THE LITTLE MAGAZINE OTHERS AND THE RENOVATION OF MODERN AMERICAN POETRY
The Little Magazine *Others* and the Renovation of Modern American Poetry

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List of Abbreviations

**BMM**  

**CP**  

**HH**  
Letters from Helen Hoyt, The Lyman Family Papers, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

**KH**  

**LLB**  

**MM**  
Marianne Moore Collection, The Rosenbach Museum and Library.

**O**  

**PMR**  

**SA**  

**T**  

**WCW**  
Williams Carlos Williams Collection, The Poetry/Rare Books Collection of the University Libraries, State University of New York at Buffalo.

**YCAL**  
Yale Collection of American Literature, The Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.
The free verse movement in America … crystallized in Alfred Kreymborg’s group of *Others*. That was a magic moment. No one who was touched by the kindling breath will ever forget the joy of it nor cease to regret that a great fiery wind devoured it. It will be worth while someday to review that frail but vital page in American literary history.

Robert Alden Sanborn

It is with this magazine [*Others*] and the group that grew up around it that modernism in American poetry really begins. William Carlos Williams, Marianne Moore, Mina Loy, T. S. Eliot, Conrad Aiken, Marsden Hartley, Wallace Gould, Alfred Kreymborg himself, Maxwell Bodenheim, and the socialist poets Lola Ridge and James Oppenheim, the anarchist Arturo Giovannitte, dozens of others—Kreymborg produced them all suddenly on the literary stage in America, like a conjurer pulling rabbits from a hat.

Kenneth Rexroth

*Others: A Magazine of the New Verse* ran only from 1915 to 1919, its subscription base peaking at 300, yet the little magazine helped launch the careers of many of the most innovative and influential modernist American poets. Providing an open forum for unknown writers, this low-budget *salon des refusés* helped instigate modern poetry in America, providing a stage for the seemingly harmonic convergence of artistic

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genius known as modernism. Others championed formal innovation and artistic autonomy, dedicating its pages to free verse experiments. These aesthetic interests have been viewed as a sign of modernist poetry’s self-absorption—its disengagement from social problems, political issues, and historical exigencies. In contrast, I argue that modernist poetry was socially embedded and engaged precisely because of its emphasis on form, but that the social dimensions of modernist formalism are lost when poems are studied in isolation. Little magazines—non-commercial, small-circulation, low-budget periodicals—anchor modernist poetry in a social context, situating individual poems in relation to other texts and discourses. These periodicals enable us to see modernist poetry as a product of its time, rather than as an art that transcends or evades time.

Until recently, modernism was promulgated as an irrevocable break from the past—a sudden, spontaneous revolution of thought and representation. In the effort to escape the shackles of the past, modernist artists claimed artistic autonomy, positioning themselves outside the bounds of social conventions, moral codes, and political causes. Poetry already enjoyed an elevated status as a transcendent art of universal feelings and timeless values. The special status granted poetry, combined with modernism’s vehement rejection of an outmoded past, claims for autonomy, and, above all, emphasis on form, conspired to cloister modernist poetry as a separate artistic sphere, allowing the genre to be mystified, mythologized, and misunderstood as a closed, hermetic activity.

Virginia Woolf fosters this poetic mythology in her 1931 “Letter to a Young Poet.” She asserts that the modern poet’s range is “restricted,” his poetry is “concentrated and intensified,” and he seems to be “looking within and not without,” as if describing “a self that sits alone in the room at night with the blinds drawn.” Woolf claims to select three poems randomly from an unnamed volume to demonstrate her thesis, quoting lines such as “To penetrate that room is my desire / The extreme attic of the mind” and “There is a dark room, / The locked and shuttered womb.”

Whether real or parodied, Woolf’s selections could have come out of Others, where a generous sampling reveals an almost morbid fixation on interior spaces:

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3 Rachel Blau DuPlessis makes a similar argument: “Poetry, particularly the lyric, has generally been construed (in university and critical reception) as opposite to society and its discourses. As a mode (and a conglomerate of genres), poetry is often positioned as untainted by the social, in pursuit of higher things, a bastion of transcendence and the aesthetic, privileged by the expression of timeless, universal emotions, set apart by specific conventions in its language, and, in its version of romantic subjectivity, by non-participation in, non-compliance with historical debate.” DuPlessis, Genders, Races, and Religious Cultures in Modern American Poetry, 1908–1934 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 8.


5 Woolf, A Letter to a Young Poet, 16.
It is a dangerous place in which to walk—a heart.
Especially one’s own.

Mary Carolyn Davies, “Songs of a Girl” (July 1915)

And thus it is that what I feel,
Here in this room, desiring you

Wallace Stevens, “Peter Quince at the Clavier” (August 1915)

And four wax candles in a darkened room
Four rings of light upon the ceiling overhead
An atmosphere of Juliet’s tomb

T. S. Eliot, “Portrait of a Lady” (September 1915)

if I in my north room
dance naked, grotesquely,
before my mirror,
waving my shirt around my head,
and singing softly to myself

William Carlos Williams, “Danse Russe” (December 1916)

I steal into the play-room
Of my mind
And take out the paint box

David Rosenthal, “The Paint Box” (December 1917)

In my heart, the love-lanterns I hung for you are dark.

Harriet Dean, untitled (December 1918)

Shall I too press—how much of my essence?—
in a cube of space—

Lola Ridge, “Easter Dawn” (July 1919)

These excerpts provide compelling evidence for Woolf’s judgment that the modern poet has fixed his gaze on his own interior consciousness and isolated himself from the world. Yet each of these poems seeks to make public the private regions of consciousness, and the act of self-exposure is represented as a daring and even “dangerous” act. Moreover, in many of these poems, the inner sanctum of self is inhabited by another—a “you” who, by entering the space of the self, exposes its permeability. Even as isolated works, then, these poems are unsuccessfully hermetic. When read as part of a broader little magazine discourse, they constitute what at the time seemed like a bold, ground-breaking, and very public conversation about the nature of intimacy between self and others. By re-situting modernist poems within the public discourse of Others, my study challenges the equation of modernist
formalism with solitary aesthetic absorption, demonstrating that the modernist drive to renovate poetic form was part of a cultural movement to re-form the boundaries of selfhood, gender, and sexuality.

