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Review of Women Editing Modernism: Little Magazines and Literary History by Jayne E. Marek

Michael Keller, South Dakota State University

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Though a number of recent studies have convincingly recounted the indispensible role women played in producing, transmitting, and promoting key modernist texts, one is still astonished at their critical acuity and personal forbearance, and the sheer reach and impact of their efforts. Harriet Shaw Weaver's editorial and financial support of the Egoist and Egoist Press, and her unceasing beneficence toward Joyce; Harriet Monroe's founding of Poetry, the journal that helped launch and sustain the careers of Pound, Eliot, Stevens, and Frost; Marianne Moore's deft stewardship of the Dial in its final years--the examples are legion, if not quite legendary, for despite such achievements, observes Jayne Marek, "Very few literary historians treat women editors seriously" (3). Indeed, much women's work has been "overlooked, denigrated, or even attributed to men" (5). The source of such neglect and misrepresentation is that for too long scholars have relied excessively upon the self-serving accounts of men--chiefly, those of Ezra Pound--to form their assessments of the period and women's part in it. In Women Editing Modernism, Marek seeks to rectify this situation, "to restore the achievements of these women and to evaluate the overall importance of their contributions to modernist literature" (21).

In the first of her projects, the restoration, Marek largely succeeds. Her detailed accounts leave little doubt that, for instance, Harriet Monroe at Poetry and Marianne Moore at the Dial worked tirelessly on behalf of the writers they published, effectively secured for them acceptance among a wider public, and thereby substantially shaped the direction of modernist literature. Further, she argues convincingly that many women undertook their literary work to pursue their own interests and that "it is misleading to assume that a 'sex war' necessarily pitted women against men in bruising struggle, or that women's achievements represent the 'underside' of a modernism that must first be understood in terms of men's work and ideas" (14). At the core of Marek's ambitious polemic, however, is a surprisingly modest, somewhat limiting conceptual approach to her material. Her "purpose," she announces is "to write a portion of women's history" and "not to sketch a theory around literary data" (20). While many
readers might welcome such an approach--indeed, the achievements of these women warrant thorough, judicious, "historical" treatment--the degree to which Marek succeeds at leaving theoretical concerns to "future theorists" (20) raises questions about the second of her projects, evaluating women's contributions to modernism. Eschewing a host of contested theoretical sites--social constructions of gender and the dynamics of textual transmission among them--Marek proposes to view the work of the women she examines through the "recurrent themes" of "collaboration and community" (21). While potentially such themes might enable the kind of evaluation Marek hopes to deliver, her failure to theorize about them or to even articulate them in any sustained way skews a number of local interpretations and, sadly, weakens her "history" overall.

Occupying the central chapters of Women Editing Modernism are four such collaborations: those between Harriet Monroe and Alice Corbin Henderson of Poetry, between Margaret Anderson and Jane Heap of the Little Review, between H. D. (Hilda Doolittle) and Bryher (Winifred Ellerman) during periods when both were associated with the Egoist and the film journal Close Up, and between Marianne Moore and publisher/editors Scofield Thayer and James Sibley Watson of the Dial. Certainly, these relationships are crucial to an understanding of Anglo-American modernism, concerning as they do the editing practices governing four of the movement's most formative and celebrated journals. Yet what, specifically, constitutes collaboration? And how does one determine the existence of community? Marek never says, offering only that "history has neglected the cooperative work often found in women's editorial operations, a teamwork less common in men's, perhaps due to cultural training that 'the other' was a threatening presence" (19). While doubtless the first assertion is true, just as it is true that literary history has overlooked editorial practice generally, the two that follow blithely rehearse received assumptions about "teamwork," overlooking in the process an abundance of it among men. In the modernist period alone, one thinks of Ford Maddox Ford and Joseph Conrad's jointly produced novels (The Inheritors and Romance) and of Pound's editorial relationships with Ford, Eliot, Lewis, and Yeats. Besides, much of the data Marek herself presents suggests that collaborations between women were not always "cooperative" and that "the other," if not an overt threat, nonetheless posed an unwanted presence. Discussion of a single case should suffice to suggest that these "collaborations" are somewhat more complex than Marek's schematic allows.

This case concerns relations between Harriet Monroe and Alice Corbin Henderson. While Monroe's work with Poetry is the better known, Marek rightly insists that Henderson's deserves more study than it has thus far received. Both Monroe and her foreign editor, Ezra Pound, valued her keen, critical intelligence and acerbic wit. During the years she actively worked on the magazine (from its founding in 1912 until 1916, when illness forced her to leave Chicago), she functioned as the first reader of manuscripts, wrote numerous editorials, and served as Monroe's "critical foil" (30). Testifying to her value, Monroe records in her autobiography, A Poet's Life, that Henderson was "a well-nigh indispensible member of Poetry's staff" (quoted in Marek, 31). Yet, despite her "importance," "Monroe refers to Henderson very little in A Poet's Life," excerpting "just two of Henderson's articles and none of her letters" and omitting
any "mention [of] their collaboration on the anthologies" (31). The source of this omission, Marek speculates, is the series of bitter disagreements that arose between the two over their "collaboration" on the first and second editions of *The New Poetry* anthology. Part of this discord concerned the proposed contents, but the most heated exchanges erupted over proprietary rights and royalties. Monroe, it is clear, considered Henderson's contributions to be far less significant than her own. Not only was she the only one to sign the contract with the publisher, "despite Henderson's request to be included," but only "reluctantly" did she concede to Henderson even a one-third share of the royalties, a share she tried to reduce (unsuccessfully) for the second edition (49). In the end, Monroe "yield[ed] to Henderson's wishes not because she thought Henderson rightfully entitled to one-third of the royalties, but "'because I am disgusted with the whole business, and besides I have a human desire that you should, if possible, be satisfied'" (Marek, 55). Because of these quarrels, Henderson was "virtually written out of Monroe's autobiography--a factor that accounts for the subsequent neglect both of Henderson's influence in modernist literary history and of the dynamics of her editorial collaborations with Monroe" (47).

This dispute tells us much: about the nature of the relationship between Henderson and Monroe, of course; and about the fragile, fleeting quality of literary "collaboration." Most important, though, it shows that men are not the only ones capable of undervaluing women's editorial contributions. And while this episode in no way erases happier, more productive moments of Monroe and Henderson's work together, it does suggest that Marek's themes are insufficient to effectively evaluate women's contributions to modernism. In effect, she attempts to assign collaboration and community a gender valence they cannot sustain.

In its purpose and in the general outline of its argument, *Women Editing Modernism* offers a useful, highly readable guide to the achievements of the women under examination. Marek prosecutes her case doggedly and one leaves convinced that, indeed, the achievements of Monroe, Anderson, Moore and company are significant and in need of further study. A good many scholars, however, already know this; and one senses slightly that much effort has been expended to wage battles already engaged, if not already won. Readers might well wish that, rather than concentrating most upon issues evoked by the first and third words of her title, Marek had focused more upon those evoked by the middle, mediating term: women editing modernism. By failing to examine in greater detail the actual editing practices at *Poetry*, the *Little Review*, the *Egoist*, and the *Dial*, Marek misses a significant opportunity.

Michael Keller

*South Dakota State University*