

## Student Projects Using *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*

1. Select a poet whose work appears in one of the first few volumes and trace that poet's work through the next ten volumes or more. Then write something about that poet's work in this magazine. Questions to consider:

- How frequently does this poet's work appear in the magazine?
- What are this poet's typical forms and themes?
- What are this poet's strengths and weaknesses?
- Do you like this poet's work? Why or why not?
- What is this poet's present reputation?
- Is that reputation justified in your opinion?

2. Look at an early issue and a later issue for the same month. Questions to consider:

- Has the magazine changed in any interesting or important ways?
- Do any of the same poets appear in both issues?
- What about the quantity and topics of advertising in the issues?
- What changes do you note in the topics considered in the Comments section?
- Is the editorial staff the same?
- Are the same people writing the reviews and articles?
- Can you detect a trend? (You might look at a few more issues from each period to confirm or correct your sense of any trends.)

3. (For the musically inclined.) Look through some issues for short poems that might be turned into contemporary songs. They are there, we assure you. When you find a likely suspect, start playing with it. Change what you need in order to make its language suitable for a contemporary song. Then set it to a tune you know (or make one up) and perform it in class. You will find possible love songs, blues, and other material in this magazine.

4. Here are some other topics to explore:

- Imagism—In the early years of the magazine, there were serious debates about this word and the kind of poetry associated with it. Who were the players? What were they arguing about? What was “Imagism” or “Imagisme,” anyway? One way to begin investigating this topic is by way of a “full text” search on the MJP site for the word “Imagism”—or, even better, search for “imagis\*”—. The latter will find all words that begin with “imagis” no matter how they continue. This should produce hits in *Poetry* magazine, but also in other periodicals of the time, including *The New Age*. Following these leads should take the investigator into the thick of the debates.

- In a review in Vol.5, No. 3 of *Poetry*, Harriet Monroe begins by saying, “Emily Dickinson, New England spinster of the nineteenth century, was an unconscious and uncatalogued *Imagiste*.” A look at Monroe’s review will tell you what she had in mind in putting this modernist label on a nineteenth century poet. Now, most critics would say that Dickinson and Walt Whitman are the two major poets of that century in America. But in 1914, when Monroe wrote that review, Dickinson was not usually considered in those terms. What happened to account for Dickinson’s rise to literary eminence? And what do modernism and imagism have to do with the change in opinions about her work?
- Women’s Voices 1—One of the notable features of *Poetry* is the number and variety of women whose poetical and critical work appears in the magazine. One of those poets, Helen Hoyt, who became an Associate Editor of the magazine, once had this to say about women’s poetry: "At present most of what we know, or think we know, of women has been found out by men, we have yet to hear what woman will tell of herself, and where can she tell more intimately than in poetry?" If Hoyt was right about this, there should be some differences between women’s poetry and men’s. Is she right? Look at a range of poems by women in one or two volumes of the magazine—especially those from the early years. Compare them to poems by men in the same volume. What differences do you find?
- Women’s Voices 2—To appear in this magazine, women were competing with men for space in its pages. Considering just the poetry pages (not the criticism or reviews), examine a volume to determine the proportions of space given to men and women. Then take up the question of the quality of women’s poetry. To consider this question, start by making a list of the women poets who appear in the first few years of the magazine. Which of these poets have the highest reputations today? Which seem to have been forgotten? How can we account for these results. What makes a poet’s work endure? Are there lost poets here who should be recovered? Can you make an argument for such a recovery?
- Women’s Voices 3—The Editor, Harriet Monroe, takes up this issue herself in the issue for June 1920 (16.3). She provides some interesting statistics and makes a guess about the future. Consider what she has to say and write a response to her statement—either as it might have been written in 1920 or from our own time, looking back almost a century. In your response, make it clear which perspective you are assuming.
- Male Poets—As with the women, there are men whose work is still read, studied, and taught, and others whose work has been forgotten. What is there in the poetry that might account for these results? What do the male and female poets whose work has endured have in common? Are there lost male poets here whose work deserves more attention? Can you make an argument for any of them?

