

Periodically Queer: Sexology and Non-Normative Sexualities in the Little Magazine *The Masses*

Ruth Mayer

Forthcoming in: *Modernist Cultures*, vol. 15, no. 4, Winter 2020.

Abstract: This paper will be concerned with the special affordances of periodical writing, taking the modernist little magazine *The Masses* as its example. This magazine was instrumentally involved in promoting sexual liberation and ‘sex radicalism’ in the United States of the 1910s, and I argue that the – contracted, serial, and contingent – structure of periodical publishing had an incisive impact on the ways in which the magazine responded to and transfigured the contemporary rhetoric of sexology. Focusing on the enactment of non-normative sexualities in the little magazine, I aim to show that the iterative and kaleidoscopic form of presentation yields effects that are different from the aesthetics of queer modernism as manifest in the ‘closed’ literary forms of the episodic novel or the short story collection. I will cast a close look at Floyd Dell’s writing in the magazine to argue my case, and end with a reflection on (the publication history of) Sherwood Anderson’s ‘Hands’.

5 keywords: ‘short form’, ‘periodical culture’, ‘Floyd Dell’, ‘Sherwood Anderson’

Modernism is a queer thing. But even though modernist movements in art and literature were more willing than the Anglo-American avantgardes of the nineteenth century to address features of diversity, including sexual diversity, modernism did by no means univocally embrace same-sex love or non-normative sexual identifications. Queerness informed modernism, but it often entered through the backdoor, in the writings of authors who came to be classified as ‘minor’ or ‘marginal’ modernists and in the form of double entendres, asides, allusions and intimations.¹ In keeping with this insight, I will focus on the productivity of a site of action of the 1910s that is both marked by modernity and marginality: the modernist little magazine. As my point of reference I take the

magazine *The Masses*, a periodical that used its position at the fringes of the public discourse to promote what was known at the time as 'sex radicalism'. I am particularly interested in the ways in which the journal's intervention is driven by the affordances of the periodical publishing format and its differences from other modes of publication such as the episodic novel, the short story collection, the poetry cycle, which may be fragmented, heterogeneous or disparate but are still contained by the covers of a book and by the authorial persona who lends a name and voice to the work.

The modernist little magazines in general, and *The Masses* specifically, manage through their very structure to break up established forms and formats of representation and to challenge the logic of address that characterises the stand-alone book. The periodical publication format thus suspends what Heather Love identifies as queer modernity's most pertinent characteristics – its temporal disjuncture or 'backward future'.² The magazine in its open and ongoing structure of presentation, collation, and association pulls its subject matter into the present, as we shall see, blurring past and future in this process. It lays out its material spatially – presenting stories, ideas, and insights side by side and next to each other, as equal options rather than successive steps, mutual exclusions or incompatible conditions. This has interesting implications for the conceptualization of sexuality in general and queerness more specifically, and these implications arise from the textual organization itself rather than individual authors with their agendas and desires. The kaleidoscopic contingency of the magazine favours resistant – or at least wilful – modes of reception that skip and jump and select and reframe. Queerness transpires in this material as one option among others, a choice or possibility that needs to be teased out and accentuated, pondered and weighed. Alternative visions of sexuality and gender manifest between the lines, or rather: between the texts and paratexts, in the tonality of 'the proximate,

the provisional, and the probabilistic', as Paul Saint-Amour characterized the wider aesthetics of a 'weak modernism'.³

Little Magazines and *The Masses*

Apart from the often scandalizing and pathologizing approaches of sexology, the public discourses of modernism and modernity, even in their radical strains, tended to address sexual diversity indirectly. As Susan Stansell has shown, 'homosexual preferences had little place in semi-public life' of the early twentieth century in the United States.⁴ The broader spectrum of non-normative sexualities seems to have fared similarly. At the same time, modernism as a movement of epistemological and aesthetic disruption and transgression shows a structural and conceptual affinity to motifs and ideas of sexual deviancy. While queer modernism positions itself at the margins of the modernist scene, it can thus also insist on its emblematic significance for modernism at large, establishing a system of signification that 'trade[s] on the ambiguity of the word "queer"', playing with its variously innocuous and fraught connotations for different addressees and audiences.⁵

Negotiations of sexuality were precarious endeavours in the 1910s, even in enterprises that explicitly challenged social conventions and advocated liberal ideas, such as the modernist little magazines. While they were by no means completely detached from the larger print market with its commercial calculations, the small-circulation, non-profit-oriented venues professed to create an alternative discursive sphere, and were indeed at a remove from the mass-marketed literature of the syndicated press.⁶ They could take more liberties to experiment with novel ideas and unconventional formats than larger journals or publishing houses with mainstream readerships. Magazine titles such as *The Little Review* or *Others* or *Le petit journal des refusées* showcase their marginality as a mark of distinction. In some cases, the flirtations with nonconformity and

transgression extended to aesthetic performances of sexual and gender diversity in the spirit of radical formal innovation, as Suzanne Churchill detailed with regard to *Others*, one little magazine that was edited by an openly lesbian couple.⁷

In all these contexts, the modes of exceptionality and experimentation were clearly accentuated. The play with gender and sexual conventions is performed as distinct from social constraints and realities – of aesthetic rather than political concern. *The Masses* was different. Published from 1911 to 1917 (and then succeeded and continued by a series of other journals, including *The New Masses*, until 1936), it flaunted its political practicality and its involvement in everyday affairs and real life, while at the same time laying claim to its status as artistic testing ground and experimental venue. Launched in 1911 as a socialist magazine with a strong investment in the labour movement and the left-wing scene, *The Masses* integrated ‘oppositional discourses, from politics to literature and art, in what might be called a counter-public sphere’, as Mark Morrisson put it.⁸ Especially after Floyd Dell, the professed feminist and sex radical took over as the journal’s managing editor in 1914, sexuality became a key issue in *The Masses*.⁹ The symbolical repertoire and the semantics of deviance play a pivotal role in this context, reflecting the editorial board’s sympathy for nonconformist and provocative positions.

