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1

Editing without Author(ity): Martha Ostenso, Periodical Studies, and the Digital Turn

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1. Martha Ostenso: A Short History

Martha Ostenso (1900–1963) is best known as the author of *Wild Geese*, originally published in 1925 by Dodd, Mead and Company, a New York publishing company. The publisher, along with *The Pictorial Review* (a popular magazine) and Famous Players–Lasky (an American motion picture and distribution company), sponsored an annual Best North American Novel of the Year Award, which Ostenso won in 1925. The event launched a literary career that would include a first-refusal deal with Dodd Mead, a film adaptation of *Wild Geese*,¹ and enough financial success for her to support herself, her husband Douglas Durkin, and both their families through the worst years of the Depression (Atherton 214).

Wild Geese marked the beginning of a long and financially lucrative writing career for Ostenso. A look at the scholarship on her work, however, will reveal a near total silence on the topic of the fourteen novels and as of yet uncounted short stories that followed *Wild Geese*. Indeed, while Ostenso was once a central enough figure in Canadian literature to warrant her own entry in the ECW *Canadian Writers and Their Works* series, in recent years she has fallen almost entirely off the academic radar, with the notable exception of Faye Hammill's excellent scholarship on Ostenso as an example of literary celebrity and middlebrow authorship. My assertion, in this essay and in my work on Ostenso in general, is that Ostenso's critical dismissal is a result of her fluidity and instability as a literary figure, and calls out for an editorial intervention.²

This fluidity exists at various levels. Ostenso was born in Norway, lived and taught briefly in Manitoba, published her first novel in New York, and spent much of her career living and writing from a cabin in Minnesota. She published in Canadian and American venues while identifying strongly as a member of the Scandinavian diaspora. Her work thus refuses to be reduced to national literary narratives.

To paraphrase Hammill, nationality and citizenship were not the only boundaries that Ostenso challenged ("Martha" 19). On 11 February 1958, Ostenso and her husband Douglas Durkin signed a legal agreement in the presence of their attorney, stating that "all of the literary works of Martha Ostenso commencing with the publication of 'Wild Geese' in 1925, were the results of the combined efforts of Douglas Leader Durkin and Martha Ostenso" (Durkin and Durkin 1). This agreement, coming at the end of

the couple's long literary career, retroactively declared the collaborative nature of the fifteen novels published under the name "Martha Ostenso" between 1925 and 1958. Most troubling for the reputation of the authors, it suggested that Ostenso received the 1925 award, reserved for first-time novelists, fraudulently, if the more experienced Durkin (who had published at least three novels prior to 1925) collaborated on *Wild Geese*. This legal agreement not only throws into doubt the entire narrative of Ostenso's career; it also destabilizes the notion of singular authorship that lies at the heart of this narrative, and raises the question of how collaborative authorship can and should be handled by literary critics and, more pertinently for this collection, scholarly editors.

Ostenso's work refuses to fit into a simplistic notion of the highbrow/lowbrow binary. To paraphrase Hammill again, the large and variegated body of Ostenso's work, especially if we read it alongside Durkin's, undermines the divide that so much evaluative criticism relies on, between serious literature and "potboilers" or cheap commercial literary production. Her work instead falls into what Hammill calls "the troublesome realm of the middlebrow," in which work "depend[s] ... on the conventional structures of popular fiction" while "diverg[ing] from such models in interesting ways, thereby disrupting cultural hierarchies" ("Martha" 21–22). It is arguably the middlebrow-ness of her work that has led to its critical dismissal, for a variety of reasons.

Literary history, in the case of Ostenso, has become a tool with which to domesticate these messy problematics, to narrativize them in ways that write the mess out of existence. Thus the standard narrative runs as follows: as a young prodigy Ostenso produced a single masterpiece, *Wild Geese*, which qualifies as a legitimate work of Canadian literature because it was inspired directly by her experience of the Canadian landscape and people and because it fits nicely into the timeline of the development of prairie realism, alongside Grove's *Settlers of the Marsh* (1925).³ *The Western Home Monthly*, the Winnipeg-based magazine that serialized *Wild Geese* in Canada, certainly emphasized this connection by promoting Ostenso as "a Manitoba girl, educated in the schools of Brandon, Winnipeg, and Manitoba University" ("Wild Geese" 27). Early commercial success, however, lured her into the larger and more lucrative American literary marketplace, where she sacrificed artistic quality for financial reward and began to produce inferior novels and short stories with American settings. What gets left out of this narrative? Ostenso's other prairie novels, like *The Young May Moon* (1929), set either explicitly in southern Manitoba or in a prairie landscape with no clear national affiliations; the two novels set in British Columbia (*Prologue to Love* [1931] and *The White Reef* [1934]); the aesthetic and thematic continuities between her earlier and later fiction that belie this narrative of rupture; and the entire body of magazine publications that demonstrate a remarkable fluidity of style, setting, content, and audience. As for the collaboration, the prevailing critical attitude is summed up fairly well by David Arnason's comment in his 1980 dissertation on prairie realism: "It would be a hopeless task to try to sort out Ostenso's and Durkin's individual contributions to the collaboration and it would also be almost fruitless"; thus in Arnason's opinion Durkin's novels should be read in isolation, while Durkin and Ostenso's collaboration should be treated "as a

separate and quite distinct unity to be discussed as if Ostenso had, in fact, quite independently written the work attributed to her” (102).