In focusing on the little magazine as a social framework for modernist poetry, my study joins recent efforts to open modernist studies to a consideration of broader cultural contexts. The 1998 founding of The Modernist Studies Association, an organization “devoted to the study of the arts in their social, political, cultural, and intellectual contexts,” heralds the trend toward more inclusive, pluralistic, and interdisciplinary definitions of modernism. Cary Nelson’s Repression and Recovery, Kevin J. H. Dettmar’s and Stephen Watt’s Marketing Modernisms, and Lawrence Rainey’s Institutions of Modernism are three recent examples of the effort to broaden the study of modernism to include the social, political, material, and economic practices that shaped artistic and literary production.

In the effort to contextualize modernism, however, poetic form often gets pushed to the margins of scholarly inquiry. Rainey omits the consideration of modernist formal practices altogether, reassessing the cultural and economic impact of The Waste Land without discussing a single line of the poem. He rejects close reading as a practice that leaves “the ambiguous heritage of modernism in history … desocialized and unexplored.” But just as even the most inward looking, formally experimental modernist poems may function as social interventions, close reading can be politically and historically engaged. As Rachel Blau DuPlessis demonstrates in Genders, Races, and Religious Cultures, close reading can be reactivated “to examine in poetry the textual traces and discursive manifestations of a variety of ideological assumptions, subject positions, and social concepts concerning gender, race, and religious culture.” Close reading can thus be used to recover the interconnections between specific features of texts and their contexts; DuPlessis’s plea resonates here: “one wants any study of poetry to engage with poetry as such—its conventions and textual mechanisms, its surfaces and layers—and not simply to regard the poetic text as an odd delivery system for ideas and themes.”

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8 DuPlessis, Genders, Races, and Religious Cultures, 1.

9 DuPlessis, Genders, Races, and Religious Cultures, 7. Another study that bridges the gap between contextual study and textual analysis is Mark S. Morrisson’s The Public Face of Modernism: Little Magazines, Audiences, and Reception, 1905–1920 (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001). Examining little magazines such as The English Review, Poetry and Drama, The Freewoman/New Freewoman/Egoist, The Little Review, and The Masses, Morrisson demonstrates that they sought not “to retreat into the private and elite confines of coterie publication,” but to enter “the vibrant and exciting new print venues of the public sphere” (10).
My study reclaims formal experimentation as a significant feature of modernism in American poetry, one that should not be cordoned off from studies of the period’s broader cultural interests, tactics, and effects. Form, in modernist poetry, lies at the intersection of social discourse and aesthetic design.

Formal experimentation was a visible, controversial, and disruptive sign of new and radical thinking, but it was certainly not the only mark of the modern. Indeed, one could say that modernism in America began on or about January 1911, with the publication of The Masses, a little magazine dedicated to leftwing political, artistic, and literary efforts, which favored traditional verse forms. Little magazines thereafter proliferated, allowing writers and artists to recognize themselves as part of a movement with revolutionary hopes for transforming both the public sphere and private life. The number and variety of little magazines published in the first half of the twentieth century in America and abroad evince the plurality and diversity of modernism in its heyday. This study examines the arena of modernist American poetry and poetics—a subfield of modernism that is itself diverse, including poetic forms ranging from the traditional verse of political journals such as The Masses to the free verse of avant-garde periodicals such as Others. What unites these poetries is a renewed, heady, modernist sense that the new verse forms could reform the world, inside and out.10

To write free verse in the 1910s was to do something radically experimental, unconventional, individualistic—in short, something “Other.” Descriptive terms for the poetry in Others ranged from “esoteric” and “irrational,” to “free-footed,” “queer,” and even “pornographic.”11 Yet, as unorthodox and illicit as “vers libre”...

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10 My understanding of “modernism” incorporates territory often reserved for the “avant-garde.” Critics such as Peter Burger and Andreas Huyssen have worked to distinguish these categories, but little magazines like Others demonstrate the spuriousness of this “great divide” by enabling the works of avant-garde figures like Man Ray and Djuna Barnes to occupy the same spaces as representative modernists such as T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound. Little magazines demonstrate how much boundary crossing occurred between various artistic circles, as well as among social and political groups and between intellectual and popular audiences. The theoretical distinction between modernism and the avant-garde hinges on the former’s purported hostility to mass culture. But little magazines demonstrate the complexity of the modernism’s relation to mass culture, which was by no means one of clear-cut antagonism. As I argue in Chapter Two, Others was all too readily assimilated by popular presses, a fact its editor, Kreymborg, attempted both to obscure and to exploit in order to promote his magazine’s precarious marginal status. See Burger, Theory of the Avant-Garde. Translated by Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984); and Huyssen, After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986).

11 These terms can be found in the following sources: Margaret Johns, “Free-footed verse is danced in Ridgefield, New Jersey: Get What Meaning You Can Out Of the Futurist Verse—Efficiency Is Its Byword & Base—It’s As Esoteric as Gertrude Stein Herself or a Lloyd puzzle—‘Others’ Is the Name of the Field Through Which You Must Wander To Grasp It,” The New York Tribune, 25 July 1915, 7; J. B. Kerfoot, “The Latest Books” Life 66, no. 1717 (23 September 1915): 568; Amy Lowell to Richard Aldington, 4 June 1915, quoted by
seemed, everyone was writing it, parodying it, reading it, or talking about it. Writing for a daily newspaper, Alfred Kreymborg, Others’s founder and editor, explained: “Vers libre, or free verse, as we have come to call it, has taken the place of cubism and futurism in public popularity. The poet has had his inning. The poet is our hero now, to mock and jeer.”12 Kreymborg uses a baseball metaphor to suggest that, despite its correspondence to the French tradition of vers libre, free verse is a genuine American product (“The pure products of America / go crazy—” William Carlos Williams observes a few years later in his free-verse-for-all experiment, Spring and All).13 Free verse was not merely a popular pastime, it was an expression of the modern consciousness; as Kreymborg puts it: “the free verse movement is … the foremost expression of the present day.”14

Publishing the most unbridled free verse, Others earned a reputation not only for technical innovation, but also for social rebellion and sexual transgression. According to Kreymborg, Others provoked “a small size riot” in mainstream presses.15 The magazine was called “a haven for the wildest orgies of proud spirited youth”; writers of vers libre were dubbed “vers libertines”; free verse was conflated with “free love”; and one critic likened the modern poetic style to “the Elimination of Corsets in Versifying.”16 The social and moral uproar was aroused as much by the sexual content of the “corsetless verse” as by its formal improprieties. As Kreymborg said of the public reaction to Mina Loy’s notorious “Love Songs”: “To reduce eroticism to the sty was an outrage, and to do so without verbs, sentence structure, punctuation, even more offensive.”17 Critics derided Loy’s depiction of “Pig Cupid” as “gutter verse,” “hoggerel,” and “swill poetry,” linking formal experimentation to moral and sexual dissipation.18


12 Kreymborg, “Vers Libre and Vers Librists,” The Morning Telegraph, 8 August 1915, sec. 2: 1. This article is the last in a series Kreymborg wrote for The Morning Telegraph, all of which appeared in the Sunday edition, Section 2. Francis M. Naumann did the painstaking work of tracking down these articles, which he generously shared with me. The other articles are listed in chronological order in the bibliography.


