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Le début du vingtième siècle offre l’image de l’écriture poétique marquée par les tensions qui caractérisent la construction d’un mythe d’invention issu de la modernité, qui se repose sur la destruction de codes. L’anthologie intitulée *The New Poetry*, publiée en 1917 par Harriet Monroe et Alice Corbin Henderson, fait écho au postulat d’une poétique fondée sur le questionnement des contraintes que représentent le mètre et la rime, tel l’exemple du vers libre. Pourtant, l’expérimentation prosodique s’accompagne dans le climat géo-politique de la première guerre mondiale d’une réflexion sur les limites du mythe de l’autonomie formelle. Dans ce contexte, l’opposition entre les notions de forme et d’absence de forme se voit supplanter par la vision d’un ordre poétique nouveau, qui serait apte à traduire l’image d’une écriture qui vise non pas les formes de rupture mais d’inscription.

In the early twentieth century, the relationship between poets and the rules that preside over composition is cast as a conflictual one, characteristic of modernity’s mythologizing of formal innovation as a path to artistic autonomy, achieved through the destruction of codes. The anthology entitled *The New Poetry*, which was published in 1917 by Harriet Monroe and Alice Corbin Henderson, faithfully reflects the construct of a poetics established upon the reappraisal of the constraints set by meter and rhyme, as in the example of free verse. However, while celebrating avenues to experiment, the anthology brings to light the limitations of the myth of formal autonomy in a cultural climate shaped by the geo-politics of World War One. In this context, the ideal of a newly-ordered poetic universe adequately reflecting poetry’s place in society comes to supplant the debate opposing notions of form and formlessness.

vers libre, modernisme, Harriet Monroe, A.C. Henderson, *The New Poetry* (1917)

I. A Tradition of the New

With the publication in 1917 of the anthology entitled *The New Poetry*, Harriet Monroe and Alice Corbin Henderson assume the editorial responsibility of encapsulating the defining features of an anglophone poetic avant-garde, whose many configurations had followed in rapid succession since the first decade of the twentieth century. The endeavour to separate the “old” from the “new”, as in this anthology, typifies early twentieth-century visons of poetry as a prospective art, in so far as it reflects the set of assumptions characteristic of modernity’s mythologizing of formal innovation. The emphasis placed on form as an avenue to artistic autonomy and thus to freedom from the conventions belonging to a previous age partakes of this myth. In addition to being read as a faithful image of this construct, *The New Poetry* is noted for displaying the interconnectedness between the rise of experiment and the formation of an American national poetic tradition. Its role in this is recognized in a 1918 review when it is lauded for presenting an “adequate retrospect of the renascence of American verse” (Kreymborg 1918: 222). Indeed, for Alfred Kreymborg, the author of the review, congratulations were due in light of this achievement. First, he argued, in their account of a

revival that extended over a period of "six or seven years", the anthologists had managed to surpass the endeavours of the major commercial organs of the time (222). Secondly, in pursuing the ambition to record the offerings of an American poetry revival, it would surely have seemed to Kreymborg that theirs was a worthy companion project to his own editorial involvement in the small magazine *Others: A Magazine of the New Verse*, founded in 1914. However, in a statement that would seem to anticipate the demise of *Others* in 1919 and to reflect in a more general sense the culture of impermanence surrounding vanguard literary circles, the review goes on to contend that the revival recorded by Monroe and Corbin one year earlier had regrettably come to an end. As if to seal its argument, the review closes by stigmatizing recent American poetry for its stale, consensual forms, now that it has in Kreymborg's view, "erect[ed] a new academy from a radical cornerstone" (223). The present study proposes to examine a fragment from the "radical cornerstone" to which Kreymborg alludes, through the example of free verse. Its role as an emblematic experiment in the first decades of the twentieth century awards free verse a large place in the anthology *The New Poetry* and in the revival it purports to illustrate. With the 1917 collection, it acquires a critical forum that lends only greater significance to a contribution that had been several years in the making. The principle according to which verse may be freed from the restrictions of meter is cast as part of a sweeping reappraisal of the rules of poetic composition, which in turn is construed as a reflection of a critical strain in contemporary culture. However, the "new spirit" as the editors define it being an inclusive one—attentive not only to the backdrop of the age but to the legacy of traditional rhymed verse (1932: xxxix)—the limitations that suppose the absence of codes are made clear. It will be considered how a discourse of artistic autonomy that remains attached to an ideal of formal rejuvenation lends itself to this paradox and in doing so, constitutes a defining feature of the poetic landscape of 1917.

