Silence is the Loudest Criticism:

The Formation of a New Feminism in Margaret Anderson's *Little Review*

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In March 1914, Margaret Anderson introduced her *Little Review* with an editorial embracing both a subject, Feminism, and new editorial form, self-expression; this opening editorial demonstrates the journal's lifelong commitment to controversy (Hoffman 52-66). Although the first two years of the journal fulfilled Anderson's combined goals of personal ventures and Feminist endeavors through the material published, the remainder of the journal's life curiously did not retain an equal emphasis on Feminism and especially neglected Woman's Suffrage (Baggett 56-7). Although Anderson's *Little Review*, an ardent Feminist magazine, appears to have ignored Woman's Suffrage, an issue which concerned many Feminists, this oversight actually presents an intriguing focus within the *Little Review* and Anderson's life. Anderson did not neglect Woman's Suffrage in her magazine because she was disinterested in the movement; rather, she spent her energies in formulating and practicing a new Feminism distinct from Woman's Suffrage. Her silence on Woman's Suffrage indicates the first articulations of this new variety of Feminism, which I will call Modernist Feminism.

Anderson's and her *Little Review*'s vibrant, idealistic, and creative natures fascinate both literary and historical scholars because of the challenges they presented to American literary and social conventions. Historian Holly Baggett examines Anderson and the *Little Review* in relation to the developing Feminist movement and the growing circle of New Women during the early twentieth century. She identifies Anderson as an archetype of the New Woman, because she

fought for basic Feminist rights (Baggett vi-vii). Recently, Jayne Marek explores Margaret Anderson and other women editors of little magazines as a way to understand women's influences on the Modernist movement (Marek 1-22) Yet although work has been done to contextualize Anderson within the burgeoning Woman Movement, and extensive research has been conducted upon her as a woman editor of one of the most influential little magazines, critics remain silent to the issues of Woman's Suffrage in relation to Anderson. The double silence on Woman's Suffrage—first from Anderson and then from scholars—calls attention to this absence. This silence was caused by Anderson's belief in Modernist Feminism which sought to establish a position for women in society while respecting their individuality (Cott 3).

During the early twentieth century, a new movement developed through which women could attain their rights. Although this movement stemmed from the nineteenth century's Woman Movement, Modernist Feminism was very different. Whereas Modernist Feminists looked for more individual approaches to forming women's positions within society, the Woman Movement focused upon the general position of women within society. As the name suggest, the Woman Movement sought "unity of the female sex…[and] proposed that all women have one cause, one movement" in order to address the social differences between the genders (Cott 3). The Woman Movement was predominately concerned with social issues such as temperance, charities, civic rights, social freedoms, education, and importantly Woman's Suffrage.

While women won the ballot in the 1910s, a new movement fueled by women developed—a movement interested not in the general aspects of society but in granting women the privileges men already possessed (Cott 3). Modernist Feminism believed in individualistic rights such as sex equality, and they understood that women's conditions and limitations in society were constructed by history, not God or nature. Modernist Feminism saw women not as a

biological grouping but as a social grouping with rights and needs, while understanding that they all were individuals who could and did make important and challenging decisions to establish their lives (3-7). This understanding of individuality within a group and the need for challenges to social conventions resonates with another important movement in the early twentieth century; one of Modernism's main tenets was individuality over convention.

Modernist Feminism's development from the Woman Movement caused changes throughout the United States and within the new literary movement, Modernism. Perhaps the most well-known difference between the Woman Movement and Modernist Feminism are their stances on Woman's Suffrage (Cott 5). A social historian, Nancy Cott, explains the change from the Woman Movement to Modernist Feminism saying, "All feminists are suffragists, but not all suffragists are feminists" (15). The *Little Review* adamantly supported Modernist Feminism but often overlooked the important and historic advances that women were making politically. This oversight becomes understandable by examining the Modernist Feminism of the early twentieth century and Anderson's personal belief in the movement.

The most important political event for American women in the early twentieth century was the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920 which culminated a nearly seventy-five-year-long struggle for Woman's Suffrage. Illinois, where *Little Review* was located until 1917, granted women partial suffrage in 1913, so Woman's Suffrage was not a most pressing issue for Anderson when she started her magazine (Women in American History). As discussed earlier, Modernism and Modernist Feminism developed as women won suffrage (Cott 34). As early as 1917, connections were made between the immense social changes involving gender and the new art movement: on February 13 1917, the *New York Sun* wrote, "Some people think the women are the cause of modernism, whatever that is" (qutd. by Saxton 120). Historians and

literary critics continue to associate the Modernist Feminism with Modernism. While the Woman Movement's goals were achieved, Modernist Feminists like Anderson demanded more individualistic rights within society.