Free verse was also associated with women’s emancipation; as Carolyn Burke notes, the rhetoric of the free verse movement evinces a “clear connection between the politics of the new woman and the poetics of the new poetry.” Writing about Others in 1915, one female journalist observed that a “notable feature of the [free verse] movement is the early prominence taken in it by women. Two, at least, of the best known leaders are women, Miss Amy Lowell and Miss Monroe, and, nearer at hand, we find two of the five contributors to the first number of ‘Others’ are women.” Loy was one of these contributors and was heralded by a New York Sun reporter as the epitome of the “modern woman.” The telling evidence: “she writes free verse and things like that.” The same article reported that “some people think that women are the cause of modernism, whatever that is.”

Spurred by feminism, modernism—whatever it was—was vividly embodied in Others. The little magazine brought together anarchist, communist, and socialist writers such as Lola Ridge, Adolf Wolff, and Carl Sandburg; avant-garde artists such as Mina Loy, Man Ray, and Marsden Hartley; and popular poets such as Sherwood Anderson, Louise Bogan, Vachel Lindsay, and even Robert Frost. Nearly half the poets it published were women, and special issues showcased women and Spanish-American poets. Others’s inclusive editorial policies had distinct racial limits, however: the magazine published only one poem by an African-American poet during its entire run. “A Negro Number,” advertised on the back cover of the December 1917 issue, never materialized. This exclusion may have less to do with any racist editorial bias than with the fact that few African American poets were writing formally experimental verse in the mid-teens: in December 1917 Jean Toomer’s Cane was still five years away, Sterling Brown was only sixteen, and Langston Hughes was looking forward to his fifteenth birthday. For the American avant-garde of the 1910s, then, the category of “Otherness” overcame barriers of gender, nationality, and class, but did not transcend the racial divide.

Despite its racial homogeneity, Others was remarkably non-discriminatory—occasionally to a fault. The magazine was so open to experiment that unsuspecting editors devoted an entire issue to the “Spectric School,” a literary hoax concocted by three of their own contributors. Blurring the boundary between poets and pretenders, Others embeds celebrated geniuses in the context of forgotten influences and innovators, taking us back to a time when H. D. shared with Jeanne D’Orge a penchant not only for pseudonyms, but also for stylistic brevity and passionate

22 Frost contributed money to the magazine, though he did not publish in it. He published three poems in Others for 1919: An Anthology of the New Verse, edited by Alfred Kreymborg (New York: Nicholas Brown, 1920). See Appendix D.
intensity, and when Orrick Johns’s “Olives” mimed Gertrude Stein’s Tender Buttons in its formal structure, linguistic playfulness, and erotic intimations.

For the modernist scholar, Others dangles the tantalizing possibility of “discovering” a forgotten genius. But such a pursuit undermines what makes Others so compelling: its spirited disregard of hierarchies, conventions, and canons. Williams once described Others as “a free running sewer,” and some of the drivel it published merits the metaphor. Nevertheless, returning to this little magazine enables us to recover the range of modernist poetry: the intermixing of high and low, serious and absurd, breathtaking and banal. Little magazines like Others provide a record of the undecided, heterodox character of the avant-garde before it was simultaneously reduced to and aggrandized as “Modernism.” As critic Edward Bishop argues, “the problem with Modernism is that it has become a monument, texts like Ulysses have become sacred objects that students pay homage to—or don’t read at all because their reputations are so daunting.” Reading these works in the context of the little magazines that first published them dismantles the monolith of modernism, reframing it as a lively social endeavor.

The little magazine was not just a stage for artistic innovation; it was also a locus of social change. To appreciate both the artistic and social significance of Others—to understand how “a self that sits alone in the room at night” may be engaged in a social intervention—we must look beyond the individual achievements of the poets it brought to fame, to the little magazine as a formal experiment and social setting and to the broader cultural milieu in which it operated.

Laying the groundwork: a definition and brief history of little magazines

Little magazines are non-commercial enterprises founded by individuals or small groups intent upon publishing experimental works or radical opinions of untried, unpopular, or under-represented writers. Little magazines originated in America

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23 Williams to Harriet Monroe, [6 May 1916], Box 40, Folder 26, Poetry: A Magazine of Verse Records, Special Collections Research Center, The University of Chicago Library. (Hereafter, I will refer to this collection as PMR.)


with Ralph Waldo Emerson and Margaret Fuller’s Transcendentalist journal, The Dial, which ran from 1840 to 1844. They reappeared in the mid-1890s and proliferated in the early 1910s, in opposition to the ascendancy of “big” commercial magazines like The Saturday Evening Post and McClure’s. Defying popular opinions and expectations, some little magazines aimed to uphold higher artistic and intellectual standards—as The Little Review’s motto asserted: “Making No Compromise With The Public Taste”—while others sought to challenge conventional political wisdom and practice. Because of their unorthodox contents, little magazines appealed to a small, often elite, readership willing to exercise their minds to comprehend Futurism, Imagism, and Dadaism, or to contemplate anarchism, socialism, and feminism.