With the first edition of the anthology in February 1917, there is a stronger sense of the desire to celebrate a tradition of the "new" than to focus on any pending demise soon to affect the modern muse. The period of renewed creativity singled out by the editors concerns a timeframe that would locate the beginnings of the renaissance in 1912—the year when Harriet Monroe founded the Chicago-based magazine *Poetry*—a cosmopolitan publication in whose pages many of the anthology's poems were first to appear. The extensiveness of the 1917 collection was greatly facilitated by Harriet Monroe's association with the American poet Ezra Pound, also beginning in 1912, when he was signed up as *Poetry* magazine's foreign correspondent. Writing from London, Pound threw all his weight behind promoting alongside Monroe what he called "our American Risorgimento" (Monroe 1938: 260). As he was to exclaim eagerly at the time: "That awakening will make the Italian Renaissance look like a tempest in a teapot!" (260). His influence unmistakably surfaces in the introduction to an anthology that comprises a broad historical survey of the diverse cultural origins of English language poetry, with references to the "oriental" and the "classic" tradition in the "new poetry" (Monroe and Henderson 1917: xii). At the outset therefore, the so-called national bias of the anthology is quickly eclipsed by allusions to imagist approximations of Japanese hokku, Pound's translations from the Chinese, Hilda Doolittle's Hellenic tropes and the overarching transnational lense through which the editors view the history of English-language poetry. Though not entirely discounting the suggestion that national character is reflected in aesthetic experiment, in particular when entertaining a comparison with contemporary English poetry[1], the revival celebrated by the editors in 1917 may be described

[1] In the revised editon of 1923 and 1932 of *The New Poetry*, it is argued that the differences between American and English poetry result from the distinctive geography and politics of each nation. In reference to American poetry, the editors affirm that "it begins to be continental in scope; to express the immense differences of climate, landscape, and racial and cultural environment, in this majestically vast and bewilderingly mixed nation. Compared with this variety and spaciousness, so to speak, most of the recent English poetry seems cribbed,

as less concerned with ascertaining the Americanness of the exercise than the level of imagination and skill behind the patterns employed[2].

At the same time the voices of Anglo-American modernism were beginning to reach new audiences as a number of non-commercial organs emerged on both sides of the Atlantic. As with *Poetry* magazine, these provided a forum for debates led by poets and critics alike on the rules presiding over poetic composition. For example, this was to produce, as with Wyndham Lewis's magazine *Blast*[3], radical calls by Italian futurist and English vorticist poets for the removal of regular forms altogether; in a similar vein discussions arose among those belonging to a less ostentatious avant-garde, but one nevertheless that was intent upon establishing alternative typologies of form. For instance, a poet struggling in 1915 to direct his writing away from the prescribed form of iambic measure might ask most candidly, "What is Poetry?"[4] For those experimenting outside the rules of metric composition, as here the American poet Edgar Lee Masters, there were distinctions to be made between "poetry" on the one hand and "verse" on the other. While meter might organise the latter, there remained the suggestion that true poetry is the fruit of a more highly flexible rhythm, stemming from the "vibrations of the soul" (Masters 1915: 308). For some, only through a studied opposition between the old and the new, thus between the rhythms derived from regular meter and the cadences of free verse, might the matter be resolved. However, what is apparent in the *New Poetry* of 1917 is a more discrete melding of forms. Instead of a strictly contrastive prosody, juxtaposing lines of unrhymed free verse and rhymed metrical schemes, there is a willingness made manifest to explore hybridity not only within individual lines but within the frames of fixed forms such as the sonnet or the dramatic monologue[5].

