

Artists are Born not Made:

Publicity and Performance of the Ulysses Obscenity Trial

David Tulis

ELM: A Journal of Undergraduate Research, Vol. I: No. 1, Fall 2004

The *Ulysses* Obscenity Trial in 1921 gave the editors of *The Little Review*, Margaret Anderson and Jane Heap, an opportunity to reach the level of the artists that appeared in the pages of their little magazine. Neither Anderson nor Heap shied away from expressing their opinions, especially in the public sphere. In Heap's editorial, "Art and the Law," in the Sept.-Dec., 1920 issue of *The Little Review*, she writes that in a "physical world laws are made to preserve physical order. Laws cannot reach, nor have power over, any other realm. Art is and always has been the supreme Order" (Heap 5). I argue that the *Ulysses* Trial of 1921 was welcomed by Anderson and Heap as a testament of true avant-garde status for their little magazine. The trial served as a stage on which the editors gave a physical performance in a physical world of laws to present their case for modernism and avant-garde literature. The editors hoped the trial would also provide much needed publicity for the slowing little magazine, which had once successfully imitated commercial magazines while in Chicago but, against their wishes, never fully recovered after the trial. In this essay I will explore the initial marketing scheme of Anderson and the new direction of *The Little Review* once Ezra Pound became foreign editor. I will also discuss Anderson and Heap's struggle as champions of *Ulysses*. Coinciding with the little magazine's transformation, the trial acted as a possibility for publicity, reflecting Anderson's earlier mindset in marketing. Also, I will consider the notion of Anderson and Heap

as not only the first women, but perhaps the first people to blur the line between financial opportunist and avant-garde artist.

When Anderson first moved to Chicago she started off writing for commercial magazines until inspiration struck and Anderson founded *The Little Review*. Anderson carried over similarities in advertising strategy and even certain sections from her experience with mass market publications. By the fifth issue, Anderson had lowered the price of the magazine subscription “from \$2.50 to \$1.50 per year—the price of the mass market monthlies like *Munsey’s*, *McClure’s*, *Good Housekeeping*, and *Ladies’ Home Journal*” (Morrison 135). Using mass market magazines as a model, Anderson decreased the price in hopes of reaching out to a greater number of readers. Anderson aimed for nationwide circulation, an impressive and unparalleled goal for a little magazine. Anderson sought after such lofty goals because in contrast to later years, *The Little Review* managed to do very well with advertising, not only devoting space to literary advertisements, but also non-literary advertisements such as “the long-running series of lavishly illustrated advertisements for Good-year tires” (Morrison 136). Anderson joined the modernist movement by editing a little magazine, but with a background in commercial magazines, a balance between experimental, avant-garde literature and more traditional, mass audience-friendly literature was necessary to realize her circulation goals.

Mark Morrison argues that with the increasing awareness of adolescents, commercial magazines began to focus on and capitalize off the youth as consumers: “an emerging marketing theory suggested that the young were important future consumers: they formed their buying habits between their late teens and late twenties” (Morrison 139). Anderson began advertising modernism as a youth movement, in which the youth represented a rebellion against the old. Alongside ads geared toward young consumers, Anderson tried to “create an unregulated public

organ for youth—an avant-garde magazine whose aesthetic, social, and political radicalism was pervaded by a new ideology, setting the freedoms of youth in public against constraining and authoritarian domesticity” (Morrison 134). “The Reader Critic” section allowed adolescents as young as sixteen years old, in one case, to speak in a public forum. Anderson’s ambition of mass circulation, uncharacteristic of little magazines, is apparent in her attempt to secure future readers rather than publishing art for art’s sake. The problem this poses for *The Little Review* is the reduced amount of freedom, versatility, and experimentation it is allowed. By using the advertising schemes that Morrison cites, *The Little Review* limited its available literary territory, because avant-garde forms of art placed upon the youth provokes claims of corruption. It is Anderson’s experimentation in avant-garde literature and the reaction of the youth that disrupts *The Little Review*’s development.