Although the term “little” refers to the magazine’s small audience, rather than to its size, significance, budget, or life span, these journals are characteristically small-budget operations with short runs. As Theodore Peterson notes, they have “one thing in common—chronic financial difficulties.” Typically funded by private donations and subscription fees rather than by large commercial interests, little magazines rarely pay for the work they publish. Advertisements, when included, generate little or no income, since they usually promote small businesses, independent bookstores, or like-minded periodicals. In part because of their precarious finances, little magazines are ephemeral operations. “Five years for a little magazine is a ripe old age,” observed the editors of American Prefaces in 1940, “The average influential little magazine flashes brightly for a year, like Seven Arts, then passes. For those who survive the first winter, the fourth-year mortality is a fearful danger; Emerson’s Dial fell victim to it.” As did Others, which eked out its first winter, revived after Dr. Williams signed its death certificate in The Egoist, and succumbed at the end of its fourth year.

Little magazines allow us to read modernist texts in their original contexts, offering a glimpse of what they meant to readers of the day. A little magazine is not merely a passive background or blank page for a modernist text; its contents, covers, paper quality, illustrations and prints, advertisements, manifestos, and editorials shape the meaning and reception of a text. Situated within a miscellany of texts and images, modernist artworks lose the autonomous, monumental status they acquire in book form, generating meanings by association. For example, the juxtaposition of T. S. Eliot’s “Portrait of a Lady” with Maxwell Bodenheim’s “The Rear-Porches of an Apartment-Building” in the September 1915 issue of Others brings to light a shared fascination with the domestic architecture of modern life, while shifting the

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28 Peterson, Magazines in the Twentieth Century, 415.

focus from a decadent aristocracy to a dying working class. Reading the two poems side by side highlights both the diversity of modernist subject matter and similarities of theme and technique.

Many modernist texts, such as James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, Ezra Pound’s *Cantos*, and Loy’s “Love Songs,” were first published in little magazines as fragments or works in progress, a mode of presentation that compromises the unity and closure they acquire in book form. Critic David Bennett explains:

> With their transposition from journal to book, from discontinuous to simultaneous and unitary publication, the individual fragments come to signify parts of a whole with which they assume the semblance of a dialectical unity … What was read in the magazine as production (work in progress, a provisional and open-ended act of construction) can now be read as an autonomous product with immanent, unifying intent.³⁰

Loy’s “Songs to Joannes” appeared in two versions under two different titles in *Others* before being published in *Lunar Baedeker*. The form of publication—revisionist installments—renders the boundaries of the poem indeterminate, amplifying the poetics of indeterminacy and dislocation developed within each version. In this poem and other modernist works, the *form* of the text corresponds to the magazine *format* in which it was first published.

Little magazine formats helped generate the modernist poetics of fragmentation and collage by provoking reading strategies different from those applied to books. We are unlikely to read a magazine from start to finish, or to seek the kind of unified sensibility we might expect from a volume of poetry by a single author. Reading a magazine, Bennett argues, “is an activity of selection and omission which produces the text as a (spatial) collage or (temporal) montage of fragments in provisional or indeterminate relations. The experience of periodical reading is an experience of discontinuity.”³¹ Little magazines facilitated the reading strategies necessary to comprehend modernist texts such as *The Waste Land*, *Ulysses*, the *Cantos*, and *Love Songs*: “We have learned to read, still more to reread, such texts, not from cover to cover, but ‘spatially,’ affirming the same freedom to dip in, to skip, to cross-refer—unconstrained by the logic of temporal succession—that the reader of the magazine enjoys.”³² These spatial strategies—which critic Joseph Frank calls “spatial form”—were fostered by little magazines.³³

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Framing new houses: little magazines as experimental artistic and social spaces

To emphasize their spatial and social functions, little magazines were frequently referred to as houses.34 Harriet Monroe’s 1912 manifesto for Poetry magazine insists that every art requires “an entrenched place” in order to function and be recognized. Painting, sculpture, and music are housed in “great palaces,” and Poetry is an attempt “to give to poetry her own place.”35 Whereas Monroe figures her magazine as a fortress in a literary wilderness and draws strict borders on the free verse field, Kreymborg resists the very notion of divisions or boundaries, turning Others “out-of-doors,” proclaiming unlimited space for “free experiments,” and holding poetry readings in a meadow.36 Little magazines like Poetry and Others framed distinct literary spaces that made new forms of poetry possible. By producing unconventional living and social spaces, modernist little magazines enabled both the artistic representation and actual enactment of alternative gender roles and sexual orientations.37

Poetry was founded and edited by an unmarried, independent woman. The Little Review was run by an openly lesbian couple who lived (temporarily) in a tent. Others was first issued from a bohemian enclave in rural New Jersey, and later migrated among various low-rent lofts in Greenwich Village, New York.

A “house” for the most innovative free verse, Others was itself an experimental form. The little magazine format was utterly new. Mass-market periodicals “ad-stripped” the page, dividing it into columns to make room for advertisements and inserting poems as filler. The Masses was the first to break away from this commercial practice, allowing more flexibility and variety in page design. But the poems were still subordinate to the political agenda of the magazine and often shared their pages with other texts and images. In 1912 Monroe established Poetry, the first American little magazine dedicated to the genre, but Kreymborg went a step further with


35 Monroe, “The Motive of the Magazine,” Poetry 1, no. 1 (October 1912): 27. Monroe consistently exploits this architectural trope in her state-of-the-arts editorials. For example, reacting to the arrival of Others, she comments: “this field, this wilderness, in which we were so recently a lonely pioneer, will soon be dotted with shacks, perhaps even with palaces” [“Our Contemporaries,” Poetry 6, no. 6 (September 1915): 315].

36 Kreymborg “Verse Libre and Verse Librists,” 1. Monroe also asserts precise temporal limits on the new poetry, as when she exhorts Kreymborg to “please make it very clear that we were the first in the field and the beginning of the present Renaissance.” Monroe to Kreymborg, 2 July 1915, Box 34, Folder 1, PMR.

37 For further discussion of the relationship between modern domestic spaces and modernist little magazines, see Sara Blair, “Home Truths: Gertrude Stein, 27 Rue de Fleurus, and the Place of the Avant-Garde,” American Literary History 12, no. 3 (Fall 2000): 417-37. Blair considers “how Stein’s text, housed in a particular little magazine with its own designs on a place in American living rooms, meditates on and participates in new circuits of cultural production” (417).
Others, eliminating manifestos, editorials, advertisements, reviews, and biographical information—everything but the poems. Kreymborg remained committed to this “austere” editorial policy for the first year of the magazine’s run. Thereafter, Others deviated sporadically from its commitment to publish only poems, adding a “Review Department,” several editorial statements, and even a few advertisements in 1916, issuing a “Play Number” early in 1918, and announcing a “Prose Department” and an “Art Department” later the same year. Cover designs changed as new printers were contracted, but remained Spartan until an abstract illustration of a geometric figure appeared on the cover of several of the final issues. These editorial changes and policies were not consistently upheld. Under the influence of various assistant or special issue editors, Others persistently remade itself, attempting to remain new and different by defying even its own norms.