The very seriousness of the debate transpires in its capacity as well to cross over and weave itself into a wider cultural tapestry. For example, 1916 saw a heated exchange between *Poetry* magazine and Max Eastman, the editor of the socialist magazine *The Masses* and a contributor to the *The New Republic*—an American magazine founded in 1914, whose liberalism in its early years echoed across a wide base of domestic and foreign policy makers. In a column for *The New Republic* entitled "Lazy Verse", Eastman describes what is termed a "journalistic vogue of free-verse": "It is easy to be free by simply declining to engage a medium offering a vigorous resistance of its own; but to be free by virtue of the power to conquer with your passion everything that stands against it in the genuine utilities of an art, is a freedom worthy of the boast" (140). Alice Corbin Henderson, who was then one of Monroe's first assistant editors at *Poetry* magazine takes issue with the suggestion that there lies a responsibility with poets to gauge the degrees of "resistance" offered by meter as opposed to *vers libre* (Henderson 1916: 148). By focussing on the equation whereby the

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cabined and confined in scope and range, and monotonous in feeling and style" (Monroe and Henderson 1932: li).

[2] For examples in *The New Poetry* (1917) illustrating the broad cultural base of English language prosody, see H.D.: "Hermes of the Ways, I-II" (63) and "Priapus (Keeper of the Orchards)" (65); Amy Lowell: "Chinoiseries" (192-93); Ezra Pound: "The River-Merchant's Wife: A Letter (from the Chinese of Li Po)" (273) and "Exile's Letter (From the Chinese of Li Po)" (274).

[3] *Blast*: June 1914-July 1915, published in London, Toronto and New York.

[4] In "What is Poetry?", an essay published in *Poetry* magazine, Edgar Lee Masters posits a definition of poetry that values "poetry"—with rhythms derived from the "vibrations of the soul"—over "verse", deemed restrictive and sterile: "A poem comes out of the vibration of the soul—the rhythmical vibration of the soul. For all vibration is rhythmical. And this is the vibration by which its dynamic comes up into words, and effects subtle and inherent cadence even where no definite rhythm is attempted. Out of this statement someone may construct a definition of poetry—a definition that will include all poetry worth including and will exclude all writing which is only verse" (308).

[5] Examples of these, to name a few, include monologues from Edgar Lee Masters's *Spoon River Anthology* (351-62), sonnets by e.e. cummings (115; 119) and the psalmodic free verse of Harriet Monroe's "The Hotel" (396-98).

absence of meter is equated with a lack of "resistance" on the part of the medium, Henderson brings to light the political arena in which literature is placed and the overriding assumption attributed to Eastman's argument that artistry be regulated on ethical grounds. If encased in the political metaphor of "resistance", as in Eastman's statement, metered verse acquires the kind of moral courage one might expect to be emulated in a poet's life; consequently, it being replaced by free verse is presented not only as a formal failure but in essence, as a moral failure. In fact, the description of free verse by Eastman as more an indication of "indolence" than of strenuous invention is what Henderson's response aims to correct (148). In a comment entitled "Lazy Criticism", she provides the following retort: "It is also foolish to think that vers libre is not 'a medium offering a vigorous resistance of its own,' simply because that resistance is less obvious. The poet knows that it is just as hard to write good free verse as it is to write good metrical verse" (144-49). By supporting the notion that there is no such thing as verse devoid of constraints of some kind—the shapes they adopt merely change—Henderson's comment not only echoes the prosodic platform of *Poetry* magazine and the subsequent 1917 anthology. It also appears to anticipate the defense of craftsmanship voiced by T.S. Eliot in his 1917 essay, "Reflections on Vers Libre": "*Vers libre* has not even the excuse of a polemic; it is a battle-cry of freedom, and there is no freedom in art" (1965: 184) and later in a 1942 lecture, "The Music of Poetry": "no verse is free for the poet who wants to do a good job" (Eliot 1957: 37).

II. Patterns of Restraint and Release

Interestingly, for others, the example of free verse only heightened the focus on ways to acknowledge and respond to the limitations dictated by craft. A first step in this direction entailed a shifting emphasis that saw poetry less as a written artefact of well-tried conventions and more as an aural art attuned to the expressive qualities of voice. In turn, analogies between poetry and music were the centerpiece to celebrations of new forms, seemingly freed of the constraints required of iambic meter and end-rhyme. One example of this is Amy Lowell's "polyphonic prose", praised by John Gould Fletcher for its "mastery of sound" and its "orchestral quality", "equal if not superior in value to vers libre" (Fletcher 1915: 35). After the discovery of "polyphonic prose", upon which Lowell is congratulated in 1915, the programmatic strain of her poetics is to reappear once again in the 1917 anthology *The New Poetry*. This is exemplified in the poem entitled "Patterns"[6], whose formal reflexivity is paired with a self-conscious reverie on the social codes available to women navigating a course between freedom and entrapment.

