

## Under Fire: Poetry Review and Poetry in World Wars I and II

ABBY ANN ARTHUR JOHNSON

**D**URING World War II, *Poetry Review* came regularly from the press, despite financial difficulties, paper and labor shortages and bombings. From his London office, editor Galloway Kyle described the situation to distant readers. He commented particularly in the December 1940 issue of *Poetry Review*, saying that the number had "been made up during almost continuous 'alert' periods, concentration broken by occasional bomb crumps, heavy gun fire and the sharp ping of 'dogfights' overhead. The chilly autumn atmosphere creeps in through broken windows, smashed during the periodic severe bombing of the neighbourhood." Despite the hazards, including significant personal losses, Kyle resolved to continue with the periodical: "The Editor's own library and his household goods, were destroyed by 'enemy action' early in September, but routine work proceeds as usual . . . however fierce and long the nightly misnamed 'blitzkrieg.'"<sup>1</sup>

Across the Atlantic, the editors of *Poetry* struggled to keep their own journal solvent. They never suffered from regular strafing of their Chicago office, but they experienced other of the difficulties mentioned by Kyle, including limitations in finances, paper and labor. They also faced the problem of audience. As did Kyle, they felt pressures from a public hungry for sentimental patriotism. They had to decide if they would honor that desire or if they would favor the more original but less popular verses which stripped illusion bare. Regarding the audience, the editors of *Poetry* came to conclusions differing from the ones drawn by Kyle and his staff. They based their policies on

those determined by Harriet Monroe, founder and editor of *Poetry* from 1912 until her death in 1936.

In their response to World Wars I and II, the editors of both journals showed contrasting understandings of poetry and thereby revealed the fundamental differences between their periodicals. These differences emerged clearly by World War I. Before that time, the journals were often confused, sometimes even called twins. They both began in 1912, *Poetry Review* in January and *Poetry* in October. The editors had similar names — Harriet Monroe of *Poetry* and Harold Monro of the *Poetry Review* — and seemingly similar purposes. Hoping to increase the audience for contemporary poetry, they incurred help from some of the same people, notably Ezra Pound. Partly at the instigation of Pound, the journals began to drift apart. In a relatively short time, they went from friendly co-operation, to spirited rivalry, to outright hostility.

*Poetry Review* has always been owned by and representative of a larger organization, the Poetry Society. The group originated on February 24, 1909, when forty persons dedicated to poetry met in an upper room of a vegetarian center, located in the heart of London. They met because they wanted to attract new audiences to poetry. In the words of their constitution, they desired "to popularize interest in poetry and to assist in bringing about 'a poetic renaissance.'"<sup>2</sup> Until 1962, when the group came under an enlightened leadership, the Poetry Society members supported the work of poets favoring rhyme and reason, those who wrote clearly and optimistically and in support of church and crown. Such writers came to include Alfred Austin, Edmund Blunden, Robert Bridges, Walter De la Mare, John Drinkwater, Wilfred Gibson, Rudyard Kipling, Alice Meynell, Alfred Noyes, and William Watson. Leading lights in the Society demanded that their editors support the same. If they became restive, they were shown the door, as were Harold Monro, editor from January to December of 1912, and Muriel Spark, editor from 1947 to 1948. The co-operative editors lasted much longer. None

lasted so long as Galloway Kyle, editor from 1915 to 1946.

Under Kyle's direction, the journal changed very little. As he aged, the editor held more firmly than ever to the ideas he had espoused in the early years of his career. *Poetry Review* of World War II consequently remained much like the journal published in World War I. At the beginning of his editorship, Kyle expressed an opinion of *Poetry* which he essentially held down to his retirement. In 1916, he publicly endorsed *Contemporary Verse*, a little magazine published in the United States. He applauded the editor for featuring Joyce Kilmer, "to whose taste and discernment literary America owes much," and he claimed the journal could "afford an admirable antidote to the extreme 'modernism' of the more pretentious *Poetry* of Chicago . . . ." <sup>3</sup> As the years rolled on, Kyle saw the emergence of *avant-garde* publications, such as the *Little Review* and *Broom*. He came to save adjectives like "extreme" for these journals. *Poetry* became the voice of "modernism," more respectable than the *Little Review* but mistaken nevertheless.