The unconventional layout of Others’s first volume—each poet granted his or her own page—framed poetic identity as an autonomous, self-bounded unit. The isolation of each poet on the page did not eliminate his or her social function, but rather, fostered greater intimacy and identification between poet and reader. Readers of little magazines like Others, many of them aspiring poets and writers, turned to the radical presses in search of kindred spirits. One reader of The Little Review was inspired to compose the free verse couplet:

I have just had the January number.
I feel as if I had found my companions.

The sense of intimacy, fostered in the pages of Others, became the basis for new social communities. Historian Christine Stansell explains:

From the empathies the printed page engendered, a reading person might mobilize an idealized self, a subject of rich possibilities fated to be joined felicitously with others. Like much modern literature, this writing enacted an estrangement from bourgeois life, but here the estrangement was softened and transformed through the admission it promised into a community of dissenters, into kinships wrought by a culture of letters. Creative spirits, stepping from one life to another, might find themselves in league with others from across the social spectrum who had taken the same steps, eager to weave bonds of politics, ethics, and sex.

“Creative spirits” who picked up a plain little yellow pamphlet in 1915 literally found themselves in league with Others. What the little magazine frames, then, is not the lone poetic genius—the modernist artist as alienated, exiled “Other”—but many “Others” coming together to form an artistic and social community, one that, like the Transcendentalist movement that produced The Dial in 1840, originated in a small, breakaway artistic colony. Although, in both instances, intellectual and artistic iconoclasts attempted to dissociate themselves geographically and symbolically

39 Stansell, American Moderns, 176.
from bourgeois culture, they were nevertheless engaged in a communal effort of artistic and social reform.

Despite Others’s importance to the development of modern American poetry, its significance tends to be overshadowed by Poetry. Shari Benstock and Bernard Benstock argue that the “history of Poetry can be read as the history of Modernism in miniature, especially since its tenure dates from October 1912 to September 1942, and its initial position was so unrelentingly avant-garde—manifested in a willingness to consider work that at the time was startlingly new.” Yet Others is as important as Poetry to the development of free verse in America and better represents the insurgent, heterodox character of many modernist little magazines. Although Poetry did publish experimental poems, it was less committed to formal innovation (publishing William Vaughan Moody alongside Ezra Pound in the first issue) and more intrusive in its editorial practices than Others (Monroe balked at Williams’s elimination of capital letters at the beginning of each line and insisted on rearranging Wallace Stevens’s “Sunday Morning”). Kreymborg instigated Others in part out of frustration with Monroe’s editorial interference, in an effort to give poets free reign to experiment. As its elegant, dignified cover attested, Poetry was also more establishment in its aims and commercial in its origins and operations: the figure of Pegasus, circumscribed by a capital “P,” affirmed that the magazine was designed to become a classic. In contrast, Others’s name and plain yellow cover flaunted its marginal, anti-establishment status. Whereas Monroe founded Poetry by soliciting fifty-dollar donations from Chicago businessmen, Others was funded in its first year by a private donation from the wealthy art collector Walter Conrad Arensberg, and thereafter by sporadic donations from poets as diverse as Lola Ridge and Robert Frost. Poetry paid ten dollars a page for contributions and gave monetary prizes; Others was avowedly anti-commercial, offering its contributors only what Pierre Bourdieu calls “symbolic capital”—the prestige and authority associated with a trade that pays nothing because it is priceless.42


41 Not only Others, but also the dozens of other little magazines of the period, from the decadent Rogue to the defiant Liberator, deserve the same critical attention bestowed upon Poetry if we are to recover a full sense of the vitality, diversity, and contentiousness of modernism.

Fig. 1.1. Cover, Poetry (October 1912).
Fig. 1.2. Cover, *Others* (July 1915).
A new social geography: New York in the 1910s

Another fundamental factor for *Others* was its geographic location. Whereas *Poetry* was headquartered in Chicago, *Others* began in an art colony in Ridgefield, New Jersey, a short ferry ride from Manhattan, and then relocated to Greenwich Village—a breeding ground for revolutionary ideas and artistic innovations.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, New York began to usurp Boston’s position as the cultural center of America. As the culture relocated, it also changed hands. No longer the exclusive province of Boston Brahmins, culture became more dynamic and hybrid. “Mongrel Manhattan,” as Ann Douglas calls it, was an mélange of languages, classes, races, and nationalities, and nowhere was the cacophony of Harvard-trained, Eastern-European, Yiddish, and Irish accents more audible than in Greenwich Village.43 Djuna Barnes’s 1916 sketch of Washington Square captures the casual yet exotic nature of the ethnic, racial, and linguistic intermixing:

On the benches in the square men and women resting; limbs wide-flung, arms pendent, listless; round the fountains and on the corners children, dark-eyed Italian children shrieking now with Yankee-cockney accent, a moment later whispering to their deep-bosomed mothers in the Tuscan of Dante. Here a bunch of Jewish girls like a nosegay, there a pair of Norwegian emigrants, strong of figure and sparing of speech; a colored girl on the sidewalk jostles a Japanese servant and wonders whether he too is colored or is he thought to be a white like “dem Dagos.”44

The most distinctively modern aspect of the Village scene Barnes describes is one least likely to register with readers today: the mingling of men and women in a public place. Their casual deportment—“limbs wide-flung, arms pendent”—signals their emancipation from restrictive gender codes and rules of conduct. Neither chaperones nor chauvinism interfered with the contact between men and women in the Village. Sexual equality was, according to Kreymborg, the “ethics that the world of Washington Square approves, where the woman is the equal, if not the superior of man.”45 Greenwich Village in the 1910s was a “hotbed of suffragism,” the headquarters for prominent “New Women” such as Barnes, Louise Bryant, Mabel Dodge, Emma Goldman, Margaret Sanger, Edna St. Vincent Millay, and the Baroness Elsa von Freitag Loringhoven.46 For these and other women who flocked to the Village in the 1910s, writing was both a means and sign of emancipation, and poetry—especially free verse—was a favored form of expression.