With Lowell, as in "Patterns", the ethics of craft debated in the little magazines of the time is approached through the question of gender. In this poem in particular, it may be observed how through an extended metaphor of the codes governing romantic and sexual behaviours, Lowell's critical input to the debate enacts a dramatization of verse straining towards freedom. The meditation that ensues on the upheaval of "patterns", perceived as restrictive, serves as a backdrop to the formation of a typology of the "new", as proposed by Monroe and Henderson in 1917. To begin, the poem reads as the tale of a feminine persona recounting her experience as a noblewoman awaiting the return of her fiancé, Lord Hartwell, who is fighting in a war alongside "the Duke in Flanders". Out of the careful detail voiced by a first person persona, a portrait unfolds of a woman in strict and elaborate dress, whose appearance is compared to that of a "pattern":

> I walk down the garden paths,
> And all the daffodils
> Are blowing, and the bright blue squills.
> I walk down the patterned garden paths

[6] The first poem in Lowell's 1916 volume *Men, Women and Ghosts*.

In my stiff, brocaded gown.
With my powdered hair and jewelled fan,
I too am a rare
Pattern. As I wander down
The garden paths.
(Lowell 1917: 182-83)

The narrative unveils the struggle against the constraints of her finery: “For my passion / Wars against the stiff brocade” (183). Furthermore, an equation is established between freedom from the elegance imposed by her rank and the sexual freedom she hopes to attain with her lover: “What is Summer in a fine brocaded gown! / I should like to see it lying in a heap upon the ground. / All the pink and silver crumpled up on the ground” (184). Following this, a dialogue intercedes to convey the news of her fiancé’s death in battle. The narrative then resumes and with dashed hopes the persona paints a picture of a life marked by social and physical confinement:

In Summer and in Winter I shall walk
Up and down
The patterned garden paths
In my stiff, brocaded gown.
The squills and daffodils
Will give place to pillared roses, and to asters, and to snow.
I shall go
Up and down,
In my gown.
Gorgeously arrayed,
Boned and stayed.
And the softness of my body will be guarded from embrace
By each button, hook, and lace.
For the man who should loose me is dead,
Fighting with the Duke in Flanders,
In a pattern called a war.
Christ! What are patterns for?
(185-86)

After establishing “a rare / Pattern” (183) in the sense of an ideal, as a model and as a beautiful design, through its comparison with a noblewoman, the poem proposes a final analogy with the subject of war. This entails a transposition of the designs introduced earlier, first in the guise of the female speaker and then in the shape of the gardens of her immediate world, into the context of a violent design, namely that of war. As a result, the reader’s perception of the female persona as an eighteenth-century noblewoman changes. In particular, it grows to encompass the note of irony that sounds out in the question put in the closing line of the poem: “Christ! What are patterns for?” (186) We are reminded of the historical context in which the poem was written—a time of aesthetic quarrel but also a time of war. Furthermore, the expletive and the forthright appeal of this line seems to direct the poem outward, lessening its tie with a fictional past of nobility and securing its grounding in 1917. As for the histrionics of the persona, who incessantly walks, as if across a stage, “up and down” “the patterned garden paths” (185) in equisitely elaborate apparel, they recall the place of performance in avant-garde experiment and equally so perhaps in Amy Lowell’s own theatrical poetry readings. At the same time, in no way does the poem suggest a radical rejection of a lineage of form. In fact, it can be argued that Lowell’s poem pays heed to tradition in its borrowings from the dramatic monologue. Though the poem makes no use of the comprehensive order attained historically through blank verse or heroic couplets in other dramatic monologues, the imagined persona may be said to dramatize events in a fashion reminiscent of the Victorian genre.

