

Collaboration and Camaraderie:

Broom, Secession, and the "Youngest Generation"

Erica Bahls

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Traditionally, modernism and modernist texts have been studied in light of the myth of "Great Men:" literary giants who plucked genius from obscurity and single-handedly ushered forth a new age of experimentation. Scholars have ignored the collaboration and camaraderie that existed among modern and avant-garde writers who worked together to publish little magazines, the staging points from which they conducted their attacks on established and conventional forms. When historians and literary critics write about the short-lived avant-garde magazines *Secession* and *Broom*, they write about Matthew Josephson, the charismatic and enthusiastic young Dadaist whose editorial hand can be found in both. Josephson's literary career is often described as a progression from one school of thought to another. He came to France as a disaffected young Symbolist, found enthusiasm and literary cause among the French Dadaists and started *Secession* with Gorham Munson, then turned his gaze back to America with Harold Loeb's *Broom* and its emphasis on the vitality of American mass culture.

This makes for a clean and simple storyline, but implies a historical progression from one magazine to the other and emphasizes rivalry, rather than relationship. It leaves out the complex web of friendships and enmities that existed among the writers involved in these two magazines and it belies the interdependency and shared history of the magazines themselves. This paper focuses on the shifting allegiances and lasting friendships of the young American literary "crowd" that surrounded Josephson, and the collaborative efforts involved in the publication of

Secession and *Broom*. Although Josephson was heavily involved in both magazines, neither *Secession* nor *Broom* was the work of just one "great man." They were published through the collaborative efforts of a group of young men who, despite their differences in opinions and aesthetics, saw themselves as belonging to the same "crowd."

In an article awaiting publication in *American Periodicals*, Alan Golding argues that *The Dial* and *The Little Review*, usually seen as bitter rivals, were actually dependent upon each other for their existence and success. They relied on each other for the vital conversation and rivalry on which their identities were built. Golding argues that *The Dial* and *The Little Review* were dependent upon each other, working "as complements rather than as rivals" (Golding, "*The Dial, The Little Review, and Modernist Canonicity*" 3). Golding argues that the complementary nature of little magazines has been overlooked in studies of modernism and avant-garde; this paper argues that their collaborative nature has been overlooked as well.

Like *The Dial* and *The Little Review*, *Secession* and *Broom* were interdependent. *Secession* was begun in part as a response to *Broom*, and *Broom* folded within only a few months of *Secession*'s end. In addition, they drew from a common pool of young writers and artists. These men were not members of one school of thought or literary society, but friends who worked together to publish their avant-garde work. The magazines were in conversation with each other. Often, personal conflicts and rivalries lay just below the surface of their texts.

The "crowd" who contributed to *Secession* and *Broom* "included principally Kenneth Burke, Malcolm Cowley, Slater Brown, and Hart Crane; two or three years later, these were joined by Robert M. Coates, John Brooks Wheelwright, and Allen Tate" (Josephson 35). These men were not merely colleagues, they were "literary friends" who "rotated in the same orbit because [their] great single-minded preoccupation was working with words" (Josephson 35).

These men were also preoccupied with breaking from American literary traditions, though they did not always agree on how to go about doing this.

From 1916 to 1919, Josephson attended Columbia University, where he met several of his "literary friends." The first of these was Kenneth Burke. The two met when Josephson defended the "young *révolté*" against a professor who denounced his poems for their themes of repressed sexuality (Josephson 31). Like Josephson, Burke was unimpressed with the literary atmosphere at Columbia. He eventually left Columbia to focus on his writing, but not before he introduced Josephson to his high school classmate, Malcolm Cowley.

Cowley had studied at Harvard, but left his studies to be an ambulance driver in the First World War. At the war's end, he moved to New York "because living was cheap...because it seemed that New York was the only city where a young writer could be published" (qtd in Shi 35). There, he joined Burke and Josephson in forming a literary club. The three read and critiqued one another's work and set up literary competitions for themselves (Josephson 51). Like his friends, Cowley was disillusioned with American literary traditions: "All our roots were dead now, even the Anglo-Saxon tradition of our literary ancestors, even the habits of slow thrift that characterized our social class" (Cowley 46). The three admired the French Symbolists and accordingly adopted despairing, decadent attitudes toward life. Their dissatisfaction with the American literary scene and the atmosphere of New York continued to grow.