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The modern, emancipated spirit materialized in *Others*, which Barnes characterizes as “a magazine of verse—blank—the moods of many; a sort of plain-bread-of-poetry—called *vers libre*; and though it was printed in the Bronx it was reeking with the atmosphere of the studios along the South side of the Square.”

As poetic and gender conventions were revolutionized in the Village, architectural innovations were transforming the way men and women organized and inhabited space throughout New York City. The changes were most visible in Manhattan’s rising skyline. Between 1900 and 1910, New York experienced an unprecedented building boom, spurred by economic expansion, population growth, and technological innovation. An influx of wealth and immigrants into cities resulted in the erection of factories, warehouses, office buildings, and apartment houses. The development of reinforced concrete and steel construction and the introduction of electricity, gas heat, indoor plumbing, and elevators enabled the construction of larger, taller, and more flexible spaces. The rapid and revolutionary transformation of American building practices prompted architectural critic Herbert Croly to proclaim in 1903 “a complete set of new architectural mechanism and scenery,” and to declare New York City “more the leader in matters of taste than it ever has been before.”

Architecture (like poetic form) is not merely a matter of design: structural changes have social ramifications, not the least of which is the potential to disrupt traditional gender divisions. Consider the rise of apartment dwelling: the number of apartment buildings in New York grew from only 200 in 1876, to more than 10,000 in the first decade of the twentieth century. According to historian Elizabeth Collins Cromley, apartment houses blurred the division between public and private spheres, allowing women more autonomy and access to urban spaces outside the home and decreasing their dependence on servants. Both critics and proponents of apartment dwellings recognized its social impact. Conservative critics derided the apartment house for disseminating “radical evil” and undermining the sanctity of the private home: the proximity of living quarters, they argued, fostered unhealthy competition among tenants, leading to debt, drink, and divorce. Conversely, Charlotte Perkins Gilman celebrated the “passing of the home” and the end of the “self-centered family life” in favor of families engaged “in the interests and pleasures of the outside world.” Gilman thought women were most likely to gain from the new arrangements: the “weary housewife,” long confined to domestic drudgery inside the private home, would be transformed into “the handsome, healthy, golf-playing woman.”

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47 Barnes, *Greenwich Village As It Is*, no pagination given.
48 Herbert Croly, “American Architecture of Today.” *The Architectural Record* 14, no. 6 (December 1903): 413, 422.
Elizabeth Hawes argues that apartment dwelling had liberating potential for women in the 1900s, noting that “the raising of hemlines, rooflines, and consciousness would proceed in concert.”

For free verse poets, the emancipation of the poetic line was a corollary dimension of this architectural revolution. In Helen Hoyt’s “Rooming,” for example, which appeared in *The Little Review*, the confines of a one-room apartment (implicitly replicated in narrow free verse stanzas) enable the speaker limitless imaginative expansion:

> My room is narrow,  
> But wide enough.  
> My desk and pencils are wide as the world  
> And my books are like palaces and far journeys.  
> What have I need of space?  
> There is always room enough for thinking,  
> Or for dreaming or desiring.

The poem illustrates Daniel Willis’s thesis that “in many cities, there is an inverse relationship between the size of one’s dreams and the floor area of one’s apartment.” For Hoyt, the tiny apartment is especially liberating for her female persona, fostering independence, psychic liberation, and mental expansion.

**“He cannot live in the old houses”: organic architecture and free verse**

As they experimented with new structural arrangements both in life and in art, modernist writers turned to the language of architecture to conceptualize their efforts. Attempting to explain free verse to readers of the *New York Morning*

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56 This phenomenon is not limited to modernist poetry. In “Many Marriages,” a novella serialized in *The Dial* in 1922, Sherwood Anderson’s protagonist, John Webster (a factory owner) engages in an extramarital affair with his secretary. The illicit relationship generates a spatial transformation of his mind and body: “If his body was a house it was now the cleansing time for that house.” After sleeping with his lover and experiencing sexual fulfillment for the first time, Webster giddily predicts a violent reformation of both architecture and selfhood: “A time will come when love like a sheet of fire will run through the towns and cities. It will tear walls away. It will destroy ugly houses. It will tear ugly clothes off the bodies of men and women. They will build anew and build beautifully” (537). Metaphorically connecting house razing and consciousness raising, Anderson’s fiction itself “tears walls away” in order to reveal the inner life of his protagonist and narrate the progress of his sexual awakening (548). Anderson, “Many Marriages,” *The Dial* 73, no. 4 (October 1922): 533–48.
Telegraph, Kreymborg uses a house metaphor, figuring traditional poetic forms as false, confining shelters:

Each man nowadays, just as in ye olden times of the sonnet, the lyric and the ballad, is seeking a form in which to express his particular tale of woe. Only he is dissatisfied with the restrictions placed about his imagination by the old forms. He wants forms of his own to surround his ideas and emotions. He cannot live in the old houses. They are too stuffy, too proper and conventional. He wants to live out-of-doors. So he builds out-of-doors. He wants a house or houses built of material he finds inside himself.57

Kreymborg’s call for composition from “within” echoes a central tenet of modern architectural theory. In Frank Lloyd Wright’s words, “Architecture must now unfold an inner content—express ‘life’ from ‘within.’”58 Or as Le Corbusier puts it, “The Plan proceeds from within to without; the exterior is the result of an interior.”59 Wright developed his “free plan,” with movable partitions between open rooms at the same time that modernist poets opted for the flexible divisions between the lines and stanzas of free verse. Applying their ideals to both public buildings and private houses, modern architects, like modernist poets, aimed to make the private public—to eliminate the divisions between inside and outside, interior and surface. According to modernist aesthetic principles, architectural construction and poetic composition become processes of turning the “inside-out.” What was formerly hidden, confined, or covered up becomes the substance of artistic composition.

