

**Adrienne Munich and Melissa Bradshaw (eds).**  
***Amy Lowell, American Modern.* New Brunswick:**  
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### ***Ce Rosenow***

From the publication of her first book, *A Dome of Many-Coloured Glass* in 1912, until her death in 1925, Amy Lowell reigned as an important, influential, and well-known modernist poet. She published eleven books during her lifetime, edited three volumes of the Imagist anthology, *Some Imagist Poets*, gave numerous well-attended readings and lectures, and regularly contributed work to leading magazines such as *The Atlantic Monthly*. She also helped to fund and contributed work to a variety of literary magazines including Harriet Monroe's *Poetry*. Lowell was a respected contemporary of the poets most often associated with the modernist movement, whether they supported her projects and ideas or whether, like Ezra Pound, they openly expressed their irritation and frustration. In the years just following her death, Lowell's reputation continued to flourish with the posthumous publication of her lectures and essays in *Poetry and Poets* as well as with three additional collections of poetry, including *What's O'Clock* which received the Pulitzer Prize in 1926. Given her importance as a poet, critic, and editor, the limited amount of critical attention she has received after 1930 and the fact that all of her books have been out of print for decades seem to be a glaring oversight on the part of scholars and publishers. The editors of and contributors to *Amy Lowell, American Modern* seek to remedy this situation by instigating a serious critical conversation about Lowell and her work as well as by bringing many of her poems back into print through a companion volume, *Selected Poems of Amy Lowell* (2003).

The editors, Adrienne Munich and Melissa Bradshaw, use the lack of Lowell scholarship and the published critiques and dismissals of her work from the past as a framework for the essays in this volume. In their introduction, they acknowledge that there is no single explanation for the neglect of Lowell's work and suggest a number of possible reasons for it, including homophobia and Lowell's continuous poetic experimentation among others. In response to this neglect, the editors and contributors undertake the monumental task of exploring "the varied contributions of Lowell as a woman poet, as a modernist, and as a significant formulator of literary debates about poetry and poetics in the early twentieth century. ... [T]hese essays demonstrate Lowell's centrality to current critical and theoretical discussions: feminist, gay and lesbian, post-colonial, disability studies, American studies, and cultural studies" (xviii). In other words, after positing potential reasons for neglect, the collection then demonstrates just how significant Lowell's life and work are to many different areas of study while simultaneously providing the basis for a continued scholarly discussion.

The essays cover important aspects of Lowell's life and work, including her connections to Imagism, her literary friendships and correspondence, and her gender and sexual identity. Furthermore, they do so in a way that clearly demonstrates the significance of Lowell's work for modernist studies and for other fields. For example, they revitalize the overworked topic of Imagism by considering it, in Andrew Thacker's essay, in relationship to Lowell's innovation of polyphonic prose. Margaret Homans' essay complicates Lowell's extensive work on John Keats by exploring Lowell's designation of Keats as a forebear of the Imagist poets. Still other essays turn to Lowell's literary friendships and correspondence as a way to demonstrate her centrality to the modernist movement. Jean Radford's consideration of Lowell and Bryher (Annie Winifred Ellerman) and Bonnie Kime Scott's examination of Lowell's letters to other modernists, including D. H. Lawrence, locate Lowell as a key figure in a network of modernist writers. Another group of essays considers Lowell's poetry through the lens of lesbian desire and in light of her lesbian relationships. In the case of Lillian Faderman's essay, "'Which, Being Interpreted, Is as May Be, or Otherwise': Ada Dwyer Russell in Amy Lowell's Life and Work," a version of an unpublished essay that had circulated privately among Lowell scholars and had been cited in their work finally becomes available to the larger academic community. Faderman demonstrates, among other things, how the forty-three poems in the "Two Speak Together" section of *Pictures of the Floating World* reflects Lowell's lesbian relationship with Russell.

If there is one limitation to this collection, it is the omission of essays

on entire groups of poems. Specifically, Lowell's dramatic monologues and long narrative poems were for the most part excluded both from the selected edition of Lowell's poems and from this collection of essays. There is some justification for such omissions. The editors note in the introduction that scholars have not determined how best to situate these poems, which suggests that there is not any existing critical work available. By discussing these omissions at some length in the introduction, the editors actually begin a conversation about Lowell's dramatic monologues and long narratives that may be pursued by other scholars. Even with this justification for omitting certain poems, the specific decision to leave out Lowell's New England narratives is still regrettable. The editors explain that Lowell uses a form of dialect that would be difficult to understand by "contemporary readers unfamiliar with the New England accent of almost a century ago" (xv). This claim seems at odds with the fact that other poems written in a variety of dialects including that of turn-of-the-century New England continue to circulate and to receive critical consideration. The fact that Lowell's New England narratives, as the editors accurately note, are difficult and time specific is not a valid reason to exclude them.

Regardless of the one limitation mentioned above, *Amy Lowell, American Modern* is a significant and long overdue publication. Readers will find it difficult not to see Lowell's importance to the modernist movement. The essays draw attention to the lack of scholarly work on Amy Lowell, foster a critical conversation about Lowell by making available a number of insightful essays about her in one collection, and demonstrate not just how central Lowell's work is to modernism but to American poetry and to poetry in general. This volume, along with its companion volume of selected poems, will hopefully and quite likely generate many more new and well-deserved studies of Amy Lowell and her work.

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