For decades, Kyle talked in the same manner about the readers he would reach. He said in 1917 that the Poetry Society wanted to make poetry popular, in the best sense of that word. Such a verse would be "the common heritage and joy of all" and would not indicate a "cheapening of ideals, a lowering of standard [sic], a stereotyped conventionality . . . ." Despite the protest, Kyle advocated a stereotyped verse, geared to the needs of an everyman who knew little about the art of poetry. Through the years, he published many essays in defense of this everyman. One of the most quotable of these writings appeared during World War II, when Marion MacKellar urged poets to consider "the ordinary reader," "the gentle reader," "the average reader," "the patient reader," who wants his "senses lulled," who wants to find in poetry "easy or pleasant reading," "simple sweetness," "an april world of fantasy." MacKellar, like Kyle, wanted poetry "brought to the masses . . . ." <sup>4</sup>

Kyle and his associates felt most in touch with "the masses" during the two world wars. In both periods, they expressed nearly identical opinions concerning poetry in war. For the sake of brevity, then, one can concentrate on the World War I issues, remembering that the same attitudes appear in the later numbers. In the early days of World War I, Kyle and the others detected a new interest in verse. They concluded that war had forced men from trivial pursuits and caused them to reflect upon eternal matters, including the concerns of poetry. In this way, war inspired great poetry and great audiences, became even the mother of the arts. Herbert Warren, then president of the Society, wrote to the leading London and provincial journals about the renaissance he saw in poetry: "In this time of tragedy, when the souls of men are moved to their depths, poetry comes again into its place as the most perfect possible utterance of humanity, and the maker of monuments of and for the human spirit."<sup>5</sup>

Prominent Society members felt that *Poetry Review* would benefit from the reordering of priorities. In 1917, they congratulated themselves and their journal, which "could be regarded as strongly and permanently established . . . ." They recalled their early days, their troubles with Harold Monro and their triumphs with Stephen Phillips, who served as editor from 1913 until his death in 1915 and who reportedly brought circulation up to three thousand copies. Confident over their wartime success, Society members anticipated an "era of peace" when the journal would be "assured of a circulation of ten thousand copies."<sup>6</sup>

Looking towards such a circulation, Kyle and Warren tried to shape their journal to the needs of the general public. They paid particular attention to the servicemen, encouraging them by publishing their verse and their letters. President Warren announced that *Poetry Review* had become "a recognised channel for what has been called 'the poetry of the trenches.'" He noted that "we are getting now a succession of touching and striking little volumes by soldiers, mostly, alas! legacies after their death." Such

poems, he stated, "make a very real appeal to us"; they communicate the emotions of "ordinary" people and they play an important role in the life of the entire nation. Warren concluded: "I hope *The Poetry Review* may succeed in being more and more a channel for the poetry of those who are actually in the thick, as we may say, of the war, in the firing line, or it may be on shipboard, or in the hospital." Shortly thereafter, editor Kyle wrote proudly of the journal's record: "We were the first to recognize the significance of the poetry from the trenches."<sup>7</sup>

In this statement and others, Kyle responded more like a reporter than a good poetry editor. He wanted to be on the scene first, and he wanted colorful, eye witness accounts. He was not as interested in the finished product, the poem of real value which may have taken years to create. In general, he desired quantity rather than quality in war verse. Accordingly, he praised popular anthologies churned from the wartime presses, such as *England, My England: A War Anthology* and *Our Glorious Heritage, A Book of Patriotic Verse for Boys and Girls*. He favored reviewers who thought such anthologies "proved" the "old-fashioned conception of poetry" and sent men to the front fired with patriotism and filled with honor.<sup>8</sup>

Over and again, he published war songs written by hosts of hitherto unpublished servicemen, some of them appearing posthumously. Most of the servicemen had no previous literary training, either in verse composition or criticism. Often the stanzas they sent Kyle were the first stanzas they had attempted. They wrote because they had to express their emotions and because they wanted to reach out to the people back home. As one would expect, their verses commonly were overly patriotic and abstract. Lieutenant Richard Hope of H.M.S. *Dreadnought*, for example, entitled his poem "Hymn of Love," dedicated to "The Fight For Right Movement." The first few lines bear the tone of the entire composition:

BRITANNIA, Mother, hear our joyous hymn,  
As strong with Freedom's strength and fearless pride,

Serene and steadfast, clean in life and limb,  
 By Love sustained and through Love justified,  
 We fight our fight for Right.<sup>9</sup>

Kyle published Hope and others like him because he wanted to encourage fighting men and please his audience. He said he cared little about the response of literary critics, the most prominent of whom had already rejected *Poetry Review*.