Striving to achieve higher and more abstract goals than the Woman Movement, Modernist Feminism glanced over Woman's Suffrage while looking toward full equality (Cott 3-4). Along with suffrage, Modernist Feminists sought to improve other issues that often confined women such as equality in work and recognition of female sexuality along with suffrage. Modernist Feminism strengthened as many women began to enjoy new liberties as the social conventions separating the sexes weakened (7). These New Women expanded their goals to include equality in work, marriage, art, and other fields (9-15). Often they found positions in journalism and the arts, particularly experimental venues in which there was less job competition (Marek 8-9).

As an editor of a modernist little magazine which adamantly supported Modernist Feminism, Anderson entered the world of the New Women. Anderson did not adhere to the Woman Movement but rather to the newly born Modernist Feminism whose ideology surfaces in much of her early work. Her belief in Modernist Feminism along with the fact that Illinois already allowed women partial suffrage helps to explain why many of the *Little Review*'s articles discuss Feminism but not the suffrage movement, although suffrage was the issue changing the most at the time (Baggett 82). Aware of the need for social change, Anderson shuddered at the idea that "someone who still believes in the antique theory that a woman must choose between her charm and her ballot" ("To The Innermost" 2). Instead of merely joining the fight for suffrage, which had already been won in Illinois, Anderson and others sought to carve a space

for women out of the close limitations of society by living the life of a liberated and active Modern Feminist with others (Cott 7-15).

Perhaps the *Little Review*'s absent discussion of suffrage was caused by this active Modernist Feminism combined with the fact that in the early twentieth century there were many journals already discussing the Woman Movement's concerns, specifically suffrage. One of the most important of these journals, *The Woman Voter,* dealt exclusively with Woman's Suffrage and was sold at newsstands in large cities (Endres xv). These magazines, publishing solely on Woman's Suffrage, negated the need for other journalistic endeavors about suffrage. Also, for the most part and especially in the areas in which the *Little Review* was published, Woman's Suffrage had already been realized (Women in American History). Considering the presence pf the other journals which discuss suffrage, the absence of the Woman's Suffrage movement in the radical *Little Review* becomes less intriguing, but it does point to a very interesting reason for the inception of the *Little Review* which dealt extensively with Modernist Feminism: possibly Anderson sought to make the *Little Review* into a forum where Modernist Feminism, an issue she felt strongly about and that was not often publicly addressed, could be discussed.

Women's issues became increasingly important in the 1910s as the suffragists started to win their long battle. Because so many people were actively involved and concerned with these issues, journals of the day became involved and published a great deal on the subjects. *The New York Times* published well over 700 articles referring to the Woman's Suffrage movement in 1914. Although *The New York Times* also printed articles that discussed Feminism, these articles were substantially fewer in number. The early issues of the *Little Review* were almost exclusively on Feminist themes—there were only two articles on suffrage between 1914 and 1916. The decided lack of discussion on suffrage within The *Little Review* suggests that

"suffrage did not engage Anderson's interest" (Baggett 82). For Anderson, suffrage was not interesting because it did not necessarily present the same social conflict that Modernist Feminism did; Anderson states that she had a strong desire for the exciting and challenging (*My Thirty Years' War* 35).

In contrast to the *Little Review*'s two articles on suffrage, *The New York Times* published many articles on suffrage delving into the discussion but remaining impartial. One of the many articles that *The New York Times* published in 1914, "Suffragist Rivals Now in the Field," closely examines the controversy within the Congressional Union for Woman Suffrage. The article discusses the two factions within the party, their personal views, and what is at stake for the committee. This unbiased representation of the conflicts within the Woman's Party speaks to the public's non-committal stance on the new movements—*The New York Times* recognized the large interest in Woman's Suffrage and published about it, yet they did not give any definite opinions on the suffragettes' successes and defeats.