- Revisions—In this magazine, you will find early versions of poems that are quite different in the anthologies—Wallace Stevens’s “Sunday Morning,” for example. Locate this or other poems that were different in these original texts from their more familiar later versions. Discuss the changes and the possible reasons for them. Are they always improvements?
- Regionalism—This was a Chicago magazine. Is there a Chicago poetry? (See, for example, Carl Sandburg’s poem of that name in Vol. 3 No. 6.). Are there other cities or regions of America that have unique voices? If you look at the Contents pages of issues, you will find many regions represented.
- American poetry versus British—There is a thread of debate about whether these two nations have different poetic languages running through the magazine—and whether one is better than the other. See if you can follow that thread and sort out the major issues involved in the debate.
- European (especially French) poetry versus American—There is a debate about whether America is behind the Continent of Europe in poetic techniques and ideas. *Poetry’s* Foreign Correspondent, Ezra Pound, is in the middle of this debate. What do France and Europe seem to represent to him? What is his view of poetry and why is it controversial?
- Native American Poetry—There is a good deal of translated poetry from the American tribal cultures in this magazine, and it is not there by accident. Look, for example at Alice Corbin Henderson’s “A Note On Primitive Poetry” in Vol. 14, No. 6. So, a question: What is Native American poetry doing in a modernist magazine? What is the connection? Or is there none?
- The magazine was founded by Harriet Monroe and edited by her and a Board, but most of the work seems to have been done by Monroe and Alice Corbin Henderson. Both were poets (Henderson writing poetry as “Alice Corbin”), but their main impact on the magazine is to be found in the pages devoted to Comments and Reviews. Find out what you can about these two women and report on their work and achievements in poetry and criticism. One way to proceed would be to make an anthology of all the critical writing by Alice Corbin Henderson over a five- or six-year period and use this anthology to examine her values and principles. One might compare these to the poems she wrote as Alice Corbin. Two students (or groups) might work on different periods and compare results, since we have eleven years of the magazine to work with. The same could be done with Monroe, of course.
- War—The magazine was founded two years before war broke out in Europe and five years before the U. S. entered that war. There are war poems in the magazine from 1914 on. Locate the issues that have war poems in them and consider the poems. What

themes and images dominate? Do things change from the first years, when America was not engaged in fighting, to the later years, after the U. S. entered the war and U. S. troops began fighting and dying over there? A number of poets died in the war. Find out what you can about them and consider their poems. Report on one that interests you—on the poet's life, death, and poetry.

- Women in World War I—A number of women who were poets were involved in the war. Consider, for example, the case of Gladys Cromwell, discussed by Harriet Monroe in Volume 13, No. 6, for March, 1919. What kinds of things did women do in that war? What kinds of poems did women write about it? Who were the other women poets who went to the war or wrote about it—or both?
- The Far East—Poetry from China and Japan was published frequently in the magazine in English translations, and forms like the haiku and the Noh play were imitated by poets writing in English. Explore this interest in Far Eastern poetry through the pages of *Poetry* magazine. What factors seem to be drawing modern poets to this distant world? What does the haiku, for example, have to do with Imagism? And why are Ezra Pound and Amy Lowell drawn to Chinese written characters?
- The Viereck Incident—In Vol. 13, No. 5 of *Poetry* Harriet Monroe writes about the expulsion of a poet from the Poetry Society of America—for being a conscientious objector to the recent War. Read what Monroe had to say and then find out more about this incident and the treatment of other such objectors in Britain and America at this time. Some famous people were imprisoned, and others had interesting experiences. Why was the treatment of such people important to *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*? What, if anything, connects poetry to politics?
- Lost Poets—Find a poem you like by a poet whose work is no longer well known. Make the case for the poem. That is, explain why others should like it because of certain virtues of thought or expression to which you can point directly.
- Lost Poems by Major Poets—Most of what we know about major poets comes from reading their poems in anthologies. But taste changes, and all the poems we now perceive as good work by these poets are not in the anthologies. Select a modern poet who is in the anthologies and look for other poems by that poet in *Poetry*. If you find one you consider good that is not in the anthologies, make the case for that poem's worthiness. See if you can explain why its value is more apparent to you now than it was to the anthologist.