In the University library, Josephson befriended William Slater Brown, who had also worked at an ambulance driver in France. Josephson describes his friend as "quite whimsical," but with an "undercurrent of melancholy" stemming from his experiences in a French prison camp (Josephson 33). Brown later introduced Josephson to his companion in prison, E. E. Cummings.

Josephson met Hart Crane by chance while bringing manuscripts to *The Little Review*; Crane rented the furnished room above the office of editor Margaret Anderson. They exchanged poems and became friends despite their differences in style. Josephson bluntly told his new friend that his poems were "old-fashioned" and recommended that he throw them out and start over in a more "modern" style (Josephson 34).

Frustrated with the financial and literary atmosphere of post-War America, many of Josephson's acquaintances joined the wave of young American artists who moved to France in the early 1920s. Cowley came to France in July 1921 to study at the University of Montpellier (Kempf 13). Josephson arrived in Paris a few months later, and Brown and Cummings soon joined them (Josephson 90). Josephson was astonished by "the number of Americans [in France], scores of them who seemed to have been transplanted from Greenwich Village, and some already known to [him]" (Josephson 81).

They joined a colony of young Americans in Paris sometimes referred to as the "Lost Generation" and known for their rejection of American culture and values. It would be a mistake to stereotype all of these young travelers as dissatisfied ex-patriots who revolted against America and all that it stood for. Josephson claimed he "never felt either pretended or real disgust with America" (qtd in Shi 47). He was, however, disgusted with American *intellectual* and *literary* culture, and felt that his travels in Europe would be an important step in his education as a writer.

In Paris, Josephson met Gorham Munson through Crane, their mutual friend. Though the two did not immediately take to each other, they did respect their mutual interest in avant-garde poetry. Josephson introduced Munson to the experimental poetry of Cowley and Burke (Shi 54).

It was in Paris that Josephson became a devotee of the Dadaist movement. He wrote to his friends that they "must write of *our age*" and claimed "[French Dadaist Guillaume]

Apollinaire had killed my interest in the classical realism of Flaubert" (Josephson 125). The Dadaists' fascination with American mass culture excited Josephson, but his friends were initially skeptical. Crane wondered, "But what has happened to Matty? And just why is Apollinaire so portentous a god? Will radios, flying-machines and cinemas have such a great effect on poetry in the end?" (Josephson 126). Josephson's enthusiastic letters to Cowley, Burke, Munson and Crane, though not initially successful in converting his friends to this new movement, did introduce the young American writers to Dadaist experimentation and word play (Shi 57-8).

While Josephson was conducting his letter-writing campaign in Paris, a new literary magazine was testing its wings in Rome. In November 1921 Harold Loeb and Alfred Kreymborg published the first issue of *Broom: An International Magazine of the Arts Published by Americans in Italy*. *Broom's* main interest was the introduction of new European art and literary styles to America, and it strove to be "a sort of clearing house" where "path-breaking artists" would have "at least an equal chance with the artist of acknowledged reputation" (*Broom* Vol 1, No 1).

Josephson was impressed by *Broom's* ambitions, but not by the product. After reading the first issue he told Burke it "was like very weak coffee after all the advance notices" (qtd in Shi 60). If Josephson was to have a platform from which to spread the Dadaist movement, he would have to start his own magazine. Munson, although not in agreement with Josephson's enthusiastic Dadaism, did believe that young American writers needed a magazine of their own. This belief had been influenced by "The Youngest Generation," an article written by Cowley and published in a supplement to the New York *Evening Post* (Josephson 100). The result of their

cooperation was *Secession*, an avant-garde magazine for young Americans, with Munson editing and Josephson soliciting material.

Secession's first issue appeared in the spring of 1922. The format of *Secession* emphasizes the collaborative effort and playful nature of the magazine. Numbers One and Two have no table of contents; instead, "Identity Cards" and "Notes" give semifactual biographical information about the contributors and include jokes and quips about their friends. For example, Cowley is listed as "The mayor of Montpellier, France," and Josephson's note claims that he was "Recently wounded in a duel with Will Bray" (*Secession* No 2).