The same policies continued into World War II, as one example will show. Kyle held his readers by giving them a steady diet of conventionally patriotic verse. Once in a while, though, he varied his approach and included an original poem which would challenge his readers, rather than comfort them. In several instances, they refused to be challenged. Instead they wrote indignant letters to the editor, saying they would drop their subscriptions if Kyle did not change his ways. They responded in like manner when Kyle published Alan Rook's "Village At War" in a 1942 issue of *Poetry Review*:

Along the banks of the pavement  
 are broken walls;  
 a painted motto  
 replaces the scorched vine.

Down the road  
 a sniper's bullet  
 and in the empty  
 courtyard tanks.

Always  
 tanks.

Down the wind  
 the smell of hunger  
 naked in the  
 market square,  
 whilst through the houses  
 tense and sullen  
 tired men are  
 taking aim.

Along the banks of the pavement  
 a broken silence  
 and broken stones  
 sadden the body of time.<sup>10</sup>

The ensuing controversy shows the nature of Kyle's audience. One of the most formidable correspondents was

Henry William Harding, who wrote to the editor from Twickenham. His words carried weight, since he was a nephew of Robert Bridges and the emerging power within the Society. Kyle listened when Harding complained about confused images in the first two lines and an absence of poetry in the entire composition. Rook failed to respect the public, Harding stated: "I do not deny that a picture is conveyed if one has imagination, but what of the millions who are deficient in this quality. Have not poets a duty to be understood of the multitude, so that the many may be apprised of beauty and benefited thereby."

Others included themselves among those "deficient" in imagination. In his letter to the editor, Fred Barlow stated that he was "gifted with an average amount of common-sense" but that he failed to find meaning in poems showing not "the slightest regard to rhyme or reason." He applauded Harding's opinions because "they prove that I am not alone in my deep resentment of much of the hocus-pocus that is being foisted upon us as poetry." Kyle acknowledged the protests and Rook disappeared from the journal.<sup>11</sup>

By this type of action, Kyle encouraged much favorable correspondence, from civilians and servicemen. The letters arrived during both world wars and generally maintained a uniform note, praising the journal for its sanity in an otherwise chaotic world. Kyle published many of the comments in the wartime issues, using them for testimonial purposes. The civilians commonly wrote like May Mair, of Epsom: "In renewing my annual subscription I should like to say how glad and grateful I am that *The Poetry Review* continues to appear in these grim and difficult times. Its bright gold cover is appropriate, for it is like a ray of sunshine in the 'blacked-out' world of total war." The fighting men of both wars sounded like the captain in a border regiment who wrote to Kyle from "a corrugated dug-out by candle-light": "I have just had my copy of THE POETRY REVIEW, and I scarce need tell you how welcome it is out here. If you saw my copy after a week's

knocking up and down, you would hardly recognise the beautiful production that comes so handsome from the printers. Soiled with much use it is, dabbled with mud, stained with candle-grease, yet a lovable thing withal. My batman treats it with a respect which the few other books I can keep never get."

Editors of military magazines even noticed *Poetry Review* and wrote occasionally to Kyle during the wars. One such letter came from the editor of *Khaki*, who had recommended the journal to his "naval and military readers." He praised Kyle for taking poetry out of the ivory towers: "THE POETRY REVIEW is no mere academic or dilettante relaxation, but a robust and vigorous production which is doing much to break down the unnatural barrier between men of action and men of letters."<sup>12</sup>

Kyle tried to bring poetry into the market place, especially during World Wars I and II. In so doing, he attracted the largest audience the journal has ever had. The best statistics available indicate that the membership of the Society extended from about 1,000 in World War I to approximately 5,000 by the end of World War II. During the same time, the sales to the public increased to approximately 1,000 per issue. At the end of World War II, then, the journal customarily reached about 6,000 readers, which is a sizable audience for a poetry periodical. Each printing order remained at 6,000 until 1948, when many readers abandoned the journal in dismay over editor Muriel Spark's liberal ways. In that year, Society membership decreased to 2,573 and the printing order to 3,500, where it remained throughout the 1960's.<sup>13</sup>