What stands between Ostenso’s body of work and a more active critical interest is a strong editorial intervention. This paper will begin to outline the possibilities of such an intervention by focusing on Ostenso’s short stories as a fruitful starting point. As short, discreet works of fiction published in a variety of popular Canadian and American magazines, the stories constitute an ideal microcosm for considering the possibilities of a digital editorial approach to Ostenso’s work. Between 1924 and 1946 Ostenso published at least thirty short stories. The only existing bibliography of Ostenso’s work, compiled by Joan Buckley as an appendix to her 1976 PhD dissertation, is an important but incomplete record.⁴ Even a sample survey of these stories immediately suggests the enormous range of Ostenso’s writing style, and the flexibility with which these stories were adapted to their publication venues. The stories published in *Country Gentleman*, for example, tend to focus on rural settings and the social values of prairie farmers, particularly those of Scandinavian extraction. Stories in Canadian periodicals such as *Chatelaine* and *Canadian Home Journal* often include explicitly Canadian content, with references to the fur trade and locations like Winnipeg. While some stories are generically conservative, following the patterns of the sentimental romance, others are more stylistically innovative and broach taboo subjects like female sexuality and divorce. “Good Morning, Son,” which I will discuss in some detail, is an example of the latter, characteristics suiting its publication in *McCall’s* at a time when the magazine’s editor, Otis Wiese, was trying to shape it into a venue for serious, realistic fiction for women.

“Good Morning, Son” serves as a useful example of how an editorial intervention might allow for a revitalized approach to Ostenso’s work from the perspectives of collaborative authorship, periodical studies, and middlebrow studies. I hope to illustrate how a text-based and author-centric editorial approach elides much of what makes Ostenso an interesting literary figure, whereas a digital social-text edition – or archive, or database, or arsenal⁵ – provides a variety of lenses through which her work can be productively revisited or, in the case of the short stories, encountered for the first time.

The context in which I first encountered Ostenso and her periodical publications was as a member of EMiC UA, a collaborative team of researchers and tool developers based out of the University of Alberta, under the direction of Paul Hjartarson, and part of the Editing Modernism in Canada project. For this reason I immediately conceived of Ostenso’s relation to literary history as an editorial problem, and one that could best be addressed by a collaborative and interdisciplinary team of scholars, coders, digitization specialists, librarians, and archivists. This kind of collaboration – particularly from the perspective of an emerging scholar – rejects the model of independent scholarship and the authority over one’s work that accompanies it. Furthermore, digital knowledge and research production entails a further destabilization of authority, with scholars and editors unable to predict or control how their work will be used or understood (Folsom 1577–78). My interest in destabilizing the ossified literary-critical and -historical narratives that have turned “Martha Ostenso” into an overdetermined authorial signifier is no coincidence considering the impossibility of author(ity) – by which I mean the complex of author-function

and discursively generated textual authority – that accompanies most aspects of my work. To refuse author(ity) is to enter into a tentative and exploratory relationship to a body of texts, the process of research and editing itself, and the “finished” product that emerges from that research.⁶ This paper pursues such a tentative and exploratory path, suggesting possibilities but evading the reinscription of author(ity) wherever possible.

2. Social Text Editing and the Problem of the Author

Emerging from the work of D.F. McKenzie and Jerome McGann, the practice of social-text editing emphasizes the sociality of text and the influence of literary historical narratives through which “the signifying processes of the work become increasingly collaborative and socialized” (McGann, *Textual* 58). McGann reminds us that “texts are produced and reproduced under specific social and institutional conditions”; thus “a ‘text’ is not a ‘material thing’ but a material event or set of events, a point in time (or a moment in space) where certain communicative interchanges are being practiced” (*Textual* 21). Because of my abiding interest in interrogating the literary historical narratives that have so curtailed critical engagement with Ostenson’s work, my editorial perspective “maps its particular investigations along the double helix of [Ostenson’s] reception history and [her work’s] production history” (16) in order to examine the “material event” of her work, in all its permutations.

Dean Irvine states, in response to McGann’s claim that “an author is a plural identity” (*Textual* 75), that “if an author’s identity is plural ... it is so because his [or her] identity is socially – and multiply – constituted” (74). “Martha Ostenson” is a perfect example of the multiple social constitutions of authorial identity. Social-text editing makes space for an understanding of both author and text as collaborative and fluid, effectively divorcing the text from notions of authorial intention. Furthermore, McGann makes it clear that the digital environment is the ideal medium for social-text editions, making it possible to highlight the complex, multimedia, collaborative nature of most texts. A rigorous social-text edition requires a quantity of space that would make a print edition technically and financially unfeasible; it also allows, in McGann’s conception, for an environment in which narrative is less dominant, in which a variety of tools “facilitate critical reorganizations and reconceptions of the underlying data