr. Frederick, the Managing Editor, we are told that they will. We believe he is right and this advertisement is a means to test his confidence. It is presented to call attention to what everyone agrees is the most beautiful publication in America:

COUNTRY LIFE IN AMERICA

It ought to interest every man or woman who takes THE MIDLAND. The smell of the soil is on every one of its pages—as well as the fine insight of writers who can see what the great world of nature holds and interpret it. The pictures have set a new standard in magazine illustration. We are so confident that the magazine will commend itself to you that we want to send you

A COPY WITH OUR COMPLIMENTS

If you like it, send us \$1.00 and we will send you the four following issues—the five numbers would cost you on the news-stands \$2.05. It is because we want to get you started as a reader of *Country Life* that we make this unusual offer to you at less than half price. We hope you will accept our invitation and draw up your chair to the *Country Life* fireside. This will be a source of pleasure to you and it will demonstrate to the publishers of THE MIDLAND that they have a magazine that pays advertisers.

Merely write your name and address in the margin, tear out this page and mail today to

DOUBLEDAY, PAGE & COMPANY, GARDEN CITY, N. Y.



OUR HOME IN THE COUNTRY

and used the opportunity to advertise their own mass magazine, *Country Life in America*. There are several things about the appearance of this ad in *The Midland* that are interesting for our purposes. For one, it shows that a little magazine might pursue advertising aggressively. For another, it shows the advertiser using the need of the little magazine for funds as an argument for buying its own bigger magazine. Subscribe to our magazine, the ad says, and you will prove that we should continue to provide revenue to this little magazine that needs our support. And finally, it shows two modern magazines, sharing an interest in country things. *Country Life in America* was edited by a Cornell University botanist, who said in its first number (Nov., 1901) that the "growth of literature pertaining to plants and animals and the out-of-doors is one of the most emphatic and significant movements of the times" (quoted in Mott, IV, 338).

The first issue of *The Midland*, published in January, 1915, had a healthy six pages of advertising, and among its contents, an indication of why John T. Frederick pursued advertising so zealously. The second item in this issue is a letter from Johnson Brigham, dated December 5, 1914, in which he tells us that "Twenty-one years ago at this time I was toiling over the initial number of my *Midland Monthly* which was to bear the date, January 1894." Brigham's magazine ran for about five years, moving from Des Moines to St. Louis when he gave up the editorship, but never quite making it financially. In his letter to *The Midland*, he explained this failure: "The weakness of the situation lay in my inability to obtain general advertising at paying prices" (4). Ezra Pound could never come to terms with the economic side of modern culture. Other modernists were less pure in their faith, more willing to compromise with advertising, without allowing it

to dominate them completely. But this is a story we can only understand if we see what was going on in the magazines themselves.

Modernism had everything to do with urbanization--which in turn generated a counter-movement away from the cities, as surely as the rise of mass magazines involved a counter-movement into little ones. That is, the emphasis on the city as the site of the modern, which we find in most theories of modernism, is just one side of a process that drove many modernist artists and writers into the country. For every Eliot there is a Frost, for every Joyce a Hemingway, and for every Picasso a Matisse. *The Midland* itself arose partly as a response to a lecture delivered by Josiah Royce at the State University of Iowa in 1902. In this lecture, later published as "Provincialism," Royce advised, "Let your province then be your first social idea. Cultivate its young men, and keep them near you. Foster provincial independence. Adorn your surroundings with the beauty of art. Serve faithfully your community and the nation will be served" (quoted in Hoffman et al., 133). "There can be little doubt," (say Hoffman et al.) "that [John T.] Frederick was perfectly aware of Royce's Phi Beta Kappa address, delivered in the home town of *The Midland*" (133). And there is little doubt that a regional modernism existed alongside urban modernism, and a mass modernism alongside an elite modernism.

My point is that we must study all these phenomena together, if we are to have any hope of comprehending modernism. We must, in the words of a memorable meeting at a conference of the Modernist Studies Association, go "beyond the little magazines," in order to understand them properly. And we must go to them as they were issued, and not rely on sanitized reprints or bound copies with the original ads stripped out and discarded. There is archival work to be done here, for only after we locate runs of the

original issues of modern magazines can we hope for some digital editions of them that will allow us to encounter their pages as their first readers did, as products of a complex interaction between traditional and new, mass and elite, purity and impurity--an interaction of elements which was, in fact, modernism.

Since I am engaged in this sort of work myself, perhaps I should conclude with a report on the current state of affairs in the archive of modernist periodicals. At the Modernist Journals Project (MJP), looking for periodicals important to the rise of modernism from 1890 to 1922, we made an important and appalling discovery. Searching the Brown University Library for *Scribner's Magazine*, we discovered that our "complete" run of *Scribner's* consisted of copies that have been bound--with the advertising pages stripped out and discarded in the binding process. Further research demonstrated that this was the case with other periodicals in the Brown Libraries and in other libraries as well. Even Princeton, which has the Scribner archive, had bound copies of *Scribner's Magazine* with most of the advertising pages gone--which for most issues meant over 100 pages missing. I am happy to report that Princeton has been searching for original issues of the magazine from 1910 to 1922, which the MJP will use as the basis for a digital edition, but the problem is enormous and it will take a serious effort by the scholarly community and the libraries to remedy it.

The discussion of advertising in *Poetry* magazine above could not have been based on the "complete" run of *Poetry* in the Brown Library, because in that run the few advertising pages in the magazine have been left out. The MJP is now working with the U. of Chicago Library toward a digital edition of *Poetry* from 1912 through 1922, based on the original issues in their collection, which is nearly complete and will be filled in

over the coming year. The main point here is that what Sean Latham and I have called "the hole in the archive" (*PMLA*, xxxxx) applies to both the little magazines and the large ones. The ad from *Midland* discussed above came from an original issue in the U. of Iowa Library. It is not in the bound copies of this journal. At present, we do not know the exact dimensions of the hole in the archive, but we have every reason to suspect that it is both wide and deep.

To remedy this, the MJP will soon offer on our web site <www.modjourn.brown.edu> a list of all magazines active during the period 1890 to 1922 that are of literary or artistic interest. Using this list, we will invite scholars and librarians to investigate their own holdings and report to us on what they have of the original issues of those magazines. Once the list is reasonably complete, we will consult with scholars of modernism and proceed to make digital editions of the magazines of greatest interest and importance, with the help and cooperation of the libraries that have significant holdings of original issues. This ambitious undertaking will depend on a level of inter-institutional cooperation that goes beyond present practice. But it can be done. The MJP has added missing copies to the collections of Princeton and the U. of Chicago of the journals in question. And they, in turn will assist in the digitization of those journals.

That, in brief, is the archival situation. We know what needs to be done, and we are starting to do it. This will be a long process, but the results will be visible as we go along, and our view of modernism's first decades should become steadier and more complete as we go. For what we are doing here is rescuing modernism from modernists like Ezra Pound, who claimed a purity of intention and achievement for modern literature

that is belied by the actual relationship between commerce and culture that made modernism what it was and is revealed so powerfully in the magazines, where the relationship between art and advertising is inescapable.

Abbreviations:

MJP Modernist Journals Project

PMLA Publications of the Modern Language Association

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