The leadership of *Poetry* was never impressed with *Poetry Review's* audience. In 1912, they became critical of the journal and remained so, through two world wars and in the years following. Ezra Pound helped Harriet Monroe shape her response to *Poetry Review*. On September 21, 1912, he joined the editorial staff of *Poetry* as Foreign Correspondent, a position he held into World War I. In his new capacity, he secured European writers for the



magazine, and he sent Monroe his opinions of literary currents abroad, including styles in contemporary periodicals. He wrote to Monroe in October 1912, the date of *Poetry's* first number, and told her about his former connection with *Poetry Review*, a journal he came to think beneath serious consideration. The editor had little critical acumen, he claimed, and formed his opinions after those of the last man he "dined with." Harold Monro "came to me in January," said Pound, "beseeching me to 'set a pace' for the review. The 'aegis' of my name etc. I've been fool enough to write for him and to get Flint and various other people to write for him. Or rather I have not been exactly a fool, for if there's going to be a Poetry Review here it might as well be as good as it can. But for heavens sake *don't* think people are taken seriously here just because the P. Rev. prints 'em." Pound severed his ties with Monro partly because the editor could not afford to pay contributing poets, thus having to settle for what he "can get for nothing." Primarily, Pound detested Monro's publication of pastiche, lines like "So, God, Thy love it not needeth me."<sup>14</sup>

Succeeding years brought Pound no closer to *Poetry Review*. In a letter to Harriet Monroe, dated July 23, 1917, he summarized contemporary periodicals, saving a final epithet for *Poetry Review*: "Poetry should put up her rates of payment and finally finish off Harpers, Scribner, Century, Atlantic. They have gone on long enough . . . Braithwaite, the New Republic, The Seven Arts, should be steadily badgered, also a lot of scum like Poetry Journal, Poetry Review, etc."<sup>15</sup>

Harriet Monroe and her successors shared Pound's estimate of the journal, if not his accompanying rhetoric. In a June 1920 editorial, Monroe commended English poets for their postwar activity, as manifested partly in the interest directed to literary journals, such as *Art and Letters*, *Coterie*, *Chap-book*, *Voices* and the *London Mercury*. She did not compliment Kyle's journal: "Besides these, of course the old *Poetry Review* goes on, 'the journal of

the Poetry Society' — as persistent as it is misrepresentative of whatever is vital in the art in England." Later, she satirized the Society sponsoring the journal: "We are reminded that some years ago many American poets, including the very obscure, were generously invited from the office of the *Poetry Review* in London to join the high-sounding Poetry Society Incorporated. One could be a Patron for \$250, or a Vice-President for only \$75, while ordinary members paid \$3; and all received the *Poetry Review*." Upon the death of Harold Monroe, in 1932, she recalled the beginnings of *Poetry Review*. She remembered the promise shown by the magazine in 1912, and she noted the failure of the contemporary publication, "a very poor affair."<sup>16</sup>

From 1912 until her death in 1936, Harriet Monroe looked to readers who would never be attracted to *Poetry Review*. She wanted an audience that would encourage originality and daring in American poets. On the cover of each *Poetry* number, she placed a line from Whitman: "To have great poets there must be great audiences too." She reached a loyal but small group of readers. *Poetry* came out of World War I with a paid circulation of only 1,400. Despite Monroe's efforts, the subscription list never extended above 3,000 and often dropped beneath this figure.<sup>17</sup>

Upon joining *Poetry's* staff, Ezra Pound belittled Monroe's concern over her audience. In an essay published in *Poetry*, he urged her to find a new motto for the journal. To Whitman, he preferred Dante: "When they asked him who was wisest in the city he answered, 'He whom the fools hate worst.'" He buttressed his argument with several examples of isolated genius. He noted that Synge was "hounded or despised by a half-educated, Zoroastrian rabble of 'respectable' people more stupid and sodden than is to be found even in America." Monroe had put her trust in American audiences, and she responded in defense of her motto. With the diplomacy characteristic of her entire editorship, she claimed that "Art is not an isolated phenomenon of genius, but the expression of a reciprocal rela-

tion between the artist and his public. Like perfect love, it can be supreme only when the relation is complete."<sup>18</sup>

In her letters and editorials, Monroe indicated a desire to reach "a golden means," to tap an audience bored by conventional publications, such as *Poetry Review*, and confused by *avant-garde* periodicals, like *Little Review*. She emphasized this approach in a letter to Alfred Kreymborg, editor of *Others*. On June 26, 1915, Kreymborg had written to Monroe, asking her for information about her journal. He would use the information, he said, in an article for the *Telegraph* on the new movement in poetry. Monroe answered on July 2: "I hope you will not misunderstand me if I ask you not to tie us up too closely to your group and to your magazine. POETRY you know tries to publish the best we can get of ALL the different schools. We have printed a great deal of rather radical experiments, and shall no doubt continue to do so, but I assume that 'Others' stands exclusively for the radicals and for a rather more youthful effervescence [sic] than I am quite ready to endorse publicly. So if in your article you will kindly draw the distinction so that people won't consider POETRY merely a kind of advance agent of 'Others', I shall be very much obliged." And she added: "Please make it very clear that we were the first in the field and the beginning of the present Renaissance" [sic].<sup>19</sup>