For the free verse poet, the new “house” is not a mere linguistic container for personal thoughts and feelings; it is the essential, organic substance of the self. Like D. H. Lawrence, who in his 1918 essay on “The Poetry of the Present” rejects “the storehouse of finished things” in favor of “the instant, the immediate self, the very plasm of self,” Kreymborg opposes the naturalness of free verse to the artificiality of traditional poetic structures.60 Both poets advocate unbuilding as the only authentic form of building. To unbuild poetry—to establish the boundaries of a boundless “out-of-doors” or to situate an undefined space as the “very plasm” or center of the self—is a utopian project. Free verse, in the imaginations of modernists like Kreymborg and Lawrence, represents an ideal space—the external embodiment of an intuited, but unfathomed core of selfhood. Free verse promises to heighten consciousness by breaking and estranging habitual patterns of language, as Lawrence argues:

We can get rid of the stereotyped movements and the old hackneyed associations of sound and sense. We can break down those artificial conduits and canals through which we do so love to force our utterance. We can break the stiff neck of habit.\textsuperscript{61}

Lawrence’s argument echoes Kreymborg’s manifesto for the “new houses” of free verse: substituting “habits” for inhabitations, Lawrence uses similar physical structures to represent the same abstract ideals of authenticity and self-emancipation.

Though frequently used to delimit the individual self, modernist spatial tropes indicate an active, multi-faceted engagement with contemporary culture—with abstract intellectual theories and concrete technological and architectural developments. As Stephen Kern demonstrates in \textit{The Culture of Time and Space}, many social, scientific, technological, and intellectual developments conspired to transform conceptions of space in the 1910s. The development of non-Euclidean geometry in the nineteenth century and Einstein’s theories of space-time relativity (1905, 1919) suggested that space was neither uniform nor static, but heterogeneous and volatile. Space began to be understood as an internal, subjective experience, rather than an external, empirical fact.

The urge to explore subjective, private spaces was further invigorated by an intellectual wave from Europe that crashed on American shores in the 1910s. The first English translations of Nietzsche, Marx, and Freud’s major works were published in the early teens. Each attempted to expose forms of “false consciousness,” whether social, psychological, or moral states of self-deception.\textsuperscript{62} Calling for the destruction of false fronts and the revelation of underlying truths, each thinker conceived the problem of personal and cultural deception in spatial terms: Marx focused on dismantling hierarchical class structures; Freud sought to excavate the hidden depths of the unconscious; and Nietzsche attempted to dislodge the individual from the shelter of anesthetizing fictions.\textsuperscript{63} American poets inherited from these European

\textsuperscript{61} Lawrence, Preface to the American edition of \textit{New Poems} [1918], 221.

\textsuperscript{62} Critic Michael Bell succinctly summarizes this common concern: “Marx … analyzed the external realm of social and economic process and laid bare the ‘false consciousness’ by which the advantaged classes unwittingly rationalized their own condition. Freud investigated the inner realm of the psyche and showed how, through the processes of ‘sublimation,’ consciousness may itself act as a sophisticated barrier to recognizing the true nature of instinctual desire. And this is not just a personal problem to be diagnosed, it is the necessary basis of civilization. Meanwhile, Nietzsche diagnosed the whole tradition of Western metaphysics from Socrates onwards as a subtle form of falsehood reflecting an inner suppression and an outer domination. Christianity in particular was a gigantic fraud perpetrated by the psyche on itself.” Bell, “The metaphysics of Modernism,” \textit{The Cambridge Companion to Modernism}, edited by Michael Levenson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 9–10.

\textsuperscript{63} “… how often, in an effort to recover from myself, as it were to induce a temporary self-forgetting, I have sought shelter in this or that—in some piece of admiration or enmity or scientificality or frivolity or stupidity; and why, where I could not find what I \textit{needed}, I had artificially to enforce, falsify and invent a suitable fiction for myself (—and what else have poets ever done? and to what end does art exist in the world at all?).” Friedrich Wilhelm
thinkers the problem of false consciousness along with the spatial tropes for conceptualizing it.

Modernist poets not only use architectural tropes to describe their compositions, but also claim for language the physical status of building materials. As Williams put it, “There is a ‘special’ place which poems, as all works of art, must occupy, but it is quite definitely the same as that where bricks or colored threads are handled.”

Williams articulates a shift from the mimetic view of language as a transparent medium for describing or reflecting the world, to a modernist understanding of language as a physical substance that actually forms the world. Modernists view poetic language as both a building material and a spatial structure we inhabit. Stevens’s 1918 poem, “Architecture,” makes this associative move, figuring writing as a process of building, as well as a dwelling place:

What manner of building shall we build?
Let us design a chastel de chasteté.
De pensée . . .

Here, the poet builds a psychic interior, an enclosure for thought (“pensée”) as well as for sexual purity (“chasteté”). Poetic language forms the structures of consciousness, shaping the pathways of thought and desire.

The discourse of free verse makes extravagant claims about its spatial properties, vital functions, and emancipating powers. As its more incisive theorists recognized, “free verse” is a contradiction of terms. In his 1917 essay “Reflections on Vers Libre,” Eliot coolly deflates the vers librists’ “battle cry of freedom,” insisting that “there is no freedom in art.” Similarly, Williams argues that, “being an art form, verse cannot be ‘free’ in the sense of having no limitations or guiding principles.”

In a droll commentary on free verse, Arthur Davison Ficke takes aim at the highfalutin architectural metaphors employed by its practitioners:

The old fixed verse-forms—such as the sonnet, blank verse, and all the other familiar metres—were exactly as cramping to the free creative spirit of the poet as the peculiar spaces and arches of the Sistine Chapel were to the designing instinct of Michael Angelo.


64 William Carlos Williams, “Marianne Moore,” The Dial 78, no. 393 (May 1925): 401; reprinted in Imaginations, 314.


Lamentable misfortune! How much would they not have gained in grandeur could they have had all outdoors to expand in!

All outdoors is just what vers libre affords the poet of today.68

Ficke points out the absurdity of the notion of art without structural limitations. Clearly, free verse enthusiasts were neither producing formless poetry, nor transcending physical limits; rather, they were renovating existing poetic structures. Free verse may be a misnomer, and the architectural metaphors used to promote it may be theoretically unsound, but it is worth examining these tropes because they constitute a bridge between modernist formal practices and social concerns.