The Masses fashioned itself as a platform for interesting novelties and new perspectives, without doctrine or program. Floyd Dell played a major role in the formulation of the journal’s agenda of difference and distinction, as put forth in an editorial statement featured on each issue’s masthead after March 1913:

T H I S Magazine is Owned and Published Co-operatively by its Editors. It has no Dividends to Pay, and nobody is trying to make Money out of it. A Revolutionary and not a Reform Magazine; a Magazine with a Sense of Humor and no Respect for the Respectable; Frank; Arrogant; Impertinent; Searching for the T r u e Causes; a Magazine Directed against Rigidity

and Dogma wherever it is found; Printing what is too Naked or True for a Money-Making Press; a Magazine whose final Policy is to do as it Pleases and Conciliate Nobody, not even its Readers—A Free Magazine.

This policy also manifested in the broad range of material that was published: from political reportages, essays, pamphlets and proclamations, to stories, poems and a variety of graphical art. While signalling to a metropolitan bohemian background, the magazine kept its distance to the radical experiments of the transatlantic avant-garde, favouring less ostentatious engagements with form and expression, which stayed largely referential. The literary authors featured in *The Masses* tended to break with conventions on the level of content rather than form, and their stylistic deviations were often inobtrusive, manifesting as oddities or irritation instead of full-fledged provocation. This aesthetic of indirection rather than confrontation characterizes Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg Ohio* exemplarily – and it makes perfect sense that it was in *The Masses* that some of the stories of this episodic novel were first published and that it was Floyd Dell who prided himself on discovering Anderson. I will turn to Anderson's *Masses* stories toward the end of my analysis, for the moment suffice it to say that they give shape to the aesthetic of the marginal on the level of form and content, that they enact queerness and they are queer, and that their publication history also serves well to illustrate the formal and generic difference between the open format of the little magazine and the closed episodic novel. But first I will turn to the sex politics of and around *The Masses*.

Sexology, Sex Radicalism and Queerness

Sex radicalism did not necessarily mean an unbiased attitude vis-à-vis same-sex relationships or other non-normative sexualities. When it came to the representation of non-normative sexualities in *The Masses*, the verdict was often quite conservative, as a review by Randolph Bourne in June

1917 may illustrate.¹⁰ The review reports favourably about a novel by the British popular writer Clemence Dane, *Regiment of Women*, which depicted a fatal love triangle between two female teachers – one older and calculating, one younger and naïve – and a student. The older teacher, Clare, in Bourne’s summary, appears as ‘hard, brilliant, mature, one of those women in whom affection takes almost exclusively the form of a lust for power. She masters both girls, plays them off against each other, flatters and scorns them at her pleasure’.¹¹ In what follows, Bourne endorses the novel’s homophobic message, and then elaborates on the larger implications of the novel and his own review:

The extreme feminist must wince a little when reading this powerful story. Clare’s philosophy of inverted sex antagonism is a little too much like the doctrine which certain elements of an impressionable younger generation seem to be having inculcated in them as the good of true feminism. The Clares in the feminist movement do the cause a very bad turn. Any taint of the vampire in the modern woman runs the risk of poisoning the movement.¹²

This assessment corresponds with a larger tendency in the journal to dismiss non-normative sexualities as indications of a certain bourgeois decadence, a backwardness not in keeping with the healthy sexual instincts of the working classes and their allies. Bourne’s review (and, arguably, Dane’s novel), apart from resounding pervasive fears around the ‘Mannish Lesbian’, calls to mind Havelock Ellis’ theory of homosexuality as a disposition that can be held at bay, at least in some cases.¹³

In the early twentieth century, homosexuality is no longer seen as a primarily moral aberration but as a pathological condition that fans out into an array of syndromes on a scale between ingrained disorder and acquired habit. In this logic, homosexuality veers between determining heritage and what Benjamin Kahan called a “situational” practice.¹⁴ It manifests itself as a pathological condition, but also as a dangerous ‘influence’, emanating from afflicted

individuals and affecting susceptible persons, to the point of ‘poisoning the [Feminist] movement’, as Bourne had it. Reclusive social scenes and confined cultural milieus such as ‘a woman’s boarding school or college, a settlement house, a women’s club, or a political organization’ were diagnosed as particularly ‘unwholesome’.¹⁵ Following this logic, homosexuality can be contracted like a disease on the grounds of the wrong lifestyle, problematic practices and inconsiderate conduct.¹⁶

There are obvious homophobic dimensions to this notion of a ‘contagious’ homosexuality. But Benjamin Kahan has shown that the conceptualization of sexuality as acquired (or transmitted) rather than congenital and identitarian – ‘immutable, involuntary, inborn, and located in the body’ – also discloses an idea of sexuality as a plane of choices or succession of identifications: ‘a multidirectional, serially organized, temporal field’.¹⁷ So the very same etiological arsenal can be used for liberating or paralyzing purposes, depending on individual readings and conclusions – particularly once the theories travel from science to literature and back again through the ‘revolving door between literature and sexology’.¹⁸

In the United States of the teens, the theories of European sexology and psychoanalysis have not yet fully arrived. While they impacted in bohemian and elite circles, they did not affect the popular imagination to the extent that was the case in the UK or Germany at the time.¹⁹ *The Masses* with its agenda of free love, sexual liberation, birth control and sex radicalism is ahead of the mainstream, but the journal tries to steer clear of the convoluted scientific debates and mostly sticks to the political and juridical – or cultural – dimensions of the issue. Still, especially after Floyd Dell’s appointment, the magazine features numerous authors who are intrigued with the subject matter of sexuality and with non-normative sexual mores and their manifestation through the unconscious. Chad Heap chronicles Floyd Dell’s obsessive investigation of his ‘unconscious

homosexuality' in Freudian terms, drawing on Sherwood Anderson's memories of the beginning of the teens:

Anderson recalls that during the 1910s, Dell and others began 'psyching' everyone who visited their studios in Chicago's 57th Street art colony. 'In an unfortunate moment I brought up the subject of homosexuality', Anderson remarked, and they immediately seized upon this mention as a 'sure sign of its presence'.²⁰

Dell's obsession with sexual variants and deviations registered throughout *The Masses*. For most of the authors of *The Masses*, however, the sexological vocabulary of the day with its emphasis on perversity, degeneration or pathological deviance was too fraught to describe the sexual self-fashionings and experiments of their time. Many of these speculations around gender and sexuality address practices, desires and personalities that are 'not straight', invoking the suggestive semantic field of queerness.