During World War I, Monroe tried to maintain her middle course. As the conflict progressed, however, she found this approach difficult, primarily because she disagreed with popular attitudes on the poet's function in war. She took positions considered increasingly extreme by many readers. In an editorial of 1914, she claimed for the first time in her journal that poets had created more wars than had kings. With epics and "war-songs," they had inspired men to battle. "Poets have made more wars than kings," she wrote, "and war will not cease until they remove its glamour from the imaginations of men."<sup>20</sup>

Two months later she published an issue which featured "Poems of War." By this action, she momentarily quieted

some of the critics just beginning to notice her. She had not intended the number as a conciliatory gesture, though. In her autobiography, she explained the origins of "Poems Of War." Alice Corbin Henderson, associate editor of the journal, had attached a notice to the September issue, announcing that *Poetry* was sponsoring a contest — one hundred dollars for the best poem on war or peace, the winner to be announced in the November issue. Monroe disliked the contest but felt she could not dissent from her assistant's "up-to-date energy, for the response was immediate and imposing" — 738 poems. The quality of verse was not so imposing. Monroe remembered that the compositions were "good, bad, and indifferent, but mostly very bad." The few good poems included the fourteen published in November and written by such prominent figures as Carl Sandburg, Amy Lowell, Maxwell Bodenheim, Richard Aldington and Joseph Campbell. The prize went to a lesser-known writer, Louise Driscoll, for "The Metal Checks."<sup>21</sup>

Monroe attached a brief note to the November issue. The note merits examination because it shows Monroe acting as politician, trying to unite a diversified audience. Saddled with the contest and the "Poems of War," Monroe made the best of the affair. In part, she used the number to woo those readers eyeing the journal with caution. The editorial statement consequently read: "In response to POETRY'S offer of a prize for the best war or peace poem, so many acceptable poems came in among the over seven hundred submitted, that it was decided at the last moment to devote this entire issue to them. The editors feel that subscribers, and the public in general, will be profoundly interested in this assemblage of widely varying ideas, and that the number will be recognized as a fine presentation of American feeling, and a little British as well, on the absorbing subject of the present war."<sup>22</sup>

Monroe never again published an issue devoted to war poems. Neither did Alice Corbin Henderson press for a contest directed to such verse. By June 1917, Alice Henderson was in a mood to satirize poetry contests. She

directed her attention, in the journal, to a contest sponsored by *Life* magazine. *Life* had offered \$500 for the best poem under twenty-four lines, written with "correct metrical rendering" and "typifying the spirit of Liberty, Fraternity, Equality and the Allies." In parentheses, Henderson remarked, "Isn't that enough to frighten the Muse?" She concluded with understatement: "Any poet who can tackle modern Democracy, the spirit of Liberty, Fraternity, Equality, and the Allies, and get away with it in twenty-four lines, is entitled to all that is coming to him."

In a statement immediately following, Monroe reiterated her resistance to the popular cry for sentimental patriotism. She said that *Poetry* wanted to publish war poetry, even though it had been "rebuked for presenting no poetry of militant patriotism at the very moment when the war-drums sounded." She promised to print without hesitation any "song for America" worth the publication: "Our only regret," she stated, "is that no one has given us a five-hundred-dollar prize to be offered as a stimulus and a reward."<sup>23</sup> She obviously spoke her regret ironically, since she never believed poets could operate like Pavlov's dogs.

Monroe continued in the same vein in the July 1917 editorial, entitled "Will Art Happen?" She again attacked the public for desiring mass production of verse, for wanting quantity rather than quality: "POETRY has been reproached for printing no war poems at the very moment of the nation's dread decision; American poets have been reproached for not buckling down to the production of masterpieces . . . ." She never named her detractors, but she clearly had in mind the type of person attracted to *Poetry Review*, among other publications. She reminded such readers that verse written on demand usually results, at the very best, in "good journalism." Of all the war poems written in America since the beginning of the War, none was perhaps "too fine for this definition," she declared. She reminded the "expectant and impatient" public that "'art happens,'" as Whistler once said. She also asked that public to be fair to *Poetry*, to remember that the journal

would include any composition which "in the opinion of the editors, is poetry and not merely journalism." When art happened, Monroe did indeed respond. She published many war poems but reserved praise for a select few. In particular, she liked D. H. Lawrence's "Resurrection," considering it "one of the very few beautiful poems inspired by the War."<sup>24</sup>