A note signed by Munson declares that *Secession* was designed for members of the "Youngest Generation" and that it "exists for those writers who are preoccupied with researches for new forms" (*Secession* No 1, p 19). The first issue also hints at the differences in aesthetics and literary opinions that would plague *Secession* throughout its run. Josephson (under his *nom de guerre* "Will Bray") contributed "Apollinaire: Or Let Us Be Troubadours," an enthusiastic and optimistic essay that speaks of the "exhilarating record" of the Dadaists and the "speed and vividness" of their writing (*Secession* No 1, p 12). "A Bow to the Adventurous," by Munson, is a more hesitant look at the poetry of French Dadaist Tristan Tzara, a close friend and associate of Josephson. Munson writes that he does not, "at present, vouch for the bulk of Tzara's activities, but he has written several indubitable poems" (*Secession* No 1, p 13). *Secession*'s vague stance on Dadaism is understandable when one realizes that the magazine was published by a group of friends who agreed that their generation needed a magazine to call their own, but who did not necessarily subscribe to the same school of thought.

Despite these ambiguities of editorial policy, *Secession* attracted the attention of *Broom*'s editor, Loeb. *Broom* acknowledged its new competition, noting that *Secession* "aligns itself in a

general way with Post-Dadaism" (*Broom* Vol 2, No 3, p 27). Kreymborg had left *Broom* in February 1922, and Loeb was looking to take the magazine in a different direction. In May 1922 Loeb published an editorial essay entitled "Foreign Exchange," in which he analyzed the "considerable American colony in Paris" and "the literary reactions of the writers to the French environment" (*Broom* Vol 2, No 2, p 177). He was particularly interested in the way these writers were "reevaluating" American culture, due in part to their contact with Dadaism.

French Dadaists, though unimpressed by American literary tradition, found American mass culture stimulating and inspirational. Under their influence, American writers (Josephson was among the most vocal, though his enthusiasm was contagious) began to reevaluate American mass culture as well, seeing in it the beginnings of a new American art form. Loeb concludes that, while these "transplanted writers...have a greater importance for contemporary literature than possibly their combined or individual talents warrant," they could eventually learn to "combine truth of vision, perfection of form, courage of conviction with a wide comprehension of a civilization too marvelous to be entirely hateful" (*Broom* Vol 2, No 2, p 181).

The editors of *Secession* responded. The next issue of *Broom* published "The Limbo of American Literature" by Gorham B. Munson and "Made in America" by Matthew Josephson. Again, the differences in their responses are noteworthy. Munson defends American authors who write in European styles, asking, "Why must we proclaim only the impossibly pure-blooded?" (*Broom* Vol 2, No 3, p 258). On the other hand, Josephson maintains that Americans are not adopting European techniques of Dadaism, but that "[t]he high speed and tension of American life may have been exported in quantity to Europe" and that Dadaism attempts to capture the "fundamental attitude of aggression, humor, unequivocal affirmation" that comes naturally to Americans (*Broom* Vol 2, No 3, p 270). In other words, Europe was on its way to

becoming Americanized and Dadaism was primarily a product of American mass culture.

Josephson's fervent response impressed Loeb, and the two agreed to meet.

Meanwhile, Josephson's relationship with Munson was becoming more strained. Munson traveled to New York in the summer of 1922, leaving Josephson and Cowley to edit the third and fourth issues of *Secession*. Munson did not trust his editors. He sent his friend, John Brooks Wheelwright, to serve as overseas agent and asked Burke to join the editorial board and keep an eye on matters (Shi 69). Unfortunately for Munson, Burke trusted his friends' editorial expertise and Wheelwright was soon convinced as well (Shi 70).