I will use queer along these lines in this essay – not as a clear-cut reference to non-normative sexualities, but more vaguely as a gesture or signal of diversion. This corresponds with the fact that in the 1910s, the term queer had not yet acquired a (primarily) sexual connotation. The term communicated diffuse conditions of being 'strange, curious, out of bounds, or suspiciously disreputable', as Melba Cuddy-Lane points out in *Modernism: Keywords*.²¹ Queer is no fixed quality but rather an index – referential, indirect, tentative. It appears in the margins of the modernist discourse, as a possibility rather than clear-cut characteristics. It 'raises a vague worry of sexual impropriety, and its potential to awaken something sleeping and unconscious has disturbing Freudian implications'.²² With this, the term does invoke the sexological assumption that non-normative sexualities are a matter of heteronomy, insinuating that an inclination may rest as an unclaimed possibility in the body, to be inadvertently actualized and set loose, submerged again and transformed into something else. By holding the sexological vocabulary at

bay, the authors of the journal also avoid the pathologization (and concretization) of the issue. To be queer-may mean all sorts of things, in all sorts as contexts, as we shall see. What all of the accounts that I read in the following have in common is the idea of an inherent and latent quality about to be unleashed, an infectious force that spreads on its own, defying individual agency and control, which need not be seen exclusively or primarily in negative terms.

This indecisiveness with regard to the evaluation of a phenomenon or development is characteristic of the format of the little magazines. Alternative ideas enter their pages in an alternately provocative, tentative, allusive or experimental manner. '[The little modernist] magazines [...] provided a stage and an audience for the performance [of identities] and it is in the interplay between the artifice and the real that modern identities were forged', writes Suzanne Churchill.²³ Indeed, the performances of gender and sexuality in *The Masses* call to mind what Churchill observes in the context of *Others*: What is articulated in the spirit of protest can inadvertently turn into affirmation, so that deceitful games of make-belief elicit 'playful fantasies of being someone "other" than themselves'.²⁴ In *The Masses*, too, the fascination emanating from such performances seems to consist to a considerable degree in the sense of a spectacle unfolding in its own right, without author, actor or agent – a forceful dynamics that runs on a momentum of its own and in its course discloses horizons of unforeseen possibilities, especially with regard to the politics of self-identification.

Dell's Queer Girls

The sex radicalism of *The Masses* was particularly concerned with female sexuality, and especially young working-class women come into view in the magazine's efforts to chart sexual mores and manners. These assessments are rarely systematical, more often than not they take the guise of sketches. This mode of presentation complies with many little magazines' predilection – and

perhaps more generally: modernity's penchant – for anecdotal and cursory modes of expression.²⁵ Reflections on female sexuality aim to avoid moral judgment, juxtaposing alienating labour routines with individual practices that offer a respite from the larger system of industrial absorption.²⁶ As Rachel Schreiber has shown with regard to the journal's artwork, themes such as prostitution, promiscuity, or marital relations are presented from the vantage point of (working) women and with a strong emphasis on their right to sexual pleasure and sexual liberation, discerning 'opportunities for single women to live in the city as sexual agents'.²⁷

The world of female working-class entertainment addressed in *The Masses* deviates markedly from the normative standards of bourgeois middle-class culture, but lesbianism as a sexual identity has almost no part in this, since the 'mostly male editorial board [...] ultimately relied on traditional gender roles, including presumptions regarding heterosexuality'.²⁸ Still, there are hints and allusions, signals and gestures. Thus, in a poem in the March 1915 issue, the illustrator and poet Lydia Gibson, another regular contributor to the magazine, invokes the goddess Artemis hailing her female followers: 'I, the childless and husbandless: I, [...] unmaternal and fleet; / All ye may crave Aphrodite: to me after Mary ye come—/I the untamed am your mother; I am your lover and home'.²⁹ Here, the new woman appears as proud of her lacks – childless, husbandless and unmaternal; fulfilled, self-confident and complete in her all-female world of lovers, who appear like an assembling army toward the end of the poem: 'My songs are songs for the strong ones, my rule is no rule for the weak. / Over the shore and the mountains come—I am yours to seek'.³⁰ The poem's 'celebration of homosexual desire [is] fairly unusual in *The Masses*', as Margaret Jones contended, but its celebration of female strength and self-confidence is not.³¹ When Floyd Dell ridicules the anti-suffragist rhetoric of the day in his essay 'Adventures in Anti-Land' in the October/November issue in the same year, he lashes out particularly sarcastically against the allegation that the female 'psychology is deranged by the fact

of her sex'. Woman, he summarizes, is assumed to be 'chronically queer'.³² 'Queer,' here, marks deviations from the norm, and – at least in the critical assessment of *The Masses* – a potential that can be put to practical use to change the order of things. But at the same time, this potential needs to be unfolded carefully and gradually. All-female spheres and scenes, it seems, may become just a bit too queer to handle.

In 1921, four years after his time at *The Masses*, Floyd Dell introduces a gay side character in his novel *The Briary-Bush* (1921) and has his heterosexual protagonist defend him against a homophobic friend: 'Don't blame him [...]. We're all a little like that — I mean, queer. I'm sure I seem quite as queer as that to my family down in Springfield. If you live in Arkansas, and want to make lovely stage-pictures, you are a freak; or you become one trying to keep from being dull like everybody else. It's inevitable'.³³ In this rendition, which clearly identifies 'queerness' with homosexuality, to be 'queer' seems to become the default mode of the avant-garde. Queerness signals a program of defiant self-fashioning against the mainstream and, maybe more importantly, against the provincial mores of rural America. Six years earlier, in 1914, Dell addresses this theme in *The Masses* in the 2-page short story 'The Beating' – one of his most popular contributions to the journal that garnered 'widespread attention'³⁴ – and in this context he charts the ground between a sexological understanding of sexual deviance and an avant-garde celebration of 'queerness' in more complicated terms than in his later writings. Dell works with the stylistic markers of brevity, presenting a condensed glimpse into a world that is marked as strange and extraordinary, and breaking off at a moment of heightened tension, thus epitomizing the narrative's fragmented and unsettled character. His readers are presented with insights and views that are marked as private, delicate, not meant for public sharing or inappropriate for public disclosure.