Lastly, the manner in which the reader’s attention is drawn to the workings of artifice is another relevant factor in our understanding of the poem. For example, the signs of an

overwrought formality may be understood as a means to energetically embody a reappraisal of form, or at least the willingness among writers to concentrate on craft. The metaphor of the "stiff brocade" brings to the fore the constructedness of art just as the frustrated passions of the persona convey an image of the writer caught up in a cycle of restriction and release. As for the structure of the verse itself, it offers no distinct syllabic pattern or rhyme scheme. Instead, the irregularity of the lines produces a series of starts and stops that culminates in a pained, stitled cadence. This is one illustration of how the poem strives to have the metaphorical play of fictional construction match that of form. This is achieved most effectively in another instance when the reduction of the persona's hopes translates into the contraction of the verse shaped into short monosyllabic lines: "I shall go / Up and down, / In my gown. / Gorgeously arrayed, / Boned and stayed" (185). Paired with the constricted shape of the persona's silhouette, these short lines effectively evoke the modernist axiom of a poetry of restraint of the kind that is ascribed to in *The New Poetry* of 1917.

When defining what is meant by restraint in the "new poetry", Monroe and Henderson are clearly following in the footsteps of the Imagist doctrine laid out by Ezra Pound and F.S. Flint in 1913[7]. In particular, the concerns voiced with respect to diction and rhythm recall the direction proposed by Ezra Pound in his correspondence with Harriet Monroe during the early years of *Poetry* magazine:

> Objectivity and again objectivity, and no expression, no hind-side-beforeness, no Tennysonianness of speech—nothing, nothing, that you couldn't in some circumstance, in the stress of some emotion, actually say. Every literaryism, every book word, fritters away a scrap of the reader's patience, a scrap of his sense of your sincerity. When one really feels and thinks, one stammers with simple speech. (Monroe 1938 : 267)

To the ornate diction of Victorian poetry, the editors mean to oppose one which is "less vague, less verbose" and "less eloquent" (Monroe and Henderson 1917: vi), citing as negative examples the "deems, 'neaths, forsooths, etc., the inversions and high-sounding rotundities" of their predecessors (v). In turn, rhythmical restraint is viewed as an antidote to ineffectual discursiveness. Thus describing the aims of the "new poetry" as a whole, the editors explain:

> It set before itself an ideal of absolute simplicity and sincerity—an ideal which implies an individual, unstereotyped diction; and an individual, unstereotyped rhythm. Thus inspired, it becomes intensive rather than diffuse. It looks out more eagerly than in; it becomes objective. (vi)

The notion that a precise, condensed language for poetry is key to a "greater imaginary and spiritual life" (Monroe and Henderson 1917: vi) may be weighed against what the critic James Longenbach has identifed as the rise of a "diminished aesthetic" in modern poetry (107) and indeed, there is evidence that the paring down expected of "the new poetry" in 1917 is tied to the modernist adherence to the superior claims of the reduced medium. We are reminded of Ezra Pound as early as 1910 recasting poetry as "a sort of inspired mathematics" and suggesting that poems may be read as "equations for the human emotions" (2005: 14). The paradox for free verse against this background of what Monroe herself names "the new austerities" (1917: xiii) begs some consideration. While the empiricism of the " 'vers-libertines' " (x), as some free verse practitioners are called, suggests strong ties with the organic model of Romanticism and the mythologizing of the inventive self freed from social strictures, the reduction sought after among Monroe's circle remains key in so far as it in turn becomes a model. Ultimately, through this construct, the ideal of creative freedom is combined with that of an objectively crafted discourse whose economy is aimed at restoring the poet and poetry to the audience. In this respect, the context of the 1917 anthology is marked, if not by a deference to an ordered poetic universe, by a strong reluctance to proximate the "new" and the retreat altogether of formal models.

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[7] See F.S. Flint 1913: 198-200; Pound 1913: 200-06.

