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Little Magazines and Modernism: New Approaches (review)

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Little Magazines and Modernism: New Approaches. Ed. Suzanne W. Churchill and Adam McKible. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2007. 276 pp. Illus. Index. \$99.95.

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As Mark Morrisson observes in his preface, "This is clearly the moment for a collection like *Little Magazines and Modernism: New Approaches*" (xvi). The recent academic interest in the material conditions that facilitated the development of modernism has naturally let to a focus on some little magazines, yet many of these important publications have been neglected. Thinking of writers and editors as strategic players in a diverse marketplace has changed the ways scholars discuss these periodicals, which promoted a diverse range of editorial policies, aesthetics, political views and commercial interests. This collection offers analyses of a wide range of little magazines, including the *Little Review*, *Poetry*, *Rogue*, *The Soil*, *Ebony and Topaz*, *Rhythm*, *Midland*, *The Egoist*, and others. Each contribution analyzes these periodicals in an historical context; some discuss the conversation each magazine's editor and its contributors had within the magazine, and others focus on the dialectical relationship one or more magazines had with other publications. Churchill and McKible explain in the introduction that they wish to promote "a conversational model of modernism," and the essays they have chosen fit this model. Even if some essays demonstrate antagonisms among editors or contributors, the book successfully shows that even magazines that may have self-consciously defined themselves against one another were in dialogue.

Churchill and McKible define little magazines as "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" (6). The little magazines represented in this collection can be accurately be classified this way, but the emphasis on "experimental works or radical opinions" does suggest a certain ideological focus, which can be easily seen in many of the essays. Indeed, if one were to identify an overarching argument for the collection, it would be that the editors of and contributors to little magazines were often more radical than scholars have acknowledged. Thus the radicalism of Harriet Monroe is emphasized by John Timberman Newcomb; Jayne Marek argues for the feminism of Jesse Fauset and racial activism of Nora Holt; Caroline Goesser looks at Charles S. Johnson's revolutionary use of race and sexuality in *Ebony and Topaz*; Alan Golding argues that the radical *Little Review* was self-consciously more experimental than the conservative, canonizing *The Dial*; Bruce Clarke looks at the "feminist militancy" of Dora Marsden of the *Free-woman*, the *New Freewoman* and *The Egoist*; and Adam McKible

suggests that the very different radicalism of Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven and Claude McKay brought them together, in Mike Gold's office of the revolutionary *New Masses*.

As Mark Morrisson has shown in his groundbreaking study, *The Public Face of Modernism: Little Magazines, Audiences, and Reception, 1905-1920* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), although the writing printed in a magazine like the *Little Review* was often experimental, much of the advertising was dedicated to coffee table books, mass market fiction, and other mainstream publications. The little magazines were not simply meant for an elite, "high-brow" audience, and should not be seen as somehow removed from the marketplace. In the Afterword of *Little Magazines and Modernism*, Robert Scholes offers this corrective to the laudatory tone of much of the collection: "We may wish to see the little magazines as all pure and experimental—but they weren't" (219). It may be that the "radicalism" of certain editors is most persuasively proved in some of these essays only by neglecting to mention some of the mainstream and even popular work that appeared in little magazines. For example, Harriet Monroe's *Poetry*, as Robert Scholes reminds us, "was subtitled *A Magazine of Verse*" (220). Newcomb finds a poem by Monroe that was published in the *Atlantic* in 1909, "The Hotel," to show her commitment to the avant-garde, yet a look at one of her poems published in *Poetry* in 1914 might explain why she had a reputation among poets, like Ezra Pound, for being interested in more conventional art and literature:

"A Love Song"

Your love is like a blue, blue wave
 The little rainbows play in.
 Your love is like a mountain cave
 Cool shadows darkly stay in.

It thrills me like great gales at war,
 It soothes like softest singing.
 It bears me where clear rivers are
 With reeds and rushes swinging;
 Or out to pearly shores afar
 Where temple bells are ringing.

Furthermore, in 1913 *Poetry* printed one of the most sentimental and widely quoted poems of the twentieth century, Joyce Kilmer's "Trees": "I think that I shall never see/ A poem lovely as a tree." While Newcomb is certainly right to challenge Ezra Pound's misogynist characterization of Monroe, her taste might be more accurately described as "eclectic," as a look at Monroe's enormously popular 1917 anthology, *The New Poetry*, co-edited with Alice Corbin Hendersen, makes clear.

Certainly, other essays look at a wide variety of topics related to little magazines. Joyce Wexler's analysis of Laura Riding's dictatorial editorial practices suggests a much less utopian view of experimental publications. Churchill analyzes the "Spectra Hoax," an elaborate literary joke in which Witter Bynner and Arthur Ficke parodied the *vers libre* promoted by many little magazines and pretended to start a "Spectra" school of poets. The work was taken seriously and printed in *Others*, *The Little Review* and elsewhere, which might be evidence of the bankruptcy of the new movement in poetry. But Churchill and others see this episode as more significant, since much of the "Spectra" poems were regarded by readers and critics as superior to the conventional poetry Bynner and Ficke usually produced. In the end, even the parodic spectra poems are praised as experimental successes, enabled by the radical editorial practices of little magazines.

Perhaps the most surprising essay is Jay Bochner's "The Marriage of *Rogue* and *The Soil*," which shows that the feminine *Rogue* and the masculine *The Soil* were finally joined through the actual marriage of Mina Loy (contributor to *Rogue*) and Arthur Cravan (contributor to *The Soil*). I enjoyed the unexpected romantic plot of this article so much that I regret to point out that Bochner uses Stein's "Aux Galeries Lafayette," which appeared in the first issue of *Rogue* and "Mrs.Th—y," which he claims was printed in the last issue, to argue for the feminine quality of *Rogue*. But "Mrs. Th—y" did not appear in *Rogue*; it appeared in *The Soil* in December 1916, in an interesting issue that also included an essay about "Censoring the Motion Picture," an installment of the Nick Carter serial, "The Pursuit of the Lucky Clew," and an essay by Charlie Chaplin titled "Making Fun." But this mistake surely does not affect the romance of the union of Loy and Cravan (and, in any case, perhaps Stein can appropriately be used as an exemplar of both "feminine" and "masculine" writing).

Little Magazines and Modernism makes an important contribution to modernist scholarship although, as Churchill and McKible reasonably assert, it is not "a comprehensive or exhaustive collection" (18). There are some omissions that might have helped to round out the selections, however. No little magazine published in Paris is discussed: *transition* is only mentioned in passing, and the *transatlantic review* does not even appear in the index (although studies about both appear in the useful appendix, "Books and Articles on Little Magazines, 1890-1950"). Perhaps the editors will consider a second volume, and continue the valuable conversation that they have started with this strong collection. As Robert Scholes's Modernist Journals Project (MJP) continues to make more periodicals published in the modernist period widely available to scholars, interest in this subject will certainly increase.

ERRATUM

Karen Leick's review of *Little Magazines and Modernism: New Approaches*, ed. Suzanne W. Churchill and Adam McKible in issue 19.1 (2009) contains an error. In her discussion of Jay Bochner's "The Marriage of Rogue and The Soil," Leick claims that Gertrude Stein's "Mrs. Th---y" did not appear in *Rogue*, as Bochner claims, but instead appeared in the December 1916 issue of *The Soil*. The portrait appeared both places.