Little Magazines

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In the history of modernism, little magazines were often the first venues to publish unknown authors who are now considered the leading lights of twentieth-century literature. A little magazine is a periodical dedicated primarily to serious literature, usually featuring poetry, short stories, serialized novels, and sometimes dramatic installments, as well as essays, reviews, and reader correspondence. They are called ‘little’ (sometimes also ‘small magazines’) owing to their cultivation of coterie contributorships and readerships in opposition to large commercial magazines whose content is strongly influenced by markets. As such, little magazines often prize experimental content that contravenes the public taste, which is one reason they were the primary vehicles for the development of modernism, its many movements, and their niche audiences. In many cases, the lack of a robust commercial apparatus meant that little magazines tended to be irregularly published and short lived, but with outsized contributions to literature and culture, such as the simultaneous serialization of James Joyce’s *Ulysses* in *The Little Review* (1914-1929) and *The Egoist* (1914-1919)and T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* in *The Dial* (1920-1929) and *The Criterion* (1922-1939).

Little magazines originated during the nineteenth century on the European continent, in Great Britain, and in the United States. During the twentieth century, most little magazines’ innovative agendae began as a reaction against the rise of large commercial periodicals that sold issues below cost in order to boost circulation, gaining more profit by selling advertising space. The standard commercial practice had the effect of publishing only that literature that would sell, based on established authors’ star power and trends that were popular in the public taste. While some little magazines eschewed advertising altogether, many featured advertisements and book lists, as well as mutual promotion from sister publications, but funded themselves primarily upon subscriptions, book stall sales, and sometimes patronage—in other words, by cultivating a community of dedicated followers who valued the content and identified themselves as a quasi subculture.

The exclusive coterie spirit that brought members together through a shared interest in radical aesthetics and politics is also what separated little magazines from mainstream fare. For instance, three magazines edited in London by Dora Marsden—*The Freewoman* (1911-1912), *The New Freewoman* (1913), and *The Egoist*—originated at the center of the feminist and suffrage movements. Their intense scrutiny of politics, economics, and sexual morality later gave way to a broader interest in avant-garde literature and art. The first two magazines were involved in political action, while *The Egoist* explored free expression and ultimately published some of the most important works of literary modernism, yet all three sponsored discussion circles that brought readers and contributors together socially. Similarly, *The Crisis* (1910-Present), originally edited by W.E.B. DuBois, in New York City, is the organ for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). *The Crisis* supported community events, offered journalism about issues confronting African-Americans, profiled successful community members, and also published a significant amount of literature. In contrast,

*Wheels* (1916-1921) was an anthology published by Oswald and Edith Sitwell for their exclusive set of poets.

Some little magazines supported shared actions and collaborated on the publication of important projects when their purposes converged (or when Ezra Pound happened to be on their editorial boards). *The Little Review* of Chicago, New York, and eventually Paris, serialized *Ulysses* simultaneously with *The Egoist* beginning in March 1918. *The Egoist* wound up publishing only a small number of installments due to wartime censorship and materials rationing, while the *Little Review* editors, Margaret Anderson and Jane Heap, stood trial for obscenity in *Ulysses* as well as allegedly seditious content in Wyndham Lewis’s ‘Cantleman’s Spring Mate.’ Both magazines mutually featured a wealth of important writers such as Dorothy Richardson, Kay Boyle, T.S. Eliot, Mina Loy, Marianne Moore, Sherwood Anderson, and Ben Hecht. Joyce’s *Work in Progress* (later *Finnegans Wake*) serialized in *transition* (1927-1938), a surrealist magazine in Paris that often featured experimental prose by Gertrude Stein, photographs by Man Ray, theories of cinema, and some of the first translations of Franz Kafka into English; much of its content was also shared with dada magazines and other similar publications. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* published simultaneously in *The Dial* and *The Criterion* during the Fall of 1922.

Most modernist authors and editors worked on multiple magazines, often simultaneously, throughout their careers. Pound contributed to and edited a list of magazines in Europe, Britain, and the United States that would be impossible to reproduce here. Eliot became a literary editor for *The Egoist* before starting *The Criterion*. While figures like Eliot and Pound have historically been credited with galvanizing the modernist movement, many women author-editors were at the forefront of soliciting and publishing innovative literature, often at the risk of legal troubles. Anderson and Heap are one such example, as are Dora Marsden and Harriet Shaw Weaver of *The Egoist*, Harriet Monroe and Alice Corbin Henderson of *Poetry*, Bryher of *Close Up* (1927-1933), and Marianne Moore of *The Dial*. The following magazines are among the most influential in the modernist movement but represent a mere fraction of the whole.

*BLAST* (1914-1915), edited in London by Wyndham Lewis as a manifesto for Vorticism, lasted a mere two issues yet had an outsized influence on the development of avant-garde writing and visual art. The magazine’s militant rhetoric reinforced the Vorticist ideal of the artist as the point of maximum concentration before an explosion, whose job it was to ‘bring to the surface a laugh like a bomb’ (‘MANIFESTO’ 51). The contributors exalted in conflicting, unresolved forces through experimental typography, geometric art, and a series of contradictory ‘Blasts’ and ‘Blesses’ that exemplified the aesthetics and writers they approved of and excoriated. *BLAST* seemed almost to prophesize the advent of World War I, as the events which triggered the conflict took place exactly one week after the first issue was published. Indeed, several contributors went to the front, including Lewis and Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, while Edward Wadsworth joined the Royal Navy reserve and invented the dazzle camouflage style that many ships of the period were known for. As a result, the second and final issue of July 1915, known as the ‘War Number,’ was slightly tamer but no less interesting than the first, and featured polemics establishing Vorticism’s allegiance both to modernism and the British cause. Contributors to *BLAST* included many other leading modernists such as Ezra Pound, Rebecca West, Wassily Kandinsky, Ford Madox Ford, Jacob Epstein, Jessica Dismorr, and T.S. Eliot.