At the time of the story's publication, Dell shared Bourne's attitude vis-à-vis homosexuality as a dangerous distraction particularly for women and he associated it with the very atavistic quality of backwardness that Heather Love identifies as a core element of the modernist discourse.³⁵ Like Bourne, he was familiar with (and enthusiastic about) Havelock Ellis' theories, and worried about 'the unwholesome fashionable practice of sex-segregated schools [that] brings young people into a homosexual atmosphere' and fosters 'homosexual "crushes" [...] particularly in girls' schools'.³⁶ His short story is set in a 'Training School for Girls' and showcases the friendship of his two female protagonists almost like a case study of a stifling all-female world of discipline and ritual. It first introduces us to an environment that is locked off, fenced in, sequestered and barred in every way possible, while at the same time replete with devices of supervision and surveillance: 'High up on the thin whitewashed partition behind the bed on which the girl was sitting was a little window, barred against the other dormitory. In the opposite wall were a number of similar windows, barred against the world. In the fourth wall was the door, which was now locked'.³⁷

The story revolves around the girls Minnie and Jeanette, one of them docile and susceptible to influence, the other strong and 'queer'. About Minnie, the meek one, we learn that 'she would have made, under other circumstances, a dutiful wife for the same reasons that now made her an inmate of a Reform School' (12). Jeanette is different:

There were a lot of queer things about Jeanette [...]. Jeanette had told [Minnie] about the things she had been sent to the Reform School for; when she talked of them a light came into her eyes. Jeanette was a queer girl. She thought that such things were beautiful ... Jeanette was queer. (12)

The focalizer, and perhaps the story at large, is at a loss of how to characterize this figure. She is 'queer', we learn over and over again, but we do not get to know what exactly this means – and

what she did to end up in the correctional facility. Although the story is laid out almost like an experimental arrangement for sexologists, however, Dell does not mark Jeanette's queerness as lesbianism. The little that we learn about her motivation is that she is driven by the desire to 'wear nice clothes, and talk to men – and make love' (12). It is almost as if Dell stops himself short of pursuing the classical scenario of 'lesbian contagion' in the course of the story, or rather: as if he changes gear in mid-story. In this course, the taint of lesbianism is transferred from the girls to their teachers. The corruption of the same-sex environment is attributed to the headmistresses Miss Carter and Miss Hampton who routinely enact rituals of sexualized punishment and degradation with a perverse mix between effeminate hysteria and mannish hardness (14).



At the story's outset, the girls are facing punishment since they tried to run away from the school. This 'beating' is then described from the perspective of Minnie, who secretly watches her friend's disciplining, which is related in voyeuristic detail not only by way of a close description but also by means of a half-page drawing by John Sloan, one of *The Masses'* most important illustrators. The image shows the punished girl with bared buttocks, four uniformed women, their hair in neat buns, the faces expressionless, holding her extremities, and a fierce matron brandishing the whip (fig. 1). The description goes farther than this: '[...] her nightgown, which should have been slipped to her shoulders, was not on her body at all. Minnie saw with a thrill [...] that it was lying scattered all over the floor, in shreds and threads' (13).

Fig. 1: John Sloan 'Charities and Corrections', *The Masses* 5.11 (August 1914): 14.

The punished girl refuses to express her pain. She does not give in to her punishers, nor to the system at large. Minnie stops watching, but she is forced to continue to listen, and experiences an intense moment of merging with the other girl's pain, that is described in a pornographic mix of sexual initiation and masochistic degradation: 'Her wide open eyes saw, as though no partition were there, the quivering body on the bed; her mind, more appreciative than it had ever been of the emotions of another, viewed the struggle with pain, the terrible struggle for silence that was fought and won ten times in every minute—won and almost lost, renewed and won again, endlessly' (14). While Jeanette is unrelenting, Minnie gives in with a physical, almost orgasmic response: 'Trembling uncontrollably all through her body, she uttered a hoarse, agonized cry. As she did so, the sounds in the other room ceased. There was silence for a whole minute and then the key turned in the lock, and the door of the dormitory opened' (14). This is how the short story ends, with Minnie breaking down on Jeanette's behalf, queered by association, and the cruel headmistresses turning to her. Doubtlessly, what is envisioned by the school as 'charities and corrections' and by the girls in terms of an endless circuit of humiliation and degradation, will not be terminated.

Correction – the enforcement of normality, turns out to be truly perverse in this story. Dell marks 'the queer' as a resistant impulse to the streamlining (and sexually corrupt) reign of the boarding school in its brutal spread. In this enactment, the queer is thus celebrated as a mode of proto-feminist resistance, and while it is explicitly dissociated from homosexuality, it is clearly inflected with the markers of same-sex desire and its 'thrill'. The story dances around the vocabulary and imagery of sexology *and* queerness, evoking and suggesting, teasing and fantasizing and thus eventually simultaneously rejecting lesbianism as a sexual identity and gesturing to it as an exciting sexual option. Queerness ultimately draws its appeal from being non-conformist and defiant, and these associations allow for the concept's aesthetic appropriation and

‘inversion’. This strategy of appropriation can be read in terms of Dell’s private and problematic positions regarding lesbianism and non-normative sexualities.³⁸ But the implications of Dell’s narrative juggling act with and around queerness may be more interesting than his putative intentions. The story attests to the fact that already in the teens, the concept of queer— and its reality – can no longer be contained. Queerness is all over the place, or rather, it is everywhere and nowhere at all. Its suggestive potential develops at the margins of the modernist discourse, and in miniaturized forms and minor keys of articulation that oscillate between allusion and retraction, exploration and disavowal, proceeding in tentative and contradictory fashion. Dell’s efforts to keep certain associations at bay are significant precisely because they fail. Queer may not (yet) have acquired a clear-cut meaning and social presence, but its fascination derives precisely from the anarchic momentum of its polysemic perversity.