The editorial policies established by Harriet Monroe continued into World War II, when the journal was edited first by George Dillon, and then co-edited by the successive teams of Peter De Vries and Jessica Nelson North, Jessica North and Marion Strobel, and Marion Strobel and Peter De Vries. The editing changed hands because both Dillon and De Vries left the staff temporarily to serve in the United States Army. Despite the turnover, *Poetry* maintained a consistent tone throughout the War.

Peter De Vries best summarized *Poetry's* approach to the conflict in an editorial statement. He cited the question raised by so many persons — "Where are the war poets?" He proceeded to explain that the query betrayed a sentimentalized approach to war, a mistaken view that war was "the signal for a sudden outburst of noble or patriotic emotions, a moment, or 'occasion,' to which the poet should 'rise.'" He believed that readers looked eagerly to World War II writers because they persisted in romantic views of conflict, reinforced by their memories of Rupert Brooke's sonnets. Saturated in journalism, they considered the poet a type of "enraptured reporter," bursting with passion. Recalling Harriet Monroe's words of decades back, he stated that art cannot be produced on demand or called into existence. Art happens, he said, when a writer has thoroughly assimilated his experience, when he knows it well enough to commit to paper.<sup>25</sup>

During World War II, as during World War I, *Poetry* editors refused to be hamstrung by public demands for sentimentalized verse, as one example illustrates. George Dillon published Alan Rook's "London, 1941," a poem very similar in style and substance to "Village At War," which

caused such commotion in *Poetry Review*.<sup>26</sup> Dillon refused to acknowledge the Fred Barlows and never followed the publication with angry letters to the editor. In general, he and his colleagues felt free to accept the best compositions then available, including outstanding poems by Paul Engle, Robinson Jeffers, Ray Smith and Langston Hughes.

In August 1943, editors Peter De Vries and Jessica North issued a special number featuring poems by fighting men. Significantly, they entitled the number "Poets in the Service," not "Poets of War." Many of the contributors dealt with topics other than the immediate conflict. Karl Shapiro, for example, wrote about the "Red Indian," who walked the "Trail of Tears," and the "Nigger," lynched by the white man — "Are you coming to peace, O Booker T. Lincoln Roosevelt Jones, / And is Jesus riding to raise your wage and to cut that cord?" De Vries and North included other compositions more readily identifiable as war poems. In describing battle, such poems stripped the glamour from war and thereby contrasted dramatically with verses found in *Poetry Review*. In "Port Of Embarkation," Randall Jarrell described the disillusion felt by so many soldiers:

Freedom, farewell! Or so the soldiers say;  
And all the freedoms they spent yesterday  
Lure from beyond the graves, a war away.  
The cropped skulls resonate the wistful lies  
Of dead civilians: truth, reason, justice;  
The foolish ages haunt their unaccepting eyes.

From the green gloom of the untroubled seas  
Their little bones (the coral of the histories)  
Foam into marches, exultation, victories:  
Who will believe the blood curled like a moan  
From the soaked lips, a century from home —  
The slow lives sank from being like a dream?<sup>27</sup>

The editors in World War II never published any compositions by Ezra Pound, busy with Fascist broadcasts from Italy. Pound's new activities bothered *Poetry* editors much more than they did Galloway Kyle, who wasted few words on the man. Pound had, after all, significantly helped *Poetry* editors, particularly Harriet Monroe, and had consistently denounced the leadership of *Poetry Review*.

During World War II, Dillon and the others felt betrayed, even though Pound had long since disassociated himself from *Poetry*; Galloway Kyle and his associates felt vindicated in their original estimate of Pound as an irresponsible and dangerous man. In March 1941, George Dillon criticized Pound for his broadcasts and for the apparent disparity among his statements: "In a recent letter to POETRY, he calls on the poets to create 'an United States literature' which shall preserve 'the story and the greatest utterances of the national heroes,' and he defines liberty as 'the right to do all *that injures no other*' . . . Pound would deny that there is anything inconsistent between such sentiments and his friendship with Mussolini's government, which has courted and flattered him." In April 1942, Eunice Tietjens called Pound a "Benedict Arnold" and hoped, "in the name of American poetry, and of all who practise the art . . . that this is the end of Ezra Pound."<sup>28</sup>

