

HERBERT LEIBOWITZ

SOME COMMENTS

As one of the oldest editorial kids on the block, let me offer some comments from the perspective of longevity. First, the question of money. *Parnassus*, which recently published its 30th Anniversary issue, was going to shut down because it lacked the funds to continue. When Willard Spiegelman, the editor of *The Southwest Review*, heard the news, he decided to publish a eulogy for the magazine before it was lowered into the grave—in *The Wall Street Journal*, of all places. As a result of his eloquence, a benevolent stranger stepped forward and gave us enough money to publish two more issues. Unless one has private wealth or receives an unimaginable legacy from a Ruth Lilly, as *Poetry* did, we all have to struggle to scrounge up the money to pay the printer, the landlord, the post office, the contributors, and ourselves. But money has, ultimately, little to do with literary quality. *Parnassus* can't begin to match the fees of *The New Yorker*, but some distinguished writers have written regularly for us because they've admired our stringency, stylishness, and eclecticism.

All editors like to think that had Walt Whitman sent "Song of Myself" to them, they would have immediately recognized its wild originality and clamored to publish the poem. We all wish to be the impresarios, talent scouts, clairvoyants, and angel Gabriel who bring the glad tidings to readers that a remarkable experimental novelist or lyrical poet is appearing in our pages. But the truth is, as many of the editors point out, such work is the excep-

tion: in our 1976 Bicentennial issue, we had the good fortune to publish Adrienne Rich's essay "Vesuvius at Home," which radically altered the way we viewed Emily Dickinson's poetry. There were other excellent essays in that issue, along with perfectly competent ones. That was a winning percentage. But sometimes the harvest is sparse. We are all familiar with the toxic poems and middling stories that fill our aptly named slush pile. We wade through them in search of a pearl or a diamond in the rough. There's nothing new under the sun about that. *Poetry*, our longest running poetry magazine, published landmark modernist poems by T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, Wallace Stevens, William Carlos Williams, and the Objectivists, but Harriet Monroe also chose reams of dull regional verse we no longer remember. Pound had to coax and strong-arm her into printing "Prufrock" and an exasperated Hart Crane had to explain "At Melville's Tomb" before she reluctantly agreed to publish it. Elizabeth Hardwick, a writer of fierce intelligence, once wisely admonished me to avoid the word "risky," because it is so subjective and imprecise—and self-congratulatory. What is caviar for one editor is trash fish for another. Small presses do sometimes put on stage voices of startling freshness and the trade houses sometimes do feature voices that have grown frayed and wobbly. I'm wary, though, of assigning all virtue to the small presses; their taste is not infallible, they can be rather clannish, enthroning one kind of poem. Perhaps the most brilliant book of poems of 2007, Cathy Park Hong's *Dance Dance Revolution*, was brought out by W. W. Norton.

Who gets to decide what's good literature? Certainly not a cadre of New York intellectuals, San Francisco "Language" poets, academic pontiffs, or the *vox populi* of poetry slams. Deciding what standards are applicable is a thorny issue for American democracy, with its long anti-intellectual tradition and its paranoid sus-

picion of elitism. Susan Jacoby has tried to rescue the word from its latest narrow definition "snobbism" and to remind us that The Founding Fathers were all elitists, well read in the classics and philosophy and adept in political disputation. In a culture's non-stop conversation and debate as to whether this novel or book of poems deserves praise or brickbats, all opinions are not created equal. An editor must judge the intellectual force or laziness of an argument, the accuracy or sloppiness of a critic's language: the insularity and factionalism in American poetry often leads to absurd *ex cathedra* pronouncements that poet A is a dreary formalist and poet B is the Second Coming of Yeats or Emily Dickinson. That is mere brand labeling, low-level polemics.

Space is a luxury most literary magazines do not have. But for a review magazine like *Parnassus*, I have long held that an author writing a retrospective of Zbigniew Herbert's or Kenneth Rexroth's *Collected Poems*, tracing the history of the ballad or the epigram, reinterpreting Surrealism or lovingly elaborating the glories of Classical Arab poetry needs ample room to make his or her case and to cast an enchanting spell. The Internet, of course, is the realm of vast cyberspace and black holes. My crystal ball is in the pawn shop, so I won't resort to prophecy, but this much I'll venture. Like all new technologies, it can be a medium for innovation or mindless grading, like most of the reviews on Amazon.com. In the blogosphere, I have read postings at stimulating sites and at boring ones. But the standards so far seem to me extremely loose and commonplace, too often a sort of infomercial or special pleading for one idea. I miss the pleasures of style and the provocations of making the reader set aside his prejudices and habits.