Following Anderson's aim to fill a void with "inspired conversation," the journal did publish two articles that dealt specifically with woman's suffrage in order to create controversy and thus conversation (*My Thirty Years' War* 35). The two *Little Review* articles on the suffrage movement were each barely a page and a half in length indicating the editor's lack of interest. Henry Blackman Sell's "Equal Suffrage: The First Real Test" in the April 1914, issue discusses the outcome of equal suffrage's "first real test in an American city [Chicago] of first rank" (30). The article describes the public's concerns over allowing women the right to vote and the possibility that they would in some way corrupt the election; yet, the election ran smoothly, none of the women candidates were elected, and Sell declares the adventure a success. The anti-Feminism of this article, describing the events of the election with the woman candidate's defeat,

contrasts with the pro-Woman's Suffrage element of the piece which argues that giving women the right to vote was not the catastrophic event that some feared. The article follows Anderson's demand for controversy by interjecting the *Little Review*'s intense Modernist Feminism with this more accepted argument that granting women suffrage will not create a radical social revolution and is therefore safe. The *Little Review* published one other article on suffrage in its first year. In the September 1914 issue Sonya Levien's "Women in War" examined the war efforts of British Suffragettes. The article discusses women's pitiable position in society. They cannot fight or vote to protect their sons and lovers in political matters and are looked down upon for standing up for them (4-5). Although the articles discussed Woman's Suffrage concerns, they did not argue for or support women in their struggles to gain equality. Rather the articles simply discuss suffrage as a means for woman to be heard, recognized, and appeased.

By publishing articles that show how little Woman's Suffrage can do for women, the *Little Review* actually advocates Modernist Feminism which held that Woman's Suffrage is no longer an issue and that people should concentrate on the struggle for women's individuality. This individuality was developed and expanded upon in other issues of the *Little Review*. So, even though it appears that the *Little Review* published two articles supporting Woman's Suffrage, in actuality it presented pieces which, through their descriptions of suffrage, demonstrated the necessity for a movement that recognized individuality in women—an issue that the magazine had been interested with from its conception.

The journal's initial issue expounds upon Modernist Feminism and its radical goals to recognize individuality. The "Announcement" found in the first issue of the *Little Review* discusses why Anderson felt the magazine was necessary and what she hoped it would produce. Anderson proclaims in her opening editorial that the magazine will be devoted to Modernist

Feminism: “Feminism? A clear-thinking magazine can have only one attitude; the degree of ours is ardent!” (“Announcement” 2). Demonstrating the Modernist Feminism of the *Little Review* and Anderson, the March 1914 issue features Rachel Vernhagen, a revolutionary European thinker who held that marriage was much similar to slavery—the articles are favorable and describe Vernhagen as “a true Feminist” (Cornelia Anderson 28). Vernhagen’s understanding of marriage as equivalent to a form of slavery aligns with the Modernist Feminist interpretation that women’s conventional roles enslave them; women must break free of their bounds by challenging society’s dictates on women, sex, work, families, and voting rights (Baggett 82-84). Many Modernist Feminists saw marriage as the most limiting element in a woman’s life and advocated woman’s ability to select her partners and preferences (Cott 37-42). Vernhagen’s opinions on the limitations of marriage and home life not only correspond well to the Modernist Feminist position of the day, they resonate with some of Anderson’s views like that the contemporary home “is rapidly losing its old functions,” and that people needed to change domestic patterns (“The Renaissance of Parenthood” 6).

This initial Feminist issue continues with two reviews of novels that deal extensively with feminist concerns. Olive Screiner’s Woman and Labor is described as a “wise and beautiful book” which discusses the major Modernist Feminist issue of “work that sets the individual free from dependence on any other individual” (Dell 10). Also reviewed in the March 1914 issue was Gasquoine Hartley’s The Truth About Women. The reviewer, Clara Laughlin, criticized the book and the novelist because she felt that Hartley’s Feminism was too apathetic (Baggett 84-85). The *Little Review* developed not only a historical and literary forum for the discussion of Modernist Feminism, it also created a circle for discussion, “The Critic’s Critic,” which featured Modernist Feminist concerns in the opening issue.

The *Little Review*'s column "The Critic's Critic," designed by Anderson to provide and interesting conversation in the journal, opened with M. H. Partridge's article "The Feminist Discussion" highlighting the ridiculousness of the controversial attitude toward Feminism. The article meticulously looks at the presentations of the movement within major journals and asks the important question: "Who has given men the power and the right to decided about woman's errand in this world?" (Partridge 22). The popular presses of the time often attempted to appease all by vacillating between pro- and anti-Feminism, which may explain Anderson's unequivocal support of Modernist Feminism in her opening announcement. In articles like "The Feminist Discussion," the *Little Review* presents itself as a freethinking, revolutionary magazine willing to ask the difficult questions and take chances with important issues (Baggett 84).