Anderson’s Queer Hands

In many respects, Sherwood Anderson’s *Winesburg, Ohio*, which appeared in 1919 as a book, was a product of the world of the little magazines. The cyclical format of the only loosely connected stories allowed for a mode of pre-publication that was not serial (like James Joyce’s *Ulysses* or Ezra Pound’s *Cantos*, which were both also first published in little magazines) but rather dispersed. The stories ‘Queer’, ‘The Untold Lie’, ‘Mother’, and ‘The Thinker’ appeared in the avant-garde journal *The Seven Arts* in 1916 and 1917, after *The Smart Set* had turned down ‘Queer’, while ‘Paper Pills’ (originally titled: ‘The Philosopher’), ‘The Man of Ideas’ and ‘An Awakening’ came out in the equally experimental *Little Review* between 1916 and 1918. But it was *The Masses* that first accepted one of Anderson’s stories for publication. ‘The Book of the Grotesque’, which would become *Winesburg*’s opening story, appeared in the February 1916 issue; ‘Hands’, and ‘The Strength of God’ were published in March and April of the same year.

Floyd Dell is often evoked as Sherwood Anderson's 'discoverer', and he did play an instrumental role in promoting Anderson. Then again, the men's professional friendship was fraught with tension and not long-lived.³⁹ Anderson, who considered himself a 'minor writer' and was somewhat condescendingly praised for mastering the writing 'in a minor key',⁴⁰ highlights the marginality and provisionality of the little modernist magazines. In line with this, he endorses the classical understanding of the medium as a playground or experimental zone at a remove from the standardized world of publishing: 'I know that I myself could have found no place for the publication of my own stories but for these smaller magazines. The conventional popular magazines would have none of me, and what I have to say of myself would be equally true of all the new writers who began to be heard from at just that time'.⁴¹ The little magazines, in Anderson's view, provide a space apart from the modern realities in Europe and the United States that are characterized by 'the speeding up and the standardization of life and thought'.⁴² To his mind, this standardization also affects the publishing culture and here it effects an editing out and narrowing down of 'difficult' or 'embarrassing' subjects such as 'sex hungers, greed, and the sometimes twisted and strangely perverted desires for beauty in human beings'.⁴³ In the little magazines, conversely, these darker impulses – the perversions and imperfections, the grotesque and the queer – can take centre stage.

But of course, the little magazines were not really a world apart. As scholars like Mark Morrisson, David Earle or Michael North have shown, their reasoning was as affected by considerations of success, distinction, marketing, profit margins and circulation as the mainstream magazines, although their definitions of these terms may not have been as purely economically inflected as the calculations of their mass-market peers.⁴⁴ In both spheres, gestures of provocation and affirmation needed to be balanced, in both spheres audiences needed to be accommodated and profiles needed to be carefully maintained, as Anderson himself learned when his later

submissions to *The Masses* were turned down with the pedantic reasoning that these texts 'were not short stories at all'.⁴⁵ *The Masses* under the management of Floyd Dell may have accepted 'Hands' because 'it touched upon the forbidden subject of homosexuality', and 'The Book of the Grotesque', 'because it might introduce other similarly bold stories'.⁴⁶ But then, step by step, Dell distanced himself from Anderson, deploring a dangerous tendency in his writings toward a 'more and more indulgent use of unconstrained fantasy',⁴⁷ which is in keeping with the larger reception history of Anderson's work and the increasing critique of his lack of restraint and the 'grotesque' gender ambivalence of his imagery.⁴⁸ The world of the little magazines was no less policed and regimented than the world at large, it seems.

Anderson's negotiations with editors and publishers, his author performances and his manoeuvres between interesting non-conformity and embarrassing oddity echo in his stories on the level of narrative and form. 'The Book of the Grotesque', which he had intended as the title-giving story of his novel, can be read as a reflection on the dreamlike process of writing. The author who figures as the story's protagonist spins forth 'a long procession of figures' that transform in the process of being dreamed, and set loose, as it were, the episodic storytelling of *Winesburg, Ohio*: 'You see the interest in all this lies in the figures that went before the eyes of the writer. They were all grotesque. All of the men and women the writer had ever known had become grotesques'.⁴⁹ There is very little emphasis on conscious crafting or creation in this description, the figures seem to generate themselves, they walk out of the writer's imagination. Much has been written about this sketch in its function as an introductory piece for Anderson's episodic novel.⁵⁰ When this story stands on its own, however, its focus changes from the meta-reflection on writing a book to the performance of authorship as a gender performance as it were. In particular, the analogy of writing to giving birth gains a strange predominance here: 'Perfectly still he lay and his body was old and not of much use any more, but something inside him was

altogether young. He was like a pregnant woman, only that the thing inside him was not a baby but a youth. No, it wasn't a youth, it was a woman, young and wearing a coat of mail like a knight'.⁵¹ This young woman inside the old man undergoes several further transformations in the course of the sketch. Nothing is ever allowed to stay fixed, everything is always shifting, claimed, taken back, revised, reconsidered.

This also characterizes the overall structure of *Winesburg, Ohio*, which depicts a fictional small town whose residents have internalized the regime of public calibration and distinction to an extent that collapses the public into the private. The small-town world may not be about appearances, since nobody really seems to care, but it is all about performances and performativity – without an audience. This is expressed not only on the stories' plot level, but perhaps more strikingly in their form. The structure of a sequence of perspectives, projections and speculations that brings one character into high relief and backgrounds another, to then rearrange the foreground/background relation in the next instance, organizes the novel's episodic narration.⁵² The little magazines, in which Anderson's stories appeared first, are characterized by a similar organizing principle of the loosely strung concatenation, of vague resonances, reciprocities and reiterations rather than a carefully designed continuity or closure.⁵³ But where the episodic novel establishes hierarchies and systems – bringing about a sense of major and minor, ordinary and queer, central and marginal characters – the publication of individual stories in a little magazine lays out a different pattern.