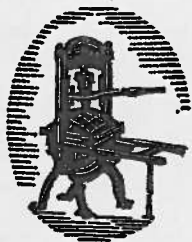
Nobody has mentioned the marvelous intangible of editing a literary magazine: foremost, the forging of friendships, first through an exchange of letters, then at a coffee shop or wine bar

table talking about a Bosnian poet and baseball, the Bayeux tapestry, and a recipe for melon soup: one imagines he's sitting in The Mermaid Tavern with Keats, Hazlitt, Leigh Hunt, and Benjamin Haydon. Equal to that pleasure are the informal colloquies with the young poets who've come to intern at *Parnassus*, where we talk shop, assess reputations, irreverently, swap jokes, puns, clerihews, listen to a Schubert song. Such, such are the joys.

William Carlos Williams often said that he would have failed as a poet without the help of the little magazines. He founded *Contact* with Robert McAlmon, served as Consulting Editor to *Others*, submitted poems to the rigorous editorial eye of Marianne Moore, even invested some of his hard-earned cash in journals with tiny circulations whose life span was that of a mayfly. *Kora in Hell*, his Dadaist experiment, ran in *The Little Review* along with Joyce's *Ulysses*. I don't think literary magazines will disappear unless culture itself is obliterated. So, editors, sharpen those red pencils and make sure the delete button is working on your computers.

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THE LITTLE REVIEW



CHAPTER IV

THE "personal" magazine usually reflects the editor's personality on the cover and on every page. There was Margaret Anderson's very personal *Little Review*.

In explaining the varied career of *The Little Review*, one must keep a close eye on the impulsive temperament of the editor. Margaret Anderson's magazine was started in Chicago with scarcely any plan for financing it,¹ and she published it

on sheer will power from March 1914 through May 1929. Stories and novels were accepted which she knew in advance would mean a journey to court, a fine, and not much publicity. She colored her review with much of the enthusiasm of her youth, and it reflects often her sudden shifts in interest. First, it was feminism. Next Emma Goldman came to Chicago and the magazine became a strong sponsor of anarchism. There followed a number of other enthusiasms: imagism, symbolism, dadaism, the machine, and the work of Brancusi, among them. It was an exciting magazine, quixotic, sometimes immature, but always radiating the blue sparks of highly charged feeling.

Many were the stars that danced before Margaret Anderson's impulsive vision. The editor was always drawn to the "marked," the "unusual" experimentalism, the most advanced of all the advanced. Inevitably, there was to come a time when she could glimpse no further horizon.

She was twenty-one when her inspiration came.² She had been in Chicago for several months, writing book reviews for *The Dial*. One

¹ A term used by Gorham Munson, "How to Run a Little Magazine," *Saturday Review of Literature*, xv, 3, 4, 14 (March 27, 1937).

² Margaret Anderson, *My Thirty Years' War*, New York, 1930, p. 36.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

night she awoke and found life meaningless. Here is the explanation, taken from her autobiography, *My Thirty Years' War*, of how life was given meaning and how *The Little Review* was born:

"So it was for the *Little Review*. I had been curiously depressed all day. In the night I awakened. First precise thought: I know why I'm depressed—nothing inspired is going on. Second: I demand that life be inspired every moment. Third: the only way to guarantee this is to have inspired conversation every moment. Fourth: most people never get so far as conversation; they haven't the stamina, and there is no time. Fifth: if I had a magazine I could spend my time filling it up with the best conversation the world has to offer. Sixth: marvelous idea—salvation. Seventh: decision to do it. Deep sleep."

Whether all of this happened so neatly, or whether the explanation is an instance of the editor's instinct for drama, is of no importance. She suddenly began talking about her marvelous new magazine. She talked so intensely that a young journalist decided to give large monthly portions of his salary for the cause.³ Immediately she was off to New York for advertising, and she actually collected about \$450.⁴ In a very short time she was back in Chicago, established in the Fine Arts Building, and announcing her first issue.

Since conversation, inspired conversation, was the *sine qua non* for her, naturally *The Little Review* had to be a critical review, printing fiction and poetry only incidentally. It was a sort of Spingarnish impressionism which was called for in the first issue:

"Its [*The Little Review's*] ambitious aim is to produce criticism of books, music, art, drama, and life that shall be fresh and constructive, and intelligent from the artist's point of view. For the instinct of the artist to distrust criticism is as well founded as the mother's toward the sterile woman. More so, perhaps; for all women have some sort of instinct for motherhood, and all critics haven't an instinct for art. Criticism that is creative—that is our high goal. And criticism is never a merely interpretative function; it is creation; it gives birth! It's not necessary to cite the time-worn illustration of Da Vinci and Pater to prove it."