The Little Review moved to New York City in 1917 to become a larger presence in Modernism. Shortly after the change in location, Ezra Pound became foreign editor which allowed a platform for the works of “James Joyce, Wyndham Lewis, T. S. Eliot, and [Pound to] appear regularly, promptly, and together” (Johnson 357). Pound was valued for these European connections. With the addition of Pound, the little magazine adopted the motto, “Making No Compromise With The Public Taste,” moving it gradually into a radical direction against the public taste, rather than attempting to satisfy a larger audience with a greater circulation. The abovementioned list of contributors along with H. D., Mina Loy, and William Carlos Williams among others, illustrates the increasing concern of the little magazine with publishing the best modernist writers. Without Anderson and Heap, the opportunity for such a high concentration of writers would not be possible. The editors created this in a little magazine.

Pound brought Joyce and *Ulysses* to *The Little Review*. Upon receiving the first chapter, Anderson responded, “This is the most beautiful thing we’ll ever have...We’ll print it if it’s the last effort of our lives” (Anderson 175). Anderson’s fight and sacrifice to publish *Ulysses* damaged the little magazine considerably. The monthly publications became increasingly less consistent during the trial. But *Ulysses* would eventually be considered brilliant, even if it took several years. Anderson immediately recognized Joyce’s craft. Her statement and plan to print *Ulysses* marked the beginning of *The Little Review*’s fight for artists against the ignorant.

The conflict between *The Little Review* and the Society for the Suppression of Vice began again in 1919 over *Ulysses*. Three issues of *The Little Review* containing installments had been burned. Both Anderson and Pound attempted to censor the most socially unacceptable portions of the installments, but they were still viewed as too “obscene.” The fourth violation was over “Nausicaa,” a chapter describing Leopold Bloom’s voyeuristic encounter with a young woman, Gerty MacDowell. Gerty’s youth prompted action.

The Society for the Suppression of Vice attacked *The Little Review* because of its potential danger to and corruption of children, yet Anderson and the little magazine’s lawyer and financial investor, John Quinn, argued that the “the magazine was not for or read by the young” (Morrison 160), contradicting the aforementioned assessment of *The Little Review* as a young person’s outlet. Anderson and Quinn failed to recognize that the charge came from an important New York lawyer, whose “daughter had received a copy of the number, unsolicited, had read it, been shocked, and had handed it to him, telling him that the editors must be prosecuted” (Bryer 157). The daughter’s reading of the issue is evidence that the little magazine’s attempt to project a youthful image succeeded. That said, as the little magazine’s balance began to shift in favor of increasingly radical art as opposed to advertising, it failed to shed the image.

The little magazine struggled but Anderson and Heap managed to keep it alive by well-timed contributions. J. S. Watson from the *Dial* showed up at the editors' apartment to purchase a copy of Eliot's "Prufrock." *The Little Review* sold the book for seventy-five cents, but Watson paid with a hundred-dollar bill, saying that it was for the little magazine. Anderson recalls Watson coming back "several times with his salutary hundred-dollar bill which kept the magazine alive when otherwise it would have succumbed" (Anderson 189). Later, Quinn rescued *The Little Review* with a contribution of sixteen hundred dollars. Anderson writes, "For the first time in our history we had leisure to improve our format, adopt striking typography, and plan publicity campaigns" (Anderson 209). The temporary security ended when the little magazine published the "Nausicaa" episode.

Angry letters in reaction to *Ulysses* flooded *The Little Review's* office. The public was disgusted and offended by the episodes. Nevertheless, Heap wrote a letter to Joyce explaining, "We feel that we are making an audience for your work" (Bryer 154). Indeed, the publishing of *Ulysses* in the little magazine was an important element of its success. The insults and attacks continued to swamp Anderson and Heap, who were deeply hurt by the experience, but the publications resumed.

John Quinn stressed the importance of keeping up appearances to Anderson and Heap, telling them "You want the public to think you've got plenty of money...Make them think you're rich" (Anderson 207). He wanted them to project an image of success, although it was nearly impossible without the funds. Anderson discussed the opportunities available when money is not an issue: "we can go everywhere. And we can talk everywhere. We really can make more interesting talk" (Anderson 227). She makes a distinct connection between the ability to be out in the public sphere with the necessity of money. Making intelligent, inspired

conversation was the foundation for *The Little Review*, but is ineffective without the funding of the commercial publications. Their lack of finances kept them quiet as did the trial. Quinn advised the pair to “remain inconspicuous, meek and silent” (Anderson 219). Anderson had to force herself to stay quiet during the trial, therefore making the editors’ role a performance of silent dissent. The editors’ appearance in court was a visual representation of *The Little Review’s* unrelenting pursuit of artistic expression without restraint as well as a means to “speak” in the public sphere through publicity. *Ulysses* was not the only work of art being attacked. Anderson and Heap had to defend their masterpiece, *The Little Review*, which was being censored along with *Ulysses*.