III. Poetry's Response to the World

This seemingly contradictory equation sheds further light on the editorial premises out of which grows the collection of poetry assembled in the 1917 anthology. The perspective offered by the poet and critic Henri Meschonnic on the debate surrounding metrical and rhetorical usage helps locate the claims for innovation within a broader enterprise aimed at reaffirming the poet's place in modernity. In his discussion of an "unrhymed, unmetered" poetic modernity, Meschonnic shifts attention away from a hierarchical classification of discourse built upon a distinction between form and formlessness and categories of objectivity as opposed to subjectivity. Instead, Meschonnic offers up a definition of what he terms the "historicity" of poetry, namely a critical lense whose purpose is to enable an understanding of form that is not incumbent upon an oppositional framework setting ryhmed and metered verse against unrhymed, unmetered verse, setting poetry, in Meschonnic's words, against ordinary language and setting language ultimately against life (1988: 92). Historicity, Meschonnic suggests, entails a diachronic view of form whose relevance lies in its willingness to accomodate invention. The paradox of this spectrum being that one looks to historical moments of rupture only for the signs of an unbroken thread of reinvention. For the poet therefore, there are no definitive restrictions to the scope of invention, which Meschonnic sees as caught up in a healthy cycle of renewal. For example, rhyme, Meschonnic argues, is "a principle of listening" (96)[8]. Accordingly, when a poet breaks the rule of the final ryhme in the position of the line, he remains attuned to the past even as he strains to hear new sounds. To quote Meschonnic: "the disappearance of rhyme at the end of a line is a passage toward the rediscovery of rhyme" (95)[9]. The narrative of form that grows out of this view thus works to demonstrate how a historic sense of poetic composition may be a faithful image of poetry's relationship to the world (92). In other words, whether contemplating the adherence to rules of imitation prevalent in the sixteenth century, the outpourings of an internalized critique of poetry in the nineteenth century or the prosodic debate of the early twentieth century centered upon free verse, we are reminded that the evolution of form lends expression to an array of codes that organise the transformation of our world. Conversely, if held at a remove, one from the other—when the fate of composition is impervious to epistemology—then poetry, in Meschonnic's view, is no longer "in life" (92)[10]. Therefore in substance, this argument contends that poetry's reponse to the world is its principal constraint (94).

The editorial commitment that Monroe and Henderson display to documenting the thread of reinvention among their contemporaries is one manner in which they pay heed to the historicity of form as Meschonnic has defined it. To the publications of *Poetry* magazine since its inception in 1912, Harriet Monroe attributes a "new spirit", by virtue of which "poetry is coming nearer than either the novel or the drama to the actual life of to-day" (1917: v). Of the poetry published in the 1917 anthology, it is similarly envisioned with respect to its relation to the here and now, being said to strive for a "concrete and immediate realization of life" (vi).

The portrayal by Monroe and Henderson of the debate over form is infused with a like-minded optimism. The spirit they celebrate is the same one underpinning the reciprocal relationship between the old and the new that contemporary culture is said to foster : "The poets of to-day", the editors argue, "follow the great tradition when they seek a vehicle suited to their own epoch and their own creative mood, and resolutely reject all others" (1917: vi).

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[8] "Parce que la rime est un principe d'écoute. L'écoute du langage passe et repasse par la rime" (Meschonnic 1989: 216).

[9] "La disparition de la rime en fin de vers est un passage vers la redécouverte de la rime" (Meschonnic 1989: 214).

[10] "La poésie fait cette critique du signe qui remet le langage dans la vie" (Meschonnic 1989: 210).

Though they envision the "renascence of poetry" from the perspective of a discriminating trimming down of form, outpourings of interest in the public sphere are said to provide the impetus to their editorial project. To some extent, subsequent events would demonstrate that the great faith of the editors in a "revival of public interest" was perfectly justified (1917: v). *The New Poetry* became a bestseller soon after its publication in New York in February 1917, prompting four successive reprints in 1917 alone and two subsequent editions, one in 1923 and the other in 1932. From a contemporary vantage point, what is first remarkable about the editorial context of this collection is the indication it provides of the enthusiasm with which poetry anthologies were received at the beginning of the twentieth century on the American Eastern seabord. It is no less noteworthy that though by no means a "war anthology", its first printing in February 1917 preceded by two months the vote in American Congress in support of the measure to declare war on Germany. Indeed, Monroe's editorial work thoughout WWI demonstrates how crucial the war poetry was in her view to the "new spirit" and thus to the revival of poetic form. For example, her editorial comments in *Poetry* magazine between January and March 1917 demonstrate the importance that was placed upon the propaganda of the day, according to which the arrival of war should be received by Americans as an opportunity for a renewed sense of brotherhood and spiritual growth. Instead of dismissing the spiritual claims of patriotic action, Monroe first ponders the human and artistic cost of modern war in a comment published in January 1917 (Monroe 1917a: 195-97). However, her contributions from two months later see her responding indignantly to definitions of a wartime culture, in particular as new claims were made about the futility of poetry in the midst of the horrors of war. Against the notion that artistic experiment as a whole may be deemed socially irresponsible and even irrelevant, Monroe would offer up at this time the first of many energetic pleas for the recognition of the poet as an "agent of civilization" in times of war (Monroe 1917b: 309):