Following this announcement came the editor's ambitious article about life and art, referring to Paderewski, Galsworthy, William Vaughn Moody, and Rupert Brooke, studded with many "beauties" and "passions." Floyd Dell expressed a firm belief that love and work

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

⁷ Anderson, "Announcement," *The Little Review*, 1, 2 (March 1914).

are good for women. Margery Currey and Cornelia Anderson (Mrs. Sherwood Anderson) wrote book reviews. Llewellyn Jones, George Burman Foster, George Soule, and Sherwood Anderson contributed articles. Vachel Lindsay told in a poem "How a Little Girl Danced"; Eunice Tietjens contributed a verse about sadness; and Arthur Davison Ficke was represented by five poems. In *My Thirty Years' War* Miss Anderson gives a rather unfair estimate of this first issue when she says: "The first number betrayed nothing but my adolescence. . . . What I needed was not a magazine but a club room where I could have informed disciples twice a week that nature was wonderful, love beautiful, and art inspired."⁸

For the following four or five months she continued her interest in criticism. During the spring and summer there were articles on such subjects as "Futurism" and "The New Paganism," but as the winter of 1914 drew on, she began to neglect criticism. Perhaps good criticism was hard to find. At any rate poets were beginning to appear more and more frequently, especially the imagists who were rapidly capturing Miss Anderson's attention. But let us pause over the titles of the critical articles dealing with art which appeared in these early numbers: "Futurism and Pseudo Futurism," "The Meaning of Bergsonism," "The Germ" (a discussion of the Pre-Raphaelite little magazine), "The New Paganism," and several articles on imagism. *The Little Review's* editor was being caught in an experimental current which stemmed from Baudelaire, down through Huysmans, Mallarmé, and Rimbaud among the French, from the Pre-Raphaelites, Pater, and Wilde among the English, and from Poe and Edgar Saltus among the Americans. It was a current that led to imagism. During 1915 and 1916 Miss Anderson fought on the front line in the battle for imagism.

She was still defending the imagists in November 1916 when her magazine carried sixteen poems by Richard Aldington, but her enthusiasm had been for some months quite apparently on the wane. Impatiently she proclaimed that "The Little Review is a magazine that believes in life for Art's sake." As early as August 1916 her impatience had generated into a fever of nervous disgust.

"I have been realizing the ridiculous tragedy of the Little Review. It has been published for over two years without coming near its ideal. . . .

"Well—I wanted Art in the Little Review. There has been a little of it, just a very little. . . . It is tragic, I tell you. . . .

"Now we shall have Art in this magazine or we shall stop publishing

⁸ Anderson, *My Thirty Years' War*, p. 47.

it. I don't care where it comes from—America or the South Sea Islands. I don't care whether it is brought by youth or age. I only want the miracle! . . .

"I loathe compromise, and yet I have been compromising in every issue by putting in things that were 'almost good' or 'interesting enough' or 'important.' There will be no more of it. If there is only one really beautiful thing for the September number it shall go in and the other pages will be left blank."⁹

With September came a magazine filled largely with blank leaves. Two pages edified the reader by describing in pen and ink cartoons the light occupations of the editors on their California sojourn: there was the editor beating at her Mason and Hamlin; Jane Heap—recently adopted associate editor, who was to play a considerable role in *Little Review* history—sat astride her broken-down horse; there was a making of fudge and of conversation. Decisive proof that the imagists had lost Miss Anderson's interest. A change was in the offing.

Although *The Little Review* battled strenuously for feminism, anarchism, Ben Hecht, and the imagists, it fought harder to keep alive. The drama is an enlightening and amusing commentary on the fortunes of the unsubsidized little magazine.

In those early Chicago days Schlogel's restaurant, the meeting place of the journalists and literary elite, seethed with Margaret Anderson gossip. "Where is Margaret?" "What's she doing now?" were frequent questions.¹⁰ A person who inspires such fascination, and of whom are written such eulogies as the following, quoted by Harry Hansen in his *Midwest Portraits*, will never lack supporters:

"She was always exquisite, as if emerging from a scented boudoir, not from a mildewed tent or a camp where frying bacon was scenting the atmosphere. She was always vivid, is yet, and beautiful to look upon, and lovely in her mind. There is a sort of high, wind-blown beauty about her; her fluffy hair blows marvelously, her eyes are in Lake Michigan's best blue. And she is valiant, always."¹¹

Gushing, but significant for an understanding of how *The Little Review* lived. When Miss Anderson spoke in "gasps, gaps, and gestures," she charmed Harriet Dean into donating energy and money, or Eunice Tietjens into giving a diamond ring.¹² "Unknown people asked me to lunch, urged me to talk about my 'ideals,' and the next

⁹ Anderson, "A Real Magazine," *The Little Review*, III, 1-2 (August 1916).