In court, Anderson and Heap represented more than a struggle to publish *Ulysses*. The two were lesbians and symbolized sexual freedom. Heap blurred the gender line, dressing in men’s clothing and choosing to wear her hair short (Albertine 172). The editors’ strength and independence threatened Quinn, who viewed their sexuality as “an integral part of their indifference to authority” (Albertine 177). The simple fact that they were women illustrated the fight of the female to enter into the male domain (Huysen 47).

Anderson managed actively to protest the court’s ruling against *Ulysses* when she was brought to have her finger-prints taken. She writes that it was “my opportunity to make as much trouble as possible” (Anderson 221). She refused to have her fingers dipped in the material until they met several demands assuring her that her hands would end up unblemished. The event may have been a small act of rebellion, but Anderson never succumbed to the public’s bullying. She was in control.

Although Anderson could not defend herself in court, she managed to make a prediction to a Chicago reporter before the hearing began, stating, “twenty-five years hence the world will

stand aghast in amazement at the people of 1921, who, in the slightest questioned Joyce's story from a moral standpoint" (Bryer 10). Anderson's prediction proved to be true sooner than she expected when *Ulysses* was accepted, published, and praised abroad in 1922 and when a United States court overturned the 1921 decision in 1933, validating the editors' vision and struggle.

Anderson's declining interest in working on *The Little Review* can best be summarized in a passage in which she recalls the repossession of her piano at a time after the trial when she had no money. Anderson describes the workers barging into her home, showing no sympathy for her attempts to plead her case, and finally taking the piano piece by piece (Anderson 229-30). Though Heap wanted to continue the little magazine, Anderson thought it had reached its peak with *Ulysses*. She was unwilling to continue because the Society for the Suppression of Vice halted the little magazine's development, basically stripping it of artistic freedom and creating a threatening atmosphere around the little magazine that would not produce a positive public image. While the Society for the Suppression of Vice was responsible for the little magazine's restrictions, the newspapers were the unsympathetic movers. Anderson expresses her disappointment in the lack of coverage of the trial, writing, "During the trial and afterward not one New York newspaper came to our defense, not one spoke out for Joyce, not one cared to be identified with the 'Ulysses' scandal" (Anderson 226). When Sylvia Beach published *Ulysses* abroad, *The New York Times* printed articles on Joyce and many books of criticism appeared but the press failed to highlight *The Little Review* as the first to publish Joyce's *Ulysses* or the subsequent trial in its defense. (Anderson 226). Considering "Ulysses was in demand as soon as it was banned. Joyce helplessly watched pirated editions reap his profits. An edition of two thousand copies sold out in four days, and another pirated edition printed in monthly installments sold forty thousand copies a month" (Dettmar 94), the trial worked incredibly well in publicizing

Ulysses but had a negative effect for *The Little Review*, to Anderson's dismay. The trial seemed to deflate her spirit since no one supported, encouraged, or credited the editors for their involvement with *Ulysses*. While *Ulysses* was a success, *The Little Review* was left behind in the aftermath. Thus, the little magazine's accomplishments could only be recognized after its demise, typical of avant-garde art.