To appreciate the publishing format of the magazine or journal, one needs to take into account a particular text's paratexts – the editorial announcements and closing remarks, its positioning within the journal, its correlation with other texts or series, and much more. Periodical publications generate regular rhythms of writing and reading, and forge patterns of habituation.⁵⁴ If one now investigates the immediate context of Anderson's stories in *The Masses*, it is most

striking to see how little coherence there is. Neither of the stories is equipped with a carefully chosen visual counter piece, let alone an illustration as in the case of Dell's story. 'The Book of the Grotesque' shares the page with a cartoon by Arthur Young criticizing the libel proceedings against the journal at the time. 'The Strength of God', too, features a seemingly random picture, although here Arthur B. Davies' sketches of nudes and dancers underneath the story could be read as an allusion to its theme of sexual desire and attraction. Then again, 'Hands' features a similar study of female bodies in motion by John Sloan, without any connection to the story's plot. The image/text relations seem arbitrary or accidental, and the individual issues' larger contexts – the war effort, women's liberation and labour politics – do not really resonate with Anderson's laconic reflections on provincial isolation and longing either.

Max Eastman's vignette 'Shy' at the end of the March 1916 issue that features 'Hands' as an opening story, however, dwells on the very theme of morbid self-absorption that Anderson also pursues, by depicting a young man's extreme aversion to public performance: 'I am so in love with myself that I have to hide, for fear everybody won't see me just right'.⁵⁵ Yet this story, authored by the journal's main editor, is placed as far away as possible from Anderson's opening piece – at the issue's end. It could as well have been published a month later or before, and this would have harmonized well with the journal's larger structure of organization: Readers could expect a literary piece, a radical essay, some poems, a few cartoons and several artistic sketches every month. The magazine thus always fans out into a familiar array of diverse genres and themes, and Anderson's stories take one regular slot in this arrangement, entering into a dialogic relationship with similar pieces by Dell, Eastman, Helen Hull, Adriana Spadoni, or others. In this larger dispersal, reflections on social isolation, marginalization, deviation and queerness appear regularly, and in this regularity may gain a paradoxically reassuring function for the magazine's readers – configuring a

pattern that is equally 'episodic' as the structure of Anderson's story cycle, if differently aggregated and definitely less directed or carefully designed.

If one reads 'Hands', Anderson's reflection on the suspicion of sexual aberration, in the context of *Winesburg, Ohio*, queerness appears first and foremost as the incapability of 'fitting in'. The story's protagonist, Wing Biddlebaum, does not 'think of himself as in any way part of the life of the town where he had lived for twenty years'.⁵⁶ He wallows in his own sense of marginality, which derives from an earlier experience of social expulsion – he was driven out of his hometown in Pennsylvania and his job as a school teacher on the suspicion of homosexuality or paedophilia. At the time of the story's present, this past stigmatization has become an integral part of Biddlebaum's self-perception. The failure to fit in is projected upon the character's hands, which seem to have a tendency of running out of control: 'His hands alarmed their owner. He wanted to keep them hidden away and looked with amazement at the quiet, inexpressive hands of other men [...]' (5). In *Winesburg, Ohio*, the body's grotesquely expressive capacity is a recurring motif: Biddlebaum's hands thus call to mind numerous other characters' physical features that reveal unacknowledged truths or unconscious longings, contributing, in Benjamin Kahan's reading, to the construction of a 'sexual universe that is not genitally organized but structured instead around the sexuality of hands and touch'.⁵⁷

In the episodic novel, such resonances uphold an overarching composition, a complex symbolic system of cross-references. As a stand-alone story in *The Masses*, 'Hands' resonates with the lexicon of sexology, and thus gains a much more concrete connotation. Especially the story's prominent theme of alienation reads differently in this context. The 'hands' that are evoked as independent agents, operating against the interests and will of their 'owner', call to mind the notion of sexual drives and impulses as self-propelling forces elaborated by Havelock Ellis. This repercussion becomes particularly apparent in the ways in which Biddlebaum's homosexuality is

addressed and obfuscated in the story. At one point, the sexual dimension of Biddlebaum's former interaction with his students is openly acknowledged: 'In his feeling for the boys under his charge he was not unlike the finer sort of women in their love of men' (5, 7). But the very next sentence takes this assessment back: 'And yet that is but crudely stated. It wants the poet there' (7). This back and forth between assertion and qualification calls to mind Dell's dance around the scenarios of same-sex attraction and lesbian 'contagion' in 'The Beating' – and *The Masses*' indecisive and ambivalent attitude vis-à-vis non-normative sexualities in general. The story's ending, which has been read in terms of homophobic dismissal in the context of *Winesburg, Ohio*,⁵⁸ acquires a different momentum in the magazine:

A few stray white breadcrumbs lay on the cleanly washed floor by the table, and setting the lamp on a low stool he began to pick up the crumbs, carrying them to his mouth one by one with unbelievable rapidity. In the dense blotch of light beneath the table the kneeling figure looked like a priest engaged in some service in his church. The nervous, expressive fingers, flashing in and out of the light, might well have been mistaken for the fingers of the devotee going swiftly through decade after decade of his rosary. (7)

What seems grotesque – or queer – in a particular light, appears like a sacral rite in another (here, literally, the light of a lamp on a low stool). When approached in the frame of sexological discourse, Biddlebaum's hands seem deviant, degenerate or atavistic. But framed by the privacy of his small-town home, they come across as devotional, innocuous or quaint. Read in the context of the little magazine, the story allows to understand sexuality is a set of possibilities, not exclusively a pathological condition or identity – sex is something that you *do* rather than what you *have* or *are*.