¹⁰ Hansen, *Midwest Portraits*, p. 102.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

¹² Anderson, *My Thirty Years' War*, p. 68.

day sent a hundred dollars for the ideals."¹³ Thus *The Little Review's* credit in the first "ecstatic" year or so. Later money did not flow into the coffers so readily, especially after anarchism was adopted. But always she managed to keep afloat. She lived in apartments without furniture, until one cold April day, when room rent was no longer forthcoming, she piled her oriental rugs on an ancient wagon, moved to the edge of the lake, pitched a tent, and lived there until the following November. During those tenting days the only clothes she possessed were a hat, a crepe georgette blouse, and a blue tailored suit, but everyone thought her well-groomed, for she had found a more expressive way of walking. And besides, the blouse could be washed every night in Lake Michigan.¹⁴

With the exceptions of the first two or three issues the magazine never garnered much advertising. Businessmen do not advertise in an anarchist magazine. For over a year the editor sought advertising, her indefatigable energy leading her to attempt a witty strategy. In the June-July, 1915, number she ran several pages which might have contained advertisements but did not. Small boxes in the middle of the back pages carried several amusing announcements, two of which deserve quoting:

Mandel Brothers might have taken this page to feature their library furnishings, desk sets, and accessories—of which they are supposed to have the most interesting assortment in town. I learned that on the authority of someone who referred to Mandel's as "the most original and artistic store in Chicago." If they should advertise those things here I have no doubt the 1,000 Chicago subscribers to the *Little Review* would overflow their store.

Carson, Pirie, Scott and Company ought to advertise something, though I don't know just what. The man I interviewed made such a face when I told him we were "radical" that I haven't had the courage to go back and pester him for the desired full-page. The Carson-Pirie attitude toward change of any sort is well-known—I think they resent even having to keep pace with the change in fashions.¹⁵

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 88-90.

¹⁵ Anderson, *The Little Review*, II, 57, 59 (June-July, 1915).

Of course *The Little Review* expected to collect on some of these gratuitous mentionings, and of course it never did.

The device of giving a party for the Chicago subscribers, admission 50 cents, was tried only once. The attempt to cajole *Little Review* readers into ordering their books by mail through the magazine, which was to receive a percentage of the sale price of the book, was not very successful. The editors had to print their monthly 60 pages from the money that Margaret Anderson enticed from her friends and enemies, from the meager 2,000¹⁶ subscribers who paid at first \$2.50 a year and later \$1.25, and from the savings of tent economy. Only a heroic need for the magazine kept it from sinking.

II

And then, in March 1917, began the New York period. *The Little Review* lived for five years, its years of greatness, in two small basement rooms of the old Van Buren house at 31 West 14th Street.

The years following 1916 saw a fiery eruption of experimentalism. The new symbolists were making their first appearances, and Miss Anderson found herself fighting tooth and nail for the right of America to read Joyce, Dorothy Richardson, Eliot, and many another symbolist. Also at this time she began her fight for the privilege of introducing to America such literary movements as cubism, futurism, and expressionism, movements that had hitherto received only the slightest notice in this country.

Symbolism gave the inner self, and particularly the feelings, a more piercing scrutiny than romanticism had ever done. The early symbolist saw more of the complicated and inexplicable in life than the romantic. Such men as Poe, Baudelaire, Huysmans, Rimbaud, Yeats, Mallarmé, and many another used every magic to suggest this complexity of the spirit. The real and the imaginary were confused; fantasy was employed; metaphors were consciously mixed; and often poetry approached music.¹⁷ More recent symbolists have exploited all of these devices and quite a few more. Proust, Joyce, Valéry, Stein, and T. S. Eliot have found life even more intricate than the earlier symbolists, largely because of the speculations of Bergson and Freud—Bergson

¹⁶ A conjecture, based on a statement in the June-July, 1915, issue that the magazine had 1,000 Chicago subscribers.

¹⁷ Edmund Wilson, *Axel's Castle*, New York, 1931, pp. 1-25.

with his conjectures as to the influence of memory on our action, and Freud with his ideas concerning the part the subconscious plays in our lives.¹⁸ Quantum physics has also cast its shadow on the thinking of the recent symbolist.

The new romantic cults that came into being between 1900 and 1930 took their cue from symbolism's radical subjectivism and have carried the ideal of exploring the innermost mind of the individual to a near limit.

Futurism was founded by the Italian poet, F. T. Marinetti, whose first manifestoes were published in *Le Figaro* in February of 1909. As we have seen in Chapter II, futurism set itself firmly to the task of abolishing the accepted standards, particularly "history, exoticism, love-stories, syntax, punctuation, conjugations, the stage, concerts, verses, colleges, art-galleries, literary critics and professors." Marinetti, like his dada and surrealist descendants, called for "the revolution of the word," "neologisms, simultaneous and onomatopoeic expression, the substitution of noise for music." Speed, dynamism, force were the slogans of futurism. It demanded electric flashings, vitality and intensity, and above everything an expression of the individual ego.¹⁹

Contemporaneous with futurism came German expressionism and French cubism. Neither cubism nor expressionism sought the frenzied movement characteristic of futurist work, but these three schools were at one in demanding the personal approach to subject matter. Pablo Picasso and his Montmartre group believed the constructive imagination to be constrained by the traditional concept of the need for three-dimensional perspective. The cubists wished to forget perspective, to take their glance at three-dimensional nature, then break it up, and finally rearrange the elements into a world of two-dimensional volumes and planes expressive of a formal and harmonious relationship. There was little cubistic literature, but the movement did strengthen the ideal of self-expression. German expressionism, however, affected all of the arts. "We will transform into plastic form live states of the soul, we will jerk your sensibilities into the most acute response,"²⁰ runs an expressionist manifesto, and it is suggestive of what such men as Kaiser, Pirandello, and the early Sherwood Anderson were attempting when they selected one aspect of a personality and dramatized it by symbol, distortion, exaggeration, and fantasy. Always the artist's vision of the

¹⁸ Regis Michaud, *Vingtième Siècle*, New York, 1933, pp. xviii-xix.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 408.

