**Monroe, Harriet (1860-1936)**

Harriet Monroe was an American woman of letters who, from her position as founder and long-time editor of *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*, fostered, promoted, and disseminated modernist literature. Although also a poet, critic, biographer, dramatist and anthologist in her own right, it is her editorship of *Poetry* that accounts for Monroe’s reputation and warrants her significance as an influential figure in the development of literary modernism.

Born in Chicago in 1860, Monroe was educated at the Dearborn Seminary in Chicago and the Visitation Convent in Washington, D.C., from which she graduated in 1879. Soon after graduation, Monroe began to make a name for herself as a poet: her sonnet “With a Copy of Shelley” was accepted by *The Century Magazine* in 1889; her collection *Valeria and Other Poems* appeared in 1891; and her “Columbian Ode” was recited at the World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1892. Indeed, the decades 1890-1910 saw Monroe venture into art and drama criticism, writing mainly for *The* *Chicago Tribune*. As a young writer based in Chicago, she participated in the outpouring of innovative writing that came to be known as the “Chicago Renaissance”, helping to foster the careers of poets such as Elizabeth Madox Roberts. In 1896, she published a memoir of her late brother-in-law, the architect John Wellborn Root. She also continued to publish verse: *The Passing Show* was published in 1903, followed by *The Dance of the Seasons* in 1911 and *You and I* in 1914.

By 1912, Monroe had managed to secure the backing of wealthy Chicago patrons for the creation of a literary magazine. The aim of the newly founded *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse* was to publish poetry of “modern significance”, encouraging both its production and appreciation. Indeed, from its inception in October 1912 and throughout modernism’s formative years, *Poetry* served as the primary venue for the work of prominent modernist writers. H.D. (“Hermes of the Ways”, “Orchard”, and “Epigram” in 1913), T.S. Eliot (“The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” in 1915), Ezra Pound (“Three Cantos” in 1917), Wallace Stevens (“Sunday Morning” in 1915) and Ford Madox Ford (“On Impressionism” in 1913), among many others, all found in *Poetry* a welcoming venue for their work. The appearance of important special topics, such as the “Objectivists” issue of February 1931, edited by Louis Zukofsky, added further lustre to the magazine. In her effort to encourage and disseminate modernist literature, Monroe was significantly aided by the magazine’s associate editor (1912-1922), Alice Corbin Henderson, and by Ezra Pound, who acted as *Poetry*’s foreign correspondent from 1912 to 1917. *Poetry* continues to publish more than one hundred years after Monroe founded it.

Monroe continued to edit *Poetry* up until her death in 1936 (She was in Peru, where she had travelled to visit Inca ruins following participation in the international P.E.N. conference in Buenos Aires.) Her papers at The University of Chicago Library reveal her influential role in the acceptance and dissemination of modernist poetry, just as the digitalised issues of *Poetry* show the magazine as a register of the most innovative poetry in the modernist period. Monroe’s autobiography, *A Poet’s Life*, published posthumously in 1938, is a valuable account of the literary and artistic circles of Chicago and London in the early twentieth century.

**List of Works**

Monroe, Harriet (1891) *Valeria and Other Poems.* Chicago.

---. (1892) *Commemoration Ode.* Chicago.

---. (1896) *John Wellborn Root: A Study of His Life and Work*. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin.

---. (1903) *The Passing Show: Five Modern Plays in Verse* (1903). Boston: Houghton, Mifflin.

---. (1911). The Dance of the Seasons. Chicago: Ralph Fletchey Seymour.

---. (1914) *You and I* (1914). New York:Macmillan.

Monroe, Harriet and Alice Corbin Henderson (eds) (1917). *The New Poetry: An Anthology*. New York: Macmillan.

---. (1938). *A Poet’s Life: Seventy Years in a Changing World.* New York: Macmillan.

Cahill, Daniel J. (1973). *Harriet Monroe*. New York: Twayne.

Williams, Ellen (1977). *Harriet Monroe and* *the Poetry Renaissance: The First Ten Years of Poetry, 1912-22*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

URLs

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Image of Harriet Monroe

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(1912- to present):

<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/archive>

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