With this, sexuality and queerness are modernized and brought 'up to date' – integrated into a modern world that is generally seen as complex, complicated and contingent, an open plane

of options, choices and alternatives rather than a bifurcation of right and wrong. This is at odds with the world of *Winesburg, Ohio*, where the desire of characters identified as 'queer' like Kate Swift or the unnamed 'stranger' in 'Tandy', is regularly made out as temporally 'impossible' – backwards in a very literal sense.⁵⁹ The stranger enthuses about a little child – 'I have missed her, you see. She did not come in my time' – and Kate Swift detects the man in the kid George Willard: "'What's the use? It will be ten years before you begin to understand what I mean when I talk to you,'" she cried passionately'.⁶⁰ In both cases, sexual relations are made out as potentialities across time, and the queer desire is characterized by going up against chronometric time. This resonates with Heather Love's assessment of the 'queer historical experience of failed or impossible love' in terms of a temporal disjuncture – 'feeling backward'.⁶¹

When reading Anderson's 'Hands' as a stand-alone story in *The Masses*, however, the theme of a temporal incongruity and the sharp juxtaposition of present and past retreats into the background and instead the narrative seems to fan out into an array of diverging *simultaneous* possibilities, presenting a layered kaleidoscope of different perspectives. While there is an undeniable distance between the story's fictional world and the conditions and concerns of urban modernity, the journal's structure of mix and match accentuates correspondences and links as much as breaks. In the context of *The Masses*, Anderson's writing seems less pessimistic and resigned than in *Winesburg, Ohio*. The recognition that the performances of modernity have only actors and no audiences, so that nobody is watching although everybody is on stage, is no joyful affair, and Anderson, in particular, insists on its melancholy quality. But read alongside the journal's other entries on public performances especially of sexuality and gender, or in the context of the journal's advertising of books such as Auguste Forel's *The Sexual Question*, Richard von Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis* or Havelock Ellis' *Men and Women* (to name only a few titles promoted in the same issue of *The Masses*), a modernist sense of possibility discloses itself, in

which the queer and the straight arrange themselves side by side and in continuous competition. Instead of pointing to the past or to the future, the modernist little magazine discloses a markedly presentist world. Here, queer is *now*, a flickering image or impression on the verge of disappearance, impossible to pin down and hold tight, but therefore all the more intriguing in its potential significance and impact.

Notes:

¹ Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 5. See also: Peggy Farfan, *Performing Queer Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 1-5; Scott Herring, 'Queering the American Modernist Novel', in *The Cambridge Companion to the American Modernist Novel*, ed. by Joshua Miller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 122-36.

² Love, p. 147.

³ Paul Saint-Amour, 'Weak Theory, Weak Modernism', in *Modernism / modernity*, 3.3 (August 2018), 437-59 <<https://modernismmodernity.org/articles/weak-theory-weak-modernism>>

⁴ Christine Stansell, *American Moderns: Bohemian New York and the Creation of a New Century*, revised edition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), pp. 250-51, see also Christina Simmons, *Making Marriage Modern: Women's Sexuality from the Progressive Era to World War II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 87-94.

⁵ Benjamin Kahan, 'Queer Modernism', in *A Handbook of Modernism Studies*, ed. by Jean-Michel Rabaté (Malden, MA: John Wiley, 2013), pp. 347-61, p. 354.

⁶ Robert Scholes, 'Small Magazines, Large Ones, and Those In-Between', in *Little Magazines and Modernism: New Approaches*, ed. by Suzanne W. Churchill and Adam McKible (London: Ashgate,

2007), pp. 323-35, p. 325, see also Sean Latham, and Robert Scholes, 'The Rise of Periodical Studies', in *PMLA* 121 (2006), 517–31.

⁷ Suzanne W. Churchill, 'The Lying Game: *Others* and the Great Spectra Hoax of 1917', in *Little Magazines and Modernism: New Approaches*, ed. by Suzanne W. Churchill and Adam McKible (London: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 177-95.

⁸ Mark Morrisson, *The Public Face of Modernism: Little Magazines, Audiences, and Reception, 1905-1920* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), p. 201.

⁹ Simmons, pp. 76-77, see also Stansell, pp. 166-67; Rachel Schreiber, *Gender and Activism in a Little Magazine: The Modern Figures of The Masses* (London: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 90-123.

¹⁰ See also Stansell, pp. 267-70.

¹¹ Randolph Bourne, 'The Vampire: Review of *Regiment of Women*, by Clemence Dane', in *The Masses*, 9.8 (June, 1917), 35-38, p. 29.

¹² Bourne, p. 38.

¹³ Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 269-73; Jennifer Terry, *An American Obsession: Science, Medicine, and Homosexuality in Modern Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), pp. 49-53.

¹⁴ Benjamin Kahan, *The Book of Minor Perverts: Sexology, Etiology, and the Emergences of Sexuality* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2019), pp. 33-6.

¹⁵ See Smith-Rosenberg, p. 277.

¹⁶ Kahan, *The Book*, pp. 37-41.

¹⁷ Benjamin Kahan, 'Volitional Etiologies: Toward a Weak Theory of Etiology', in *Modernism / modernity*, 25.3 (September 2018), 551-68, p. 354.

¹⁸ Kahan, 'Volitional Etiologies', p. 349.

¹⁹ See Terry, p. 74; Laura Horak, *Girls Will Be Boys: Cross-Dressed Women, Lesbians, and American Cinema* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2016), pp. 93-117.

²⁰ Chad Heap, *Slumming: Sexual and Racial Encounters in American Nightlife, 1885-1940* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2009), p. 162, see also William L. Phillips, 'How Sherwood Anderson Wrote *Winesburg, Ohio*', in *American Literature*, 23.1 (March 1951), 7-30, p. 15; Mark Whalan, *Race, Manhood, and Modernism in America: The Short Story Cycles of Sherwood Anderson and Jean Toomer* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 2007), pp. 38-40.

²¹ Melba Cuddy-Lane, 'Queer', in *Modernism: Keywords* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), pp. 177-83, p. 156.

²² Suzanne W. Churchill and Ethan Jaffee, 'The New Poetry: *The Glebe* (1913-14); *The Others* (1915-19); and *Poetry Review of America* (1916-17)', in *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines, Vol. 2: North America, 1894-1960*, ed. by Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 299-319, p. 300.

²³ Churchill, p. 195.

²⁴ Churchil, p. 195.