²⁰ Thomas Craven, *Modern Art*, New York, 1934, p. 225.

"psychic state" which he wishes to interpret attempts to be "original."

In April 1917, Ezra Pound became foreign editor of *The Little Review*. Pound knew many of the European experimentalists, and was obviously the person best qualified to find the "beautiful" art which Margaret Anderson sought. Pound wanted an American organ where he, Joyce, T. S. Eliot, and Wyndham Lewis could appear whenever they felt like it—usually about every month. Margaret Anderson thought this "the most stunning plan that any magazine has had the good fortune to announce for a long, long time."²¹ The experimentalists having been adopted, the periodical began to appear in green, orange, and red covers, each of which heralded: *The Little Review, a Magazine of the Arts. Making No Compromise with the Public Taste*. Hatred for the "usual," love for the "unusual," became a fetish with *The Little Review*.

The great event of 1918, and probably of *The Little Review's* history, was the beginning of Joyce's *Ulysses*. For three years the novel ran in installments, four of which were confiscated and burned by the Post Office Department.

"It was like a burning at the stake as far as I was concerned. The care we had taken to preserve Joyce's text intact; the worry over the bills that accumulated when we had no advance funds; the technique I used on printer, bookbinders, paper houses—tears, prayers, hysterics or rages—to make them push ahead without a guarantee of money; the addressing, wrapping, stamping, mailing; the excitement of anticipating the world's response to the literary masterpiece of our generation . . . and then a notice from the Post Office: BURNED."²²

Government burnings, newspaper charges that the magazine was a purveyor of lascivious literature, nonrecognition of *Ulysses*²³ on the part of intellectuals—all this was but a prelude to the battle over Joyce. The climax came in December 1920 when John Sumner's Society for the Suppression of Vice brought the review before a Special Sessions Court on an obscenity charge. John Quinn, able New York lawyer and patron of the arts (he had donated \$1,600 to the periodical), defended the magazine and lost the verdict. The editors were fined \$100. Margaret Anderson insisted on going to jail rather than paying the money, but her friends dissuaded her. A woman who hated *Ulysses* paid

²¹ Anderson, "Announcement," *The Little Review*, iv, 25 (April 1917).

²² Anderson, *My Thirty Years' War*, p. 175.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 175.

the hundred dollars, and the case ended with disappointingly little publicity.²⁴

But *Ulysses* was not the only exciting work the magazine printed from 1917 to the end of 1921. Dorothy Richardson's frequent contributions included *Interim*. Sherwood Anderson sent many of his expressionistic stories, later to make up the volume *Winesburg, Ohio*. Ford Madox Ford published his *Men and Women*. Pound was represented by much of his poetry and practically all of the critical papers which later appeared in *Instigations*. There were a good many things by Wyndham Lewis, such as *The Ideal Giant* and *Cantleman's Spring Mate*. Poems, stories, and plays came from William B. Yeats, and there was a single group of twenty-four reproductions from Brancusi's sculpture. Much of the early work of T. S. Eliot, Ben Hecht, Emanuel Carnevali, William Carlos Williams, Djuna Barnes, Aldous Huxley, Arthur Waley, John Rodker, Mary Butts, Jean Cocteau, Louis Aragon, Philippe Soupault, and Francis Picabia found its way to *The Little Review* during these five years. Miss Anderson's pride in her little magazine knew no bounds; well did she know that there was only one answer to her question: "Is *The Little Review* contributing to the mental upkeep of Columbia Gem of the Ocean?"²⁵

The magazine performed an invaluable service to America in those years, since it was one of the few outlets in this country for ideas and techniques which were to influence profoundly much of our later writing. Had it not been for the sacrifices and limitless enthusiasm of Margaret Anderson, it is quite likely that the postwar American fiction and poetry would have been slower in its experimental course. "My idea of a magazine which makes any claim to artistic value is that . . . it should suggest, not conclude; that it should stimulate to thinking rather than dictate thought."²⁶ It was precisely this function that made the periodical an important force in American letters.

How *The Little Review* managed to keep sailing during the late teens is a splendid, if sometimes pathetic, story which we cannot dwell upon. Harriet Monroe, in reviewing *My Thirty Years' War*, remarked: "One kind of courage they had which this reviewer could never attain—the courage to run into debt and print issue after issue without knowing, or indeed caring, where the money would come from to pay for it.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 214-21.