> Let us get down to brass tacks. This being a strenuous age, of universal locomotion, war and other bedevilments, the world has no use, we are told, for the poet unless he is an Isaiah or a Hans Christian Anderson. One might as well say the world has no use for gardens, or dwellings, or symphonies, for sculptured friezes and monuments, for portraits and landscapes, for Venetian glass or Chinese rugs, for jewels and laces, for club-houses and art museums. Because my favourite painter is not moved to depict cosmic horrors like Verestchagin, shall I bid him burn his brushes and take to brooding in a corner? Because the mad world is at war, shall no one play the piano, or plan a fair house, or dream by a sculptured fountain under the tree? (Monroe 1917b: 309-10)

In light of this debate, it is perhaps even more poignant to see that there is every intention to bring to bear the importance of war upon contemporary culture at large in the 1917 anthology. While the United States is not yet at war, this is made apparent through a substantial number of contributions from poets such as D.H. Lawrence, Ford Madox Hueffer[11] and Wilfred Wilson Gibson, to name a few, all whose writing in this instance evoke the ongoing conflict in Europe[12].

As the threat of war spread westward across the Atlantic, Monroe and Henderson were also no doubt keenly aware that the interest displayed in English poets within American literary circles in 1917 was arguably a symptom of the times; their determination to provide a representative sketch of modern poetry written in the United States and in England underwrites the introduction to the volume and is quickly established as one of the guiding principles behind their publishing endeavour (1917: v). Indeed, for the brief window of time

[11] To the 1917 edition, Ford Maddow Heuffer contributed a group of poems entitled, "Antwerp, I-VI"; in the edition of 1931, "Winter-Night Song" and "Footsloggers, I-II and "L'Envoi" are published under the name Ford Maddox Ford.

[12] In the 1917 anthology Gibson published a series of eight poems under the title "Battle"; D.H. Lawrence: "A Woman and her Dead Husband", "Fireflies in the Corn", "Green", "Grief" and "Service of All the Dead".

opened up by WWI, artistic experiment was a buttress the editors were willing to see erected conjointly by American and English poets[13]. In a similar light, gone was the rhetoric of violence that characterized some pre-war calls for formal innovation, as for example with the futurists and vorticists who vigorously extolled the destruction of codes. In place of this, departures from conventional practice are envisioned as partaking in the "spirit of beauty" derived from artistry, and paradoxically perhaps, as an avenue to artistic mastery (1917: xii). As such, it is apparent that little emphasis is to be placed on the disruptiveness of free verse, in its capacity as a revolutionary mode of writing. Instead, the editorial comment is steeped in the awareness that claims of decadence would continue to be levelled against aesthetic experiment as the United States became entrenched in the war. In the face of crisis, what patterns are "for", the editors appear to respond, is a widening of artistic "scope" (1917: xii) through a cross-cultural pollination. This would quickly evolve under the penmanship of Harriet Monroe in the months preceding the 1918 Armistice as "The New Internationalism" (Monroe 1918: 149).

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[13] While the editors support the idea that in the years preceding the first editon of *The New Poetry* the translations published in *Poetry* magazine from languages such as the French, Provençal, Chinese, Greek, Russian and Native American had been greatly instrumental in making English-language poetry more "cosmopolitan and more representative of the age" (Monroe and Henderson 1932: l), it is interesting to note that English poetry in comparison with American poetry would be criticized in the subsequent editions of the anthology (1923; 1932), for its "provincial" and "insular" character (li).

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