²⁵ See Michael Gamper and Ruth Mayer, 'Erzählen, Wissen und kleine Formen: Eine Einleitung', in *Kurz & Knapp: Zur Mediengeschichte kleiner Formen vom 17. Jahrhundert bis heute*, ed. by Michael Gamper and Ruth Mayer (Bielefeld: transcript, 2017), pp. 7-22; Andreas Huyssen, *Miniature Metropolis: Literature in an Age of Photography and Film*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).

²⁶ See Schreiber, pp. 90-123; Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), pp. 35-76; Sandra

Adickes, *To Be Young Was Very Heaven: Women in New York Before the First World War* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), pp. 37-43.

²⁷ Schreiber, p. 97.

²⁸ Schreiber, p. 97.

²⁹ Lydia Gibson, 'Artemis', in *The Masses*, 6.6 (March 1915), p. 11.

³⁰ Gibson, p. 11, see Margaret C. Jones, *Heretics and Hell-Raisers: Women Contributors to The Masses, 1911-1917* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993), p. 19.

³¹ Jones, p. 19.

³² Floyd Dell, 'Adventures in Anti-Land', in *The Masses*, 7.1 (October/November 1915), 5-6, p. 5.

³³ Floyd Dell, *The Briary-Bush* (New York: Knopf, 1921), p. 34.

³⁴ Douglas Clayton, *Floyd Dell: The Life and Times of an American Rebel* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1994), p. 123.

³⁵ Love, p. 6, on Dell see George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994); Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-century America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), pp. 86-7.

³⁶ Quoted in Simmons, pp. 146-47.

³⁷ Floyd Dell, 'The Beating', in *The Masses*, 5.11 (August 1914), pp. 12-14, p. 12, hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

³⁸ Faderman, pp. 86-87.

³⁹ Martha C. Carpentier, 'Letters between Floyd Dell and Sherwood Anderson, 1920s', in *Making Modernism: Literature and Culture in 20th Century Chicago* (Chicago: Newberry Library, 2013/2017)

<http://publications.newberry.org/makingmodernism/exhibits/show/exhibit/dellanderson>;

Walter Rideout, *Sherwood Anderson: A Writer in America*, vol. 1 (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006); Matthew James Vechinski, 'Publishing Sherwood Anderson's "Group of Tales": The Textual Presentations of the Winesburg Stories and the Modernist Legacy of *Winesburg, Ohio*.' *Sherwood Anderson's Winesburg, Ohio*, ed. by Precious McKenzie (Leiden: Brill, 2016), pp. 145-74.

⁴⁰ Irving Howe, Introduction to *Winesburg, Ohio*, by Sherwood Anderson (New York: Signet, 1993), pp. vii-xviii, p. xvii; see also Whalan, pp. 123-248.

⁴¹ Quoted in Vechinski, p. 149.

⁴² Sherwood Anderson, 'Notes on Standardization', in *Sherwood Anderson's Notebook* (New York: Boni & Liveright, 1926), pp. 139-50, p. 139; see also Kahan, *The Book*, pp. 85-99.

⁴³ Anderson, 'Notes', p. 145.

⁴⁴ Morrison; David M. Earle, *Re-Covering Modernism: Pulp, Paperbacks, and the Prejudice of Form* (New York: Routledge, 2009); Michael North, 'Transatlantic Transfer: Little Magazines and Euro-American Modernism' in *The Modernist Atlantic*, Conference, De Mont University, July 2017 <http://modmags.dmu.ac.uk/file/north_transatlantic_transfer.pdf>

⁴⁵ Vechinski, p. 156.

⁴⁶ Rideout, p. 212.

⁴⁷ Quoted in Rideout, p. 212.

⁴⁸ Peter Nagy, 'The Woman in the Man: Male Modernism and Cross-Gender Identification in Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*' in *College Literature*, 45.4 (Fall 2018), pp. 773-800.

⁴⁹ Sherwood Anderson, 'The Book of the Grotesque', *The Masses*, 8.4 (February 1916), p. 14.

⁵⁰ J. Gerald Kennedy, 'Toward a Poetics of the Short Story Cycle', in *Journal of the Short Story in English*, 11 (1988) 9-25; J. Gerald Kennedy, 'From Anderson's *Winesburg* to Carver's *Cathedral*: The

Short Story Sequence and the Semblance of Community', in *Modern American Short Story Sequences: Composite Fictions and Fictive Communities*, ed. by J. Gerald Kennedy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 194-215; Robert Dunne, *A New Book of the Grotesque: Contemporary Approaches to Sherwood Anderson's Early Fiction* (Kent: Kent State University Press, 2005).

⁵¹ Anderson, 'Book of the Grotesque', p. 14, see also Phillips, p. 8; Nagy, pp. 781-84; James Ellis, 'Sherwood Anderson's Fear of Sexuality: Horses, Men, and Homosexuality', in *Studies in Short Fiction*, 30.4 (Fall 1993) 595-601.

⁵² Kahan, *The Book*, p. 87.

⁵³ See Schreiber, pp. 1-31; Rebecca Zurier, *Art for the Masses (1911-1917): A Radical Magazine and its Graphics* (New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery, 1995).

⁵⁴ Margaret Beetham, 'Open and Closed: The Periodical as a Publishing Genre', in *Victorian Periodicals Review*. 22.3 (Fall 1989) 96-100; pp. 96-7; see also Lynn Pykett, 'Reading the Periodical Press: Text and Context', in *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 22.3 (1986) 100-8.

⁵⁵ Max Eastman, 'Shy', in *The Masses*, 8.5 (March 1916), 18.

⁵⁶ Sherwood Anderson, 'Hands', *The Masses*, 8. 5 (March 1916), pp. 5, 7, p. 5. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

⁵⁷ Kahan, *The Book*, p. 92.

⁵⁸ Whalan , p. 46.

⁵⁹ Sherwood Anderson, *Winesburg, Ohio* (New York: Signet, 1993), p. 162.

⁶⁰ Anderson, *Winesburg*, p. 140, p. 161.

⁶¹ Love, p. 29.