²⁵ "What *The Little Review* Has Done," an advertisement in *The Little Review*, ix, inside back cover (Autumn-Winter, 1923-24).

²⁶ Anderson, "Our First Year," *The Little Review*, i, 2 (February 1915).



Margaret Anderson



William Carlos Williams



Norman Macleod



Alfred Kreymborg

THE LITTLE REVIEW

THE MAGAZINE THAT IS READ BY THOSE
WHO WRITE THE OTHERS

MARCH, 1918

Ulysses, 1.

James Joyce

Imaginary Letters, VIII.

Wyndham Lewis

Matinee

Jessie Dismorr

The Classics "Escape"

Ezra Pound

Cantico del Sole

Women and Men, II.

Ford Madox Hueffer

Bertha

Arthur Symonds

A List of Books

Ezra Pound

Wyndham Lewis's "Tarr"

Raymonde Collignon

The Reader Critic

Copyright, 1918, by Margaret Anderson

MARGARET ANDERSON, *Editor*

EZRA POUND, *Foreign Editor*

24 West Sixteenth Street, New York

Foreign office:

5 Holland Place Chambers, London W. 8.

25 cents a copy

\$2.50 a year

Entered as second-class matter at P. O., New York, N. Y.

Published monthly by Margaret Anderson

A typical contents page of THE LITTLE REVIEW

And frequently it didn't come, and printers and editors alike were perilously near starvation. It was a gallant adventure—the *Little Review*—and all the audacity and flaming sincerity of youth were in it."²⁷

The magazine was swallowing over \$10,000 a year. The editors did, indeed, go without food at times. They made their own clothes, did their own cooking and scrubbing, even cut their own hair.²⁸ As in Chicago, they opened a bookstore in connection with the magazine, this time not on the mail order plan but a regular shop in *The Little Review* office. There was an appeal in 1920 for \$5,000 in the hope that one thousand persons would contribute \$5 apiece. Once, in desperation, Margaret picked out the tallest skyscraper, took the elevator to the top floor, and began a canvass of the entire building. Several endowments were offered, usually with restraining chains; only those gifts were accepted which left the editor a free hand.²⁹ In one way and another, "real credit," Miss Anderson's personality, kept the magazine afloat.

The monthly became a quarterly in the autumn of 1921. The handling of mechanical details was becoming a superhuman task. The editors were forcing themselves through the drudgery of reading copy, wrapping, and distributing the periodical twelve times a year. All of this might have been endured.³⁰ But added to these annoyances was a growing war with the printer, a situation that finally became so unbearable that the editors had to spend days at a time in the print shop goading the printer to his work.³¹ No doubt it was physically impossible for a nervous temperament to stand many fights such as the one indicated by the following letter:

DEAR MISS ANDERSON:

Tomorrow will be a week that I received copy with money in advance as agreed, and was not able to start and will not be able before next week. It is no use Miss Anderson to be so nervous. You want always first-class work and I cannot make. Do you not know that we had war? Workingman is now king. If you would pay me three thousand dollars I will not make good work. This is other times. I wrote you about this many times and will not repeat any more, but wish to say if you pay all in advance and two, three hundred per cent more as now, you must not expect good work or on time. I want no responsibility.³²

²⁷ Harriet Monroe, "Personality Rampant," *Poetry*, xxxvii, 98 (November 1930).

²⁸ Anderson, *My Thirty Years' War*, p. 156.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 187-88.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Anderson, *The Little Review*, vi, 64 (March 1920).

III

From 1921 on *The Little Review*, taking advantage of a low money exchange rate in France, appeared in a luxurious format, full of bizarre types, printed with inks of many colors. The Autumn-Winter, 1924-1925, issue, with its high quality paper, its elaborate reproductions of Juan Gris's work, its black, yellow, and red headache inks, was a far cry from those issues of the war years when the magazine was printed on a thin, low grade stock, always threatening to disintegrate at the slightest touch.

After the experimental climax in the brilliant works of Dorothy Richardson, Joyce, Yeats, Proust, and others, came a denouement of dadaism. Dada was born at six P.M., February 8, 1916, at the Café Voltaire, Zurich, Switzerland. It was largely the work of Tristan Tzara, a Roumanian. Dada was conscious of a large disgust with western bourgeois culture and war-making. It wanted to destroy the whole cultural structure, beginning with literature and the other arts.³³ The chief attack on letters consisted in writing meaningless sentences, or in composing subjective tales that could be understood only by the author.