Wheelwright, Cowley and Josephson read through the contributions set aside for *Secession* Number Four and were appalled by an "uncommonly dull" series of poems by Donald B. Axton, a friend of Munson. One of the editors (neither Josephson nor Wheelwright claims to remember who) suggested that they cut all his poetry except for the last three lines of "The Jilted Moon:" "O moon, / Thou art naught but Chinese, / Only Chinese" (Josephson 235). These lines, at least, were "neutral and so passable." Josephson later admitted "it was not editing; it was murder." However, he did not apologize, only suggested that they might have been drunk when the decision was made (Josephson 235). Munson discovered the joke and was outraged. Wheelwright and Josephson were asked to leave the editorial board of *Secession*, and Josephson accepted Loeb's invitation to invest his editorial talents in *Broom*.

During the same autumn that Josephson switched allegiances, Cowley began to rethink his literary and aesthetic opinions. He had never felt entirely comfortable with Josephson's passion for Dadaism and modern aesthetics, finding the "Truth, Nature, Good Sense" and rational aesthetics of classical French literature more appealing (Kempf 18). Josephson saw Cowley's defense of classicism as "pretentious" (Kempf 27). Cowley's personal reaction to the

first issues of *Secession* was cautious and hesitant, for he was not as passionate about the avant-garde as his friends (Kempf 24).

It was not until October 1922 that Cowley met the Dadaists that had so intrigued his friend Josephson. He found them "the most amusing people in Paris," but it was not until February of the following year that he began to subscribe more seriously to their ideas (Cowley 135-6). His growing interest in Dadaism led him, like Josephson, to rethink his views of American mass-culture. Because of this, "[h]is style changed; the tempo of his verses now assumed something like a ragtime beat" (Josephson 157). In the meantime, Josephson introduced Cowley to Loeb and he became a regular contributor to *Broom*, while continuing to publish in *Secession* as well.

In October 1922, *Broom* moved to Berlin with Josephson. *Broom's* November 1922 issue was the first to carry Josephson's name in its banner. It also printed an article by Josephson, "The Great American Billposter," which posits advertising as the modern form of American art and literature. He compares a Campbell's soup advertisement to poetry by Keats and claims that it is "easy to see why our literature is so impoverished and where the creative genius has gone" (*Broom* Vol 3, No 4, p 312). This radical essay set the tone for *Broom's* shift in focus, from European avant-garde to American mass culture.

A glance at the table of contents of the January 1923 issue shows how much support Josephson was able to draw from the *Secession* crowd: Burke, Crane and Cowley are listed as contributors alongside more highly recognized writers such as William Carlos Williams, Gertrude Stein, and Marianne Moore. Crane and Cowley continued to be published regularly in *Secession*, but Burke broke with Munson, resigned from the editorial board, and moved to New York.

Both magazines struggled with financial crises throughout 1923. When Loeb's personal finances ran out, Josephson convinced his brother-in-law in New York to publish *Broom* at reduced cost (Shi 74). While Loeb remained in Europe, Josephson moved *Broom* to New York. In the July 1923 issue, Loeb introduces "the men of this group" to the readers in New York (*Broom* Vol 5, No 1, p 55). *Broom* had become a mouthpiece of Josephson's generation; while Loeb remained editor, associate editors Brown (still a *Secession* contributor as well), Cowley (now more firmly in agreement with Josephson's literary ideology), and Josephson were able to take the magazine in the direction of their choice. Josephson later claimed, "We had our Message to deliver; we had the conservatives of literature to dispose of; and our "new poets" to champion" (Josephson 254). Unfortunately, they had no money.

While in New York, Josephson continued to work with his "crowd" of young artists and writers. Burke was willing to work with Josephson on *Broom* though they still disagreed about literary matters; Josephson claimed he tended to write "in a rather classical style" (Josephson 260). In August, Cowley also returned to New York. Financial problems required that he find a job, leaving him little time to devote to either magazine. However, "owing to the contagious effect of our contact with the young [Dadaist] Europeans," Cowley was Josephson's greatest ally in the fight to "introduce a certain excitement" to American literary life (Josephson 260). Less enthusiastic was Crane, who agreed with Josephson's aesthetics but thought he was an egotistical and overbearing editor (Shi 78). *Broom's* new "taste for experiment" was "exemplified by Cummings' lyrics in small capitals and an inebriated typography, by Cowley's burlesque songs" (Josephson 259). By the fall of 1923, most of the young writers belonging to the *Broom-Secession* crowd had returned from Europe and congregated in New York or New Jersey.