*Poetry's* staff buried the topic until the September 1946 issue, which featured an eleven-page excerpt from Pound's *Canto LXXX* and four essays discussing the writer. J. V. Healy, R. P. Blackmur and T. S. Eliot all praised Pound for the excellence of his criticism and poetry, which had come at a turning point in modern literature. George Dillon, back with the editorial staff, tried to explain why a respectable magazine would chose to print Pound once again. "Not all the readers of this magazine have followed it regularly through the years," he observed, "and some will rightly wonder what motive any periodical may have in publishing a new work by Ezra Pound." Lest he be accused of subversive attitudes, Dillon described some of his war experiences and how they shaped his response to Pound. The phrasing is memorable, since it vividly recalls the days of war: "I confess that it is hard for me, in my own mind, to disentangle Pound from the war. His voice is associated with a certain shack in the mid-African heat, and even more with a narrow, brilliantly lighted radio tunnel under Plymouth harbor. There, in the invasion period, when we dialed the short-wave programs during



rest intervals, Pound was sometimes good for five minutes of modest entertainment." One night, Dillon turned Pound off "in mild abhorrence" and "ran directly on to one of those broadcasts of underground code phrases that sounded like surrealist poetry and heard the words solemnly declaimed in French: 'Reserve an amiable reception for the acrobat,' which I have since associated with Pound. At the moment it seemed to suggest the right spirit in which to listen to him. It still does."

Dillon explained that the *Canto* appeared in *Poetry* for two reasons. First, the poem was "excellent": "I should still publish it if the author were not in a hospital but in a cell awaiting execution." Second, the editors wanted to flex their muscles, to illustrate the freedom of their press: "If the other editors and I can truthfully say that we are happy to publish this poem, it is because there could be no better proof that we are able to publish what we please. Our satisfaction is in the thoughtful exercise of that freedom, and not, of course, in demonstrating it to Pound: its meaning happens to be one he mysteriously doesn't get."<sup>29</sup>

From the early days of *Poetry*, editors spoke repeatedly of the freedom to create and to publish. Dillon's words must be seen in the context of *Poetry's* history, particularly in light of a statement made by Harriet Monroe in 1913. Speaking to a new generation of writers and readers, Monroe said that poetry must be free from all external pressures, including the dictates of the past: "Tradition, however grand and old, ceases to be of use the moment its walls are strong enough to break a butterfly's wing . . . . The freedom of the human spirit is more important to the future of the race than the Greek temples and Gothic cathedrals of the past. Art is not a Mosaic dispensation from Mount Sinai, but a creation of men's minds. The more direct and spontaneous this creation, the better." Rather than the old rules and forms, "better the free foot in the wilderness, better the upward flight of danger in a monoplane!"<sup>30</sup> Monroe realized the hazards accompanying freedom and thus spoke of "wilderness" in

connection with the "free foot" and "danger" in relation to the monoplane's flight.

The hazards of poetic freedom loomed very large during both world wars. Monroe in World War I and her successors in World War II saw several possible directions for their journal, but two routes seemed especially open. They could try to secure the future of *Poetry* by catering to public demands, or they could jeopardize that future by separating *Poetry* from public pressures. They opted for editorial freedom and thereby took the difficult path through "the wilderness." In so doing, they alienated many potential readers and came very close on several occasions to losing their journal. At the same time, they slowly gained the support of a loyal following. With a small audience, knowledgeable in literary matters, they managed to keep a press that was open in terms of the options then available.

Throughout his career, but especially during the two world wars, Galloway Kyle took a different course with his journal. He always acted on a statement he had made in the 1914 *Poetry Review*. The comment is particularly noteworthy in its striking contrast to Monroe's assertions in her 1913 editorial. "We should look forward as well as backward," he said; but "in reality the latter is more necessary than the former, and it is particularly essential in relation to a poet who may find the times too noisy, too self-centered and too self-righteous to heed him."<sup>31</sup> When Kyle referred to the "times," he was alluding to those forward looking members of the literati who were weary of Georgian verse, as were Harriet Monroe, Pound, and others attracted to *Poetry*. He was not commenting on the tastes of the "ordinary reader," who enjoyed a backward look as much as he did. In World Wars I and II, Kyle held his readers by recalling a time when war seemed the glorious endeavour, when God's purpose seemed identical with national interest. Unlike *Poetry's* editors, he stayed to the well-beaten path, never daring a "free foot in the wilderness." To drop the metaphor, he and his supporters took