Miss Anderson migrated from New York to Paris in 1922, two years after André Breton, Louis Aragon, Philippe Soupault, Paul Eluard, and Tristan Tzara had founded their review, *Littérature*. By the time Margaret Anderson arrived in Paris, *Dadaist Disgust* (the title of a dadaist pamphlet) was on the march, crusading "with all the fists of one's being in destructive action"³⁴ against a world of silliness, stuffiness, and brigandage. Young men of talent, most of them just out of the trenches, were thumbing their noses at the world, not only through their writings but in individual actions. Fervent young dadaists chased about Paris, interrupting bourgeois plays, burning popular literary heroes in effigy, denouncing religion from churchyards—insulting the hated public in every fashion conceivable. Louis Aragon threatened to wreck the offices of *Les Nouvelles Littéraires* if it continued to mention his name, and carried out his threat when he was next mentioned. He terrified critics by threatening beatings if they dared review his books; no one accepted the dare.³⁵

The Little Review threw its energy gaily into this fracas, printing

³³ Michaud, *Vingtième Siècle*, p. 409.

³⁴ Malcolm Cowley, *Exile's Return*, p. 159.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

much of the work of Guillaume Apollinaire, Tristan Tzara, Os-Anders, Louis Gilmore, W. G. Jitro, Louis Grudin, Jean Cocteau, and others, delighted for a time with the dadaist vision of a new world order where the novel, the purposeless, the "marked," the "individual pursuing his individual whims, the artist riding his hobbyhorse, his dada," would rule.

But dadaism finally bogged down when it began to embrace that portion of its manifesto announcing: "Art is a private matter; the artist does it for himself; any work that can be understood is the product of a journalist."³⁶

Even before dada had failed, surrealism cropped up, carrying a great deal of dada baggage, but also adding a positive note. Dada's influence on surrealism was fundamental. Dada had cleared the field for the ideal of absolute self-expression. It had suggested art for the individual's sake and had set a precedent for breaking with bourgeois cultural ideology. To some extent dadaism was also responsible for the surrealists' tendency toward a deformatization of language, though the latter group has never been very radical in this respect.³⁷

But even with dada, personalized self-expression was confined largely to an exploration of the writer's conscious mind. About 1924 surrealist André Breton (once a dadaist) and his followers assumed the right right to explore their subconscious and unconscious depths. It is true that the symbolists had made gestures in the direction of the subconscious under the influence of Freud and Bergson, but no previous group had explored the mind with the thoroughness of the surrealists. *Surréalisme*—a term used by Guillaume Apollinaire as early as 1918—shows very little interest in anything above the subconscious.³⁸

Breton's group attempts to transcend the reality that our sensory equipment reveals to the conscious mind. It is interested in what the subconscious and unconscious do with the patterns formed by the conscious. The deformations, the grotesques, the magical exoticisms into which the deeper regions transform our ordinary "real" impressions, is the proper subject matter of art, for the unconscious represents a higher reality. Surrealism sets for itself the positive program of systematically exploring the innermost man, an exploration which in its opening years was conducted often through the aids of automatic writing and hypnosis. Spontaneous images are emphasized, and the

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

³⁷ Michaud, *Vingtième Siècle*, p. 419.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 418-20.

real and the imaginary are contrasted by such leaders as André Breton, Philippe Soupault, Louis Aragon, Paul Eluard, Robert Desnos, Joseph Delteil, Benjamin Péret, and Henry Michaux in their efforts to free the imagination, to give it a wider working scope.³⁹ Commander Breton has formulated the clearest and briefest definition of the literary aspects of the movement that has yet been published. His definition is to be found in *Le Manifeste du Surréalisme*.

"SURREALISME, n.m. Automatisme psychique pur par lequel on se propose d'exprimer, soit verbalement, soit par écrit, soit de toute autre manière, le fonctionnement réel de la pensée. Dictée de la pensée, en l'absence de tout contrôle exercé par la raison, en dehors de toute préoccupation esthétique du morale. ENCYCL. Philos. Le surréalisme repose sur la croyance à la réalité supérieure de certaines formes d'associations négligées jusqu'à lui, à la toute-puissance du rêve, au jeu désintéressé de la pensée. Il tend à ruiner définitivement tous les autres mécanismes psychiques et à se substituer à eux dans la résolution des principaux problèmes de la vie."⁴⁰

It is apparent that here is a fusion of the naturalistic empirical spirit with the romantic longing for the "above," the mysterious, the supernatural.⁴¹

The Little Review entertained surrealism for two years, but gradually the editors became weary. From the winter of 1926 to May 1929 the magazine could find no excuse for publication. The white flag of complete surrender was finally hauled up. It was with a trace of pomposity that the editors delivered the sword in their 1929 capitulation number.

Miss Anderson said in part:

"So I made a magazine exclusively for the very good artists of the time. Nothing more simple for me than to be the art arbiter of the world.

"I still feel the same way—with a rather important exception. As this number will show, even the artist doesn't know what he is talking about. And I can no longer go on publishing a magazine in which no one really knows what he is talking about. It doesn't interest me.

"I certainly couldn't live my life today among people who know nothing of life. It would be as if some one asked me to live seriously

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 419.

⁴⁰ André Breton, *Manifeste du Surréalisme*, Paris, 1929, p. 46.