Contributor	Number of issues of <i>Secession</i> that printed contributions*	Number of issues of <i>Broom</i> that printed contributions
Slater Brown	2	4
Kenneth Burke	4	2
Robert Coates	1	2
Malcolm Cowley	4	11
Hart Crane	3	1
E. E. Cummings	2	5
Waldo Frank	2	2
Matthew Josephson	3	14
Gorham B. Munson	7	1
Jean Toomer	0	2
Glenway Wescott	0	2
John Brooks Wheelwright	3	0
Total number of issues	8	21

Fig. 1. Contributions by members of the *Broom-Secession* crowd.

* Note that *Secession* issues 1, 2, and 7 do not include tables of contents. For these issues, I have counted the contributions attributed to each author within the magazines' pages.

Meanwhile, Munson was having troubles with *Secession*. Wheelwright had resigned from the editorial board and Burke would soon leave as well. Munson moved to New York late in 1923 to reduce printing costs, but *Secession* was on its last legs. Printing quality and breadth of contributions had decreased. The seventh issue contains contributions from Crane, Burke, Ivor Winters, and Waldo Frank. It also contains a "review" of a book of Josephson's poetry, in which Munson attacks and belittles Josephson's aesthetics and "the emptiness of one who cannot create his own artistic world" and accuses him of copying European avant-garde (*Secession* No 7, p 31). The two editors may have been working once again in the same city, but their old feud had not been forgotten.

In October 1923, Cowley convinced Josephson and Burke to call a meeting of all the members of the *Broom-Secession* crowd: "Brown, Burke, Coates, Cowley, Crane, Frank,

Guthrie, Josephson, Munson, Sanborn, Schneider, Toomer, Wescott, Williams, or such of them as are beyond taking-no-interest-in the immediate future" (Cowley 179). The purpose of this meeting was to liven up a group that found itself growing despondent in the face of mounting debt and diminishing interest. Cowley still saw these writers as belonging to one group, contributing to both magazines despite the enmity between their editors. (See Fig. 1 for chart of contributions made by members of *Broom-Secession* crowd.)

On October 19, fifteen writers and several spouses met at a speak-easy on Prince Street (Shi 179). Munson was ill and sent a letter for Cowley to read aloud to the group. Cowley found the letter's pompous style and noble self-righteousness absurd and "declaim[ed] it like a blue-jawed actor reciting Hamlet's soliloquy" (Cowley 181). Hart Crane and Waldo Frank, supporters of Munson, were outraged. The meeting dissolved into squabbling and was soon dispersed. No plan of action had been decided upon, and the *Broom-Secession* crowd was now split into two opposing camps.

Financial and personal problems continued to plague the magazines. Munson announced in the winter issue of *Secession* that he would publish only one more issue, under his sole editorial command (*Secession* No 7, notes). In January 1924, *Broom* was proclaimed "unmailable" by the New York postmaster; Burke had used the word "breasts" in a short story (Shi 89). The American Civil Liberties Union offered to defend the magazine free of charge, but Josephson and Cowley were broke and their confidence was dwindling. *Broom* was disbanded and its band of writers dispersed (Shi 90).

In April 1924, Munson published, as promised, his last issue of *Secession*. Number Eight consisted, in its entirety, of one essay by Ivor Winters entitled "The Testament of a Stone: Notes on the Mechanics of the Poetic Image." *Secession* quietly faded out of existence.

While *Broom* and *Secession* are historically viewed as rivals, this is an oversimplification. The rivalry between their editors did not divide their common pool of contributors until late 1923; once the "crowd" had been divided, neither magazine lasted more than a few months. During the years of their runs, *Broom* and *Secession* were able to draw from a common pool of young writers and artists while maintaining distinct identities and policies. Matthew Josephson was a charismatic and influential editor, but his aesthetic opinion was not the only factor that went into editorial decisions. The personal histories of Josephson and his friends directly influenced the publication of these magazines. *Broom* and *Secession* are not merely rivals, nor are they the paper record of the changing opinions of one powerful editor. The relationship between the two magazines was as complex and changing as the relationships among the men involved in their publication.

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