As modernist poets strive to do something “other” with poetry, they reach out to other disciplines to describe their compositions. Certainly architecture is not the only discipline that poets turn to: music, dance, painting, even industry and commerce, also supply rich analogies. But the architectural metaphors prove particularly efficacious because they simultaneously emphasize the formal dimensions of language— its physical substance and structures—and get at something more social, involving how men and women live together, and how we construct boundaries between public and private, inside and outside, self and other. In this way, these metaphors transfer modernist poetic forms into the domains of gender and sexuality. Thus, the new “manner of building” in Stevens’s poem “Architecture” has distinctly sexual dimensions. As DuPlessis observes, the “edifice has a playful phallic part” that arises when the speaker calls upon us to “Push up the towers / To the cock-tops.”69 The combination of forms does not merely constitute a manly erection, however, but also implies a fertile heterosexual arrangement of male and female parts: “Our chiefest dome a demoiselle of gold. / Pierce the interior with pouring shafts.” The new poetic architecture figuratively regenerates the individual and brings him into fruitful, erotically pleasurable relations with others:

Only the lusty and the plenteous
Shall walk
The bronze-filled plazas
And the nut-shell esplanades.70

A blueprint of the book

The preponderance of architectural metaphors in modernist poetic discourse becomes apparent when we read through Others. Viewed in the context of little magazines, the modernist fascination with “spatial form” signals not a retreat into what Joseph Frank calls “the timeless world of myth,” but an active participation in a broader poetic and social experiment—a movement to renovate the psychic,

69 DuPlessis, Genders, Races, and Religious Cultures, 23.
70 Stevens, Opus Posthumous, 18.
physical, and linguistic structures we inhabit. By attending to the complexity and variety of spatial and architectural tropes, I aim to show free verse’s entanglement with other social discourses, without losing sight of what may be modernist poetry’s most distinguishing feature: its emphasis on form. My ultimate goal is to renovate formalism—to root modernist poetry in a social context, while recognizing the artfulness of its spatial designs. Others provides the frame for such a re-reading of modernist formalism, and the architecture of my own book is informed by spatial tropes that pervade the little magazine.

Chapter Two offers a history of Others, emphasizing the material and symbolic spaces the magazine inhabited and brought into being. I argue that how writers conceive and represent those spaces influences the location—or dislocation—of gender and sexuality in the history of modernism. Chapter Two generates a topological map of modernism that accommodates both its formal and sexual dimensions, grounding modernist poetic practices in the context of a period of gender unrest, and charting lines of influence and interaction between women and men, canonized and forgotten poets, and American and European artists.

Chapter Three moves inside the space of the Others, surveying the poems published in the magazine to assess trends, patterns, and preoccupations. By reading across the magazine, I show how architectural tropes, especially interior spaces, serve as a bridge between modernist forms and modern structures of gender and sexuality. In their efforts to access and unfold interior spaces, modernist poets agitate the spatial divisions that historically define gender as “separate spheres,” and that, toward the turn of the century, reposition sexuality in the domain of the interior. My survey of the magazine examines the complex, contradictory, and often comical ways in which Others poets evoke, deconstruct, and reconstruct sexual difference, while engaging in a communal effort to renovate poetry.

Although many writers attempt to stabilize the changing sexual topography, often the most interesting and challenging poets do not resolve the incongruities, but use the forms and structures of poetry to complicate them. Chapters Four, Five and Six examine how three of the most inventive poets—Williams, Moore, and Loy—participate in this effort, grappling with the complexities and contradictions in the logic of the free verse movement.

Chapter Four examines William Carlos Williams’s rejection of rhyme and his search for alternate structures of poetic closure and continuation. Williams’s work on and in Others is part of his effort to generate new endings for poetry by bringing it crashing to the ground and then erecting it anew, a process he executes not only

71 Joseph Frank argues that the “space-logic” of modernist writings reflects a cultural urge to transmute “the time world of history into a timeless world of myth.” Frank, The Idea of Spatial Form, 64. In contrast, I would argue that the modernist preoccupation with space evinces an engagement with major social issues, particularly changing conventions of gender and sexuality.

72 Wallace Stevens was just as closely associated with Others, but his involvement with the magazine is well studied by Newcomb in “Others, Poetry, and Wallace Stevens.”
through his repeated attempts to terminate the magazine, but also within his poems. The formal structures of poetry become, in Williams’s handling, both architectural and sexual: rebuilding a poem after a cataclysmic ending serves as a way of reanimating both the creative impulse and the sex drive. Teasing out a correlation between formal poetics and heterosexual erotics, I link Williams’s poetry in *Others* to his subsequent experiments with poetry and prose in *Kora in Hell* (1920) and *Spring and All* (1923).

Chapter Five examines the reciprocal relationship between Marianne Moore and *Others* as each sought to establish poetic identity. Moore provided *Others* a sense of solidity and value in the volatile new poetry scene, and in turn the little magazine granted her necessary freedom from conventions and categories. Moore’s formal experiments in *Others* attempt to activate a social self through conversation with others. Her “poetics of conversity” projects an interactive self-in-process that delights in movement and exchange. Moore plays with pronouns to instigate communication outside confining gender categories, using rhythm and lineation to model flexible, equitable forms of partnership. Her early poetry in *Others*, culminating in the long poem “Marriage” (1923), seeks “that striking grasp of opposites / opposed each to the other, not to unity.”

Chapter Six examines Mina Loy’s affiliation with *Others* in the teens, showing how she used the little magazine to develop a “poetics of dislodging.” Loy roots her feminist poetics in the architecture of houses: “The door was an absurd thing,” she asserts in “The Effectual Marriage,” insinuating that the door produces the illusion of progress and passage in a static, lifeless marriage. By wrenching apart syntax and grammar, Loy attempts to deconstruct the foundations of marriage and to dismantle the structures that delimit female identity. Ultimately Loy fails to detach her personae from their material and linguistic foundations, but the awkward entanglements provide fascinating insights into the social formation of gender and sexuality. This chapter also looks beyond *Others*, investigating how Loy’s subsequent appearances in *The Dial* and *The Little Review* chart two contradictory developments in her poetry: a movement toward the detached, impersonal, and technically refined aesthetics of high modernism, and a counter-impulse to continue the complex personal entanglements of *Others*.

Williams, Moore, and Loy used *Others* to develop their distinctive poetics and to advance their reputations, and each poet in turn was shaped by the little magazine. Understanding individual genius in the context of broader social forces, my study of *Others* reframes modernist formalism as a social process—a collective movement to renovate the structures we inhabit, not alone or in isolation, but in relation to others.
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