⁴¹ For a supplementary discussion of surrealism, especially as it is developed in several independent surrealist magazines, see Chapter x, pp. 180-84.

all the redundant human drama that undeveloped people like to put you through. Oh no."⁴²

The statement "even the artist doesn't know what he's talking about," refers to a questionnaire which had been circulated to the world's most prominent artists, asking such questions as "What do you look forward to?"; "What is your attitude towards art today?"; "Why do you go on living?"

Jane Heap expressed herself volubly in that last issue:

"For years we offered the *Little Review* as a trial-track for racers. We hoped to find artists who could run with the great artists of the past or men who could make new records. But you can't get race horses from mules. I do not believe that the conditions of our life can produce men who can give us masterpieces. Masterpieces are not made from chaos. If there is confusion of life there will be confusion of art. This is in no way a criticism of the men who are working in the arts. They can only express what is here to express.

"We have given space in the *Little Review* to 23 new systems of art (all now dead), representing 19 countries. In all of this we have not brought forward anything approaching a masterpiece except the 'Ulysses' of Mr. Joyce. 'Ulysses' will have to be the masterpiece of this time. But it is too personal, too tortured, too special a document to be a masterpiece in the true sense of the word. It is an intense and elaborate expression of Mr. Joyce's dislike of this time.

"Self-expression is not enough; experiment is not enough; the recording of special moments or cases is not enough. All of the arts have broken faith or lost connection with their origin and function. They have ceased to be concerned with the legitimate and permanent material of art."⁴³

And so ended *The Little Review*. The magazine published only two unsolicited writers in its life and was not much given to discoveries. Ben Hecht, with his tale "Life," was the first find. Sherwood Anderson wrote criticism from the beginning and one of his first published stories, "Vibrant Life," appeared in March 1916.⁴⁴

But we can justify *The Little Review*, not on its discovery record, but on its "service" record. It was one of the first to enter the fight for experimental writing, battling for the new movements and for a host of

⁴² Anderson, Editorial, *The Little Review*, xii, 3 (May 1929).

⁴³ Jane Heap, "Lost: A Renaissance," *The Little Review*, xii, 5-6 (May 1929).

⁴⁴ Sherwood Anderson's first published story, "The Rabbit Pen," was printed in *Harper's*, cxxxix, 207-10 (July 1914).

little known writers who were later designed to become leaders of their generation. Further, the magazine was the first to give us an adequate cross-section view of European and American experimentalism, for it explored, at one time or another in its turbulent life, about every experimental highway and byway. Though much of this experimentalism was freakish, especially after the move to France, the periodical did, despite attitudinizing, erratic editorial whims, and a frequent lack of literary taste, present a great volume of significant work, some of it the most significant of our time. And, as Miss Anderson says, even when the magazine was at a low level it was still suggestive, suggestive especially for the young men of literary inclinations who were first beginning to think of writing between 1915 and 1922. *The Little Review* was a potent charmer; its glamour and strangeness fired the imaginations of many a young Hart Crane and Ernest Hemingway, often suggesting the roads they were to travel. Nor must we forget the spell cast on still other young men, persons who were soon to establish little magazines of their own. *Broom*, *Secession*, and *This Quarter* were in many respects patterned after the rebel, combative *Little Review*.

There are many reasons for writers, now between forty and fifty years old, to remember gratefully *The Little Review*, and for their insistence that it was the best magazine of their youth.

THE THIRD DECADE



CHAPTER V

WRITING for the opening number of *Decision* (January 1941), Stephen Vincent Benét remarks upon the great difference between "A Review of Free Culture" and the magazines of 1921. "There were plenty of new magazines in the America of 1921—but they took freedom for granted, except where John S. Sumner and the Watch and Ward Society were concerned. The fight then was against a particular and rather limited form of censorship; a censorship that tried to keep the writer from handling all sections of life. It seemed an important fight at that time, and I think it was one. . . ."¹

From the point of view of the forties, the magazines of the twenties might well have appeared unimportant. But that opinion was by no means held by those who edited them and wrote for them. It was an exciting time. The war was over. It had left a great number of "unemployables"—both those of the type of John Dos Passos' Charley Anderson, back from Europe with gunshot nerves, and the other sort, the "aesthetically unemployable." The times were ripe for change; they were years of mockery, open defiance of the Babbitts of Zenith, state of Winnemac, and of Cambridge, Massachusetts, alike. Harriet Monroe's magazine seemed tame, "The nervous guardian of the corn-fed poetic cliché."² The heritage of which the twenties took advantage was near by, a matter of a few years past, or of the actual living present. James Joyce had been heard from in the London *Egoist*. Wyndham Lewis was writing, and waiting for an opportunity to launch another magazine. D. H. Lawrence, having survived the war, was carrying on his own

¹ "America—1941," *Decision*, 1, 9 (January 1941).

² Quoted by Samuel Putnam from the *Chicago Daily News*, in "Chicago Letter," *Modern Review*, 1, 38 (Autumn 1922).