Though Anderson had hoped that the *Ulysses* Trial would offer needed publicity, her initial support of *Ulysses* was completely based on artistic admiration. Paradoxically, both Pound and Anderson, devoted supporters of *Ulysses*, acted as principal censors prior to the trial. Two prominent members of the modernist movement censoring an artist's work seems inconsistent, but the two had their reasons. Pound had objections to the language Joyce used. He "not only criticized and advised, he also acted by deleting what he felt to be the offensive passages before forwarding the manuscript to Margaret Anderson" (Bryer 151). Paul Vanderham argues in his article, "Ezra Pound's Censorship of *Ulysses*," that Pound's reasons for making cuts were "to reduce the likelihood that *Ulysses* would be suppressed by government authorities in the United States. For another, he wanted to prevent the frankness of *Ulysses* from provoking John Quinn to withdraw financial support crucial to the magazine's welfare" (Vanderham 583). Pound apparently had practical reasons for censorship, but in his letters to Joyce, he also reveals that his "aesthetic was indeed opposed to Joyce's" (Vanderham 583). Pound argued that some lines were excessive, stating Joyce "use[s] a stronger word than [he] need[s], and this is bad art, just as any needless superlative is bad art" (Vanderham 584). Pound concluded that Joyce's choice in language lacked effectiveness. Rather than allow what he believed to be a masterpiece to remain in original form, Pound reduced the level of obscenity in *Ulysses*. In contrast to Pound, Anderson edited *Ulysses* to avoid suppression. Anderson deleted

sentences from the “Scylla and Charybdis” episode with the explanation, “To avoid similar interference this month I have ruined Mr. Joyce’s story by cutting certain passages in which he mentions natural facts known to everyone” (Bryer 153). Anderson’s attempt to censor *Ulysses* fell short because the episode still contained what the postal authorities deemed “obscene,” but she offers a sincere and justified reason for her actions. She deleted what she thought would be the minimum cuts necessary to maintain the artist’s vision, but it was not enough. Anderson wrote that *Ulysses* was the “literary masterpiece of our generation” (Anderson 175). She edited *Ulysses*, but only so that she could still publish what she believed to be beautiful, and as editor, she censored *Ulysses* to publish her work of art.

In her article “An Obvious Statement” in the Sept.-Dec. 1920 issue of *The Little Review*, Anderson states that “the artist has no responsibility to the public” (Anderson 8). Anderson and Heap, through their little magazine and the *Ulysses* Trial, were artists who felt a level of responsibility to the public. They gave *Ulysses* to the public imagining its critical success, but could not foresee its publication reacting so unfavorably for them.

Anderson continues in the article quoting passages from Ananda Coomaraswamy’s “Dance of Siva,” which states that:

The poet is born, not made; but so also is the rasika (critic), whose genius differs in degree, not in kind, from that of the original artist....The critic, as soon as he becomes an exponent, has to prove his case; and he cannot do this by any process of argument, but only by creating a new work of art, the criticism. (Anderson 16)

Joyce’s relationship with *Ulysses* parallels Anderson and Heap’s connection with *The Little Review* in that they are both the products of genius. *Ulysses*, the crowning contribution of *The*

Little Review, began as installments in the little magazine; a part of the whole. As editors and critics, Anderson and Heap put together a lasting compilation of modernist and avant-garde art.

Their support of *Ulysses* before the trial, their presence in court, and their publishing of artists' work and criticism was their argument and work of art. But when attacked and suppressed by people who reject what they do not yet understand, progression proves to be difficult. Anderson began her little magazine career balancing financial security and socially acceptable literature, but her later efforts to keep *The Little Review* active through legitimate advertising could not overcome her increasing submersion into modernism. *Ulysses* survived and thrived thanks to the pains suffered by two female artists, Margaret Anderson and Jane Heap. And though *Ulysses* marked the decline of *The Little Review*, it also revealed the end of a gradual rise to the avant-garde for the little magazine; the rasikas' creation and new work of art.

Works Cited

- Albertine, Susan. *A Living of Words*. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1995.
- Anderson, Margaret. *My Thirty Years' War*. New York: Covici, Friede Publishers, 1930.
- Bryer, Jackson R. "Joyce, *Ulysses*, and the Little Review." *South Atlantic Quarterly*. 66 (1967): 148-164.
- Dettmar, Kevin J. H. and Stephen Watts. *Marketing Modernism*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1996.
- Huyssen, Andreas. *After the Great Divide*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986.
- Johnson, Abby Ann Arthur. "The Personal Magazine: Margaret C. Anderson and the Little Review, 1914-1929." *South Atlantic Quarterly*. 75 (1975): 351-63.
- The Little Review*. New York: Kraus Reprint Corporation, 1967. Vol. VII.3.

Vanderham, Paul. "Ezra Pound's Censorship of Ulysses." *James Joyce Quarterly*. 32 (1995): 583-95.