*The Egoist* was Marsden’s third magazine, following her first two feminist magazines *The Freewoman* and *New Freewoman*. By the time *The New Freewoman* was renamed *The Egoist* in January 1914, its contributors and readers had expanded their interests in feminist politics to embrace Egoism and Nietzschean individualist philosophy. Soon after the *The Egoist* began its run, Harriet Shaw Weaver took over most managing editor duties while Marsden began working on a philosophical monograph on the nature of time and the mind, which serialized at the top of each issue and later published by The Egoist Press as *The Definition of the Godhead* (1928). *The Egoist* also became a venue for modernist poetry by the likes of Marianne Moore and, through the influence of Pound, began serializing novels such as Lewis’s *Tarr* and Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* plus selected episodes of *Ulysses* (also owing to Weaver’s patronage). The magazine was especially notable for its art and cultural criticism, including Eliot’s famous essay ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’ (after he took over from Pound as literary editor), a column by Richard Aldington, the autobiographical and philosophical essays of Huntley Carter, and theories of the novel by Muriel Ciolkowska that were ahead of their time. Despite many wartime hardships and changes in editorial staff, *The Egoist* was able to survive World War I but closed at the end of 1919 due to financial stress and Marsden’s increasing reclusiveness.

*The Little Review* grew out of the Chicago art scene in the winter of 1914, making its mission the publication of art and literature that exuded vitality. When Pound became literary editor in 1917, the magazine changed its subtitle from ‘Litearture Drama Music Art’ to ‘Making No Compromise with the Public Taste’ and became a sister magazine of *The Egoist*. Though Pound lived in London at the time, he used *The Little Review* to attempt a transatlantic literary revolution, placing some of the same innovative content in both magazines simultaneously. The magazine is perhaps best known for serializing the first twenty episodes of Joyce’s *Ulysses*, which was supposed to emerge simultaneously in *The Egoist*, as well as its obscenity and sedition lawsuits stemming from the ‘Nausicaa’ episode of *Ulysses* and Lewis’s ‘Cantleman’s Spring Mate.’ Other notable contributions include the serialization of a large swath of Dorothy Richardson’s *Pilgrimage* novel series, with simultaneous critiques by May Sinclair in *The Egoist* that were the first to apply the term ‘stream of consciousness’ to her experimental narrative techniques, stories by Sherwood Anderson, and experimental poetic prose by Dismorr and journalist and screen writer Ben Hecht.

*The New Age* (1894-1938), edited in London by A.R. Orage from 1907-1922, is not always considered a modernist magazine; however, its socialist politics and radically experimental rhetoric made it an influential and impossible-to-ignore presence among the London literary and political coteries. *The New Age* published technically savvy articles on economics, domestic and international politics, criticism of art and literature, most of which was delivered in a trenchantly acerbic style. It published many modernist authors, including Lewis, and is also notable for numerous mutually conflicting essays by Alice Emily Haigh, published under a variety of pseudonyms including Beatrice Hastings.

*The English Review* (1908-1937) and *The Transatlantic Review* (1924) were two influential literary magazines initiated by Ford Madox Ford. *The English Review* published the work of Joseph Conrad, John Galsworthy, Thomas Hardy, W.H. Hudson, Henry James, and H.G. Wells, and also came to include early works by Pound, Lewis, and D.H. Lawrence. Ford quickly sold the magazine to Alfred Mond, under whose guidance it came to publish a slew of other modernist authors such as Anderson, Aldous Huxley, W.B. Yeats, and a number of Russian novelists and playwrights. *The Transatlantic Review* ran for only twelve issues but published many of the leading lights of interwar modernism, including Djuna Barnes, H.D., Ernest Hemingway, Jean Rhys, and Gertrude Stein. Notable items include an extract of Joyce’s *Work in Progress* (*Finnegans Wake*) and the August 1924 issue guest-edited by Hemingway.

What follows is a list—by no means exhaustive—of some of the important little magazines in which modernism came to fruition.

* France: *Action*, *Aventure*, *l’Élan*, *Littérature*, *La Nouvelle Revue Française*, *La Revue du monde noir*, *This Quarter*, *transition*
* Germany: *Die Aktion*, *Der Dada*, *Merz*, *Der Querschnitt*, *Der Sturm*
* Great Britain: *BLAST*, *The Blue Review*, *Coterie*, *The Criterion*, *The Dome*, *The Egoist*, *The Enemy*, *The English Review*, *The Freewoman*, *The New Freewoman*, *The New Age*, *The Owl*, *Rhythm*, *The Transatlantic Review* (also Paris), *The Tyro*, *Wheels*
* Ireland: *Dana*, *The Klaxon*
* Italy: *Broom* (later Berlin and New York), *The Mask*,
* Switzerland: *Close Up*, *Dada* (also Paris)
* United States: *291*, *Camera Work*, *Contact*, *The Crisis*, *The Dial*, *The Double Dealer*, *Fire!!*, *The Glebe*, *The Liberator*, *The Little Review*, *The Masses*, *Others*, *Poetry*, *The Seven Arts*, *The Southern Review*

A more comprehensive list of magazines from the period can be found at the Modernist Journal Project’s Periodical Directory: 1890-1922 < http://modjourn.org/periodicals.html>.

Further Reading:

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