Anderson's early adherence to a Modernist Feminism within the magazine surprisingly dissolves during the late teens, finally resulting in complete silence on the Nineteenth Amendment. What makes this silence so interesting is the fact that the *Little Review* had already used silence as an acute and biting commentary. In September 1916, the *Little Review* featured thirteen blank pages—nearly half of the magazine—in response to Anderson's ultimatum made in the August issue:

> Now we shall have art in this magazine or we shall stop publishing it….
>
> I loath compromise, and yet I have been compromising in every issue by putting in things that were "almost good" or "interesting enough" or "important." There will be no more of it. If there is only one beautiful thing for the September number it shall go in and the other pages will be left blank.
>
> ("A Real Magazine" 2)

These thirteen pages serve a double purpose: they demonstrate the editor's belief that good literature is lacking, and they criticize society's expectations for a complete magazine with stories, editorials, poems, and other works even if the works were not good (Marek 82). But there is an important difference between Anderson's use of silence in 1916 and in 1920. In the September 1916 issue, an editorial comment expressing Anderson's disappointment in the dearth of art accompanied the blank pages: but in 1920, the silence on Woman's Suffrage had no obvious frame explaining its purpose suggesting that Anderson was not resurrecting her previous critical method but was simply ignoring an issue she found irrelevant and not interesting enough to include within her conversational magazine (Baggett 82).

Some scholars suggest that Anderson and her co-editor were overwhelmed between 1919 and 1921 by the trials they faced because of their candid publication of James Joyce's *Ulysses* and therefore could not focus on other issues. Anderson and Heap fought hard to keep publishing the magazine despite the constant abuse they received from both the law and their public because of the popular view that *Ulysses* was indecent. Anderson, famous for her energy and quickly changing interests, became involved with the intense debate over her uncensored publication of art. Anderson desired conversation and the quickest way to conversation is through controversy. *Ulysses'* publication provided more than enough controversy to keep conversation going within and without the magazine; she did not need to bring up the more mainstream issue of the Nineteenth Amendment (Bryer 362-409). Although the *Little Review* did not publish much Feminist work during the *Ulysses* trials, this absence in relation to the trials demonstrates Anderson's Modernist Feminism more than any of her previous issues (Baggett 242-44).

The *Ulysses* trials relate to Anderson's Modernist Feminist principles because Anderson was not merely tried for her indecent publication, she was also tried for her open homosexuality.

Ostensibly the trial was an attempt to suppress "obscene" literature, but the trial's dynamics show an attempt to silence the New Women who were becoming dangerous and sexual creatures (Baggett 243). Anderson's homo-erotic relationship with Heap was equated with their desire to publish *Ulysses*—even their attorney made the connection saying that anyone who read all of *Ulysses* "would say that the person or persons responsible for the selection of that number suffered from sex mania or the obsession of sex, or that they were taking out on paper and in type what they should have taken out between some man's or woman's legs" (Quinn qutd. by Baggett 248). What bothered the public was *Ulysses*' defiance of the "Victorian tenet of woman's innate asexuality [like] Anderson's lesbianism disqualified her from Quinn's [and others] Victorian model" (255). Anderson and Heap, through their steady and determined publication of *Ulysses* despite trials and warnings, threatened the male-dominated society along with the New Women (259). Tellingly during the trial, Heap told Anderson not to defend herself. By choosing to remain silent to the attacks upon their artistic and personal choices, Anderson and Heap were able to make another acute and silent commentary upon society and its fear of the New Women who challenged conventions (264-66).

Many people at the time derided lesbianism and associated it with the developing Modernist Feminist movement in which Anderson strongly believed (Baggett 243). In carrying out Modernist Feminism to its extreme, its association with lesbianism is not surprising, for Modernist Feminist advocated sexual freedom, the recognition that women are sexual beings, and for women's freedom in making choices about how to conduct their lives away from or into societal conventions. Anderson lived her principles privately with Heap and publicly by publishing Modernist Feminism and then *Ulysses*. Anderson's silence on Woman's Suffrage was not caused by an oversight or lack of concern. She was deeply aware and concerned about the

position and place of women in society during the early twentieth century. But her concern was not with the political realm, but the social reception of women as individuals, as sexual beings, as Modernist Feminists who could and did make new and radical decisions in approaching life. For Anderson the *Little Review* was not merely a magazine of art or news, but a medium through which ideas could surface and challenge society.

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