the easier and, on literary terms, the much less praiseworthy approach to poetry in war.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup>*Poetry Review*, 31 (November-December 1940), inside cover.
- <sup>2</sup>"Constitution and Rules," *The Poetical*, 1 (October 1909), 25. The Poetry Society issued a newsletter, first called *The Poetical* and then *The Poetical Gazette*, from October 1909 to October 1910.
- <sup>3</sup>*Poetry Review*, 7 (1916), 166.
- <sup>4</sup>"Appreciation And Influence," *Poetry Review*, 8 (1917), 231; "Poetry Is Pleasure," *Poetry Review*, 35 (1944), 25-28.
- <sup>5</sup>"Poetry And The Nation," *Poetry Review*, 8 (1917), 255.
- <sup>6</sup>"Notes: Reports: Announcements," *Poetry Review*, 8 (1917), 183; "1909-1918," *Poetry Review*, 10 (1919), 51.
- <sup>7</sup>"The Appeal of Poetry To Our Day," *Poetry Review*, 6 (1916), 355; "Notes: Reports: Announcements," *Poetry Review*, 9 (1918), 248.
- <sup>8</sup>"The Harnessing Of Pegasus," *Poetry Review*, 6 (1915), 96-97.
- <sup>9</sup>*Poetry Review*, 7 (1916), 435.
- <sup>10</sup>*Poetry Review*, 33 (July-August 1942), 238.
- <sup>11</sup>"The Two Alans," *Poetry Review*, 33 (September-October 1942), 315; "Whither Poetry!" *Poetry Review*, 33 (November-December 1942), 374-75.
- <sup>12</sup>*Poetry Review*, 32 (March-April 1941), inside cover; "An Editorial Causerie," *Poetry Review*, 8 (1917), 45; "Notes: Reports: Announcements," *Poetry Review*, 8 (1917), 181-82.
- <sup>13</sup>Information in a letter to the author from Robert Armstrong, Vice-President of The Poetry Society, October 2, 1971. Armstrong recalled 3,500 as the printing order until "very recently when I believe it has been adjusted to 3,000 because of the restricted public appeal."
- <sup>14</sup>Box 37, Folder 6, MS, pp. 1-2. *Poetry Magazine Papers*, 1912-1936, University of Chicago Library. In this quotation, as in the others, I have given the punctuation as it appears in the original text.
- <sup>15</sup>Box 37, Folder 29, TS, p. 8. *Poetry Magazine Papers*.
- <sup>16</sup>*Poetry*, 16 (June 1920), 168-69; "News Notes," *Poetry*, 32 (July 1928), 236; "News Notes," *Poetry*, 40 (May 1932), 115.
- <sup>17</sup>Frederick J. Hoffman, Charles Allen, and Carolyn F. Ulrich, *The Little Magazine: A History And A Bibliography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946), p. 44.
- <sup>18</sup>"Comments And Reviews: The Audience," *Poetry*, 5 (October 1914), 29-32.
- <sup>19</sup>Box 34, Folder 1, TS, *Poetry Magazine Papers*.
- <sup>20</sup>"The Poetry Of War," *Poetry*, 4 (September 1914), 237.
- <sup>21</sup>*A Poet's Life* (New York: Macmillan, 1938), p. 342.
- <sup>22</sup>"Notes," *Poetry*, 5 (November 1914), 96.
- <sup>23</sup>"Wanted: A Song For America," *Poetry*, 10 (June 1917), 165.

<sup>24</sup>*Poetry*, 10 (July 1917), 203-205; *A Poet's Life*, p. 346.

<sup>25</sup>"A Note On This Issue," *Poetry*, 62 (August 1943), 272-74.

<sup>26</sup>*Poetry*, 58 (August 1941), 249.

<sup>27</sup>*Poetry*, 62 (August 1943), 244, 242, 263.

<sup>28</sup>"News Notes," *Poetry*, 57 (March 1941), 398; "The End of Ezra Pound," *Poetry*, 60 (April 1942), 40.

<sup>29</sup>"A Note On The Obvious," *Poetry*, 68 (September 1946), 322-25.

<sup>30</sup>"Editorial Comment: Tradition," *Poetry*, 2 (May 1913), 67-68.

<sup>31</sup>"Harry Kemp," *Poetry Review*, 4 (February 1914), 108.

The author wishes to acknowledge the support she has received from the Faculty Research Program at Howard University.