*3. To: William Carlos Williams*

My dear Dr. Williams:

Your letter would be insulting, if it were not pathetic. I am sorry you are so bitter, but you must not think that any real artistic movement can be snuffed out by the failure of one magazine. As a matter of fact, “Others” was foolishly managed from the first.[[1]](#footnote-1) It was not the idea which was at fault, it was the way the idea was carried out. You must not forget that besides the commercial sense, which you consider that I possess, I also have years and experience on my side. You were fooled by a little newspaper notoriety into thinking that the future of the magazine was secure. The truth is that notoriety of that kind is a disease, which has to be gone through, and made the best of, before any real fame is likely to come. Had you (and here I speak collectively, for I do not know who was actually responsible for the policy of the magazine) played your cards a little better, had you not antagonized the public by printing an immense amount of very poor stuff mixed with the good, you would have found that, on the death of the magazine, its effect still remained.

I withdrew myself as a contributor to the magazine, in the middle of last Winter, not because I felt that it was doomed to failure, as you seem to suppose, (I knew it was doomed to failure from the moment it was started, and yet I was willing to contribute with the rest of you when Mr. Kreymborg asked me to do so). I withdrew in the middle of the Winter because I found myself completely out of sympathy with the policy of the magazine.[[2]](#footnote-2) I saw that the editors had no objection to printing poems which I felt were not poetry, were not art, and the tendency of which I knew would be to lower the estimation in which the whole of the new poetry movement was held in the eye of the public. This I explained carefully to Mr. Kreymborg. The rest of my group felt exactly as I did, and the policy they pursued was identical with mine.[[3]](#footnote-3)

When you wrote to me yourself last Summer and asked me to send a contribution for the number which you were editing, the kindly feeling which I entertained toward you personally—a feeling which I had originally got from Mr. Pound and which was corroborated by our one meeting as Arensberg’s last Autumn—made me send you a poem, as soon as you told me that Mr. Fletcher had also lifted his embargo.[[4]](#footnote-4) When the number which you edited came, I was disgusted to see, from its contents, that you had been in sympathy with the former policy of the magazine, and I regretted having given way to a feeling of comradeship in having sent my contribution, and I refused to be in the Woman’s Number when Miss Hoyt asked me to send something for it.[[5]](#footnote-5) If you agree with the general trend of the magazine, and with the whole movement as managed by Mr. Kreymborg, of course you can only regret its failure, and I can only say that, in spite of admiring much of your own work, and some of the work of others in your group, I am not in sympathy with your aims as a whole. If, on the other hand, you think that the magazine could have been run better than it was, I see no reason for despair, for I think the movement toward art in this country is a real movement, and I think that anyone who is a sincere artist, and not a mere schoolboy with his tongue in his cheek, will find a place. But it must be done step by step. You cannot win to fame through headlines in the newspapers, and until you people are willing to take the slower road, I do not think you will get forward very fast.

In your letter, you accuse me of certain things which show you to be both prejudice and misinformed. I appeal to your spirit of fair play, and ask you again to come and see me when I am in New York and make your charges absolute, and give me a chance to explain the matter as it really is. You should not judge of anything on hearing only one side. If you do not care to do this, if your sense of justice does not show you the advisability of doing this, I shall be very sorry.

You have nothing to gain by coming to see me, you need not announce so loudly that you have nothing to sell, for, believe me, I have nothing to buy. “Others” has been offered to me too many times since its beginning (the last time by yourself) for me not to realize that I might be its owner to-day, had I chosen. You may not be aware that after first refusing to be included in our “Anthology”, Mr. Pound changed his mind and offered to come into it, if I would give him a certain figure a year, to be used for a charity in which he was interested. The figure was not for himself, as you see, but he nevertheless made me an offer of his services for a price to be paid. I was willing to give the money, if it could be proved to me that the object was worthy; I was not willing to buy anyone’s suffrage. Having refused the assistance of Mr. Pound, you need hardly fear that I shall try to purchase that of any of his henchmen.

You tell me that the “Imagist Anthology” has received a certain notoriety through the omission of Mr. Pound. That is a strange statement, for at the time Mr. Pound voluntarily withdrew himself from the magazine, his parting shot to me was that we should fail without him, and it was an opinion then held by several people. Now that we have succeeded, you endeavour to give Mr. Pound credit vicariously, by suggesting that it was partly because of this very withdrawal. That is interesting; but in neither one care nor the other was Mr. Pound as important an asset as you suppose.

You go a little far when you suggest that I “stole” anything from Mr. Pound. So far as I know, the only thing which Mr. Pound has invented is the name “Imagist”. Vers libre has been written in English literature for three hundred years; Mr. Pound merely insisted upon it as a creed. As to the name “Imagism”, it is impossible to copyright the name of an artistic school. Imagism is an artistic point of view, not a club. A man may be a Romanticist, or an Impressionist, or an Imagist, according as he thinks that way. You will also please to remember that Mr. Pound christened us all “Imagists”. We merely adopted the name because we felt that it stood for our attitude. But in order to play perfectly fair, we changed the title of our “Anthology”, so that he might bring his out under the old title if he so desired. He now prefers to call himself a Vorticist, which, of course, removes all difficulty. Again, please understand that I am not the editor of “Imagist Anthology”, and deserve no more credit than the other contributors for its success. The six contributors all make the collection, and are all equally responsible for it, and for the policy of the volume.

I do not understand what you mean by my “well known attitude toward unknown and young American writers”. I suppose there are few people who have tried to do more for young and unknown writers than I. I am not connected with any magazine, financially, or otherwise. I am under no contract to write reviews for any magazine. But I have often recommended poem to editors as, as far as was in my power, endeavoured to show people less well informed than myself who were worthy among the younger group. You may not know that when Mr. Braithwaite was preparing his “Magazine Anthology” for 1915, I called his attention to Mr. Stevens’s very beautiful “Susannah and the Elders”, which he had not seen.[[6]](#footnote-6) I hunted up the magazine and sent him a copy, telling him that it certainly should be included. As soon as Mr. Braithwaite had read it, he saw its beauty as well as I did, and, as you know, it appeared among the first five poems of the year. Possibly you have no opinion of Mr. Braithwaite’s taste, but that is an advertisement which is a help with the public at large, and that particular form of notoriety Mr. Stevens owes entirely to me. In the same way, when Mr. Bodenheim[[7]](#footnote-7) was here last Spring he read me his poem “On Heaven”. He told me that he was lunching with Mr. Braithwaite the next day, and I begged him to be sure and show Mr. Braithwaite this poem. As soon as he had left, I telephoned Mr. Braithwaite, praised the poem highly, and suggested that he ask Mr. Bodenheim to let him see it. My remarks may have had no effect on Mr. Braithwaite, he is not easily influenced. But I certainly did my best. It is quite possible that I have no praised all the people of whom you think well. It is also possible that my “commercial sense” may be merely critical judgment, and that I may not think as highly of so many people as you do, for in your article in “The Egoist” you speak as though the country were teeming with poets, an opinion which you share with Mr. Braithwaite. But I agree with Mr. Aiken, that if there were so many excellent poets as that, this would be one of the most remarkable eras in the history of the world.[[8]](#footnote-8) It is true that, as a rule, I refuse to read and criticize the manuscripts of young poets. But I have been obliged to take this stand because of the number of manuscripts sent me and the time involved. Even here I make occasional exceptions.

It was only a year ago that you were anxious to reconcile Mr. Pound and me, and now you call me all sorts of names, and assume all sorts of things. I can only think that the failure of “Others” has embittered you unduly, and again I will say: Will you come and make your charges to me categorically, and will you listen to my account of the breach with Mr. Pound, the truth of which you can easily verify by applying to the Aldingtons?

Sincerely yours,

1. Williams was an Associate Editor of Alfred Kreymborg’s little magazine *Others: A Magazine of the New Verse* (1915-1919) and guest edited the July 1916 number (Vol. 3, No. 1), which included Lowell’s poem “Chinoiseries.” At the time of Lowell’s letter, the magazine had briefly ceased publication, and would resume in December of 1916. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. [policy=too political? June 28, 1916 letter to WCW objects to “poems of the Minna (sic) Loy type [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The other contributors to *Some Imagist Poets*. In late 1915, early 1916 Lowell, Fletcher, and Richard Aldington withdrew poems scheduled for publication in *Others*. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Walter Conrad Arensberg (1878-1954), American art collector, critic, and poet. He initially financed *Others* before withdrawing support because of Kreymborg’s focus on American poets over European poets (Churchill). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Helen Hoyt (1887-1972), American poet. She served as an Associate Editor first of *Poetry*, and then of *Others*. She edited the Woman’s Number of *Others* in September, 1916 (Vol. 3, No. 3). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. William Stanley Braithwaite (1878-1962), American poet and anthologist who published an annual *Anthology of Magazine Verse* from 1913-1939. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Maxwell Bodenheim (1892-1954), American poet and novelist. He was a frequent contributor to *Others*, and along with Ben Hecht co-founded *The Chicago Literary Times* (1923-1924).

   [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Conrad Aiken (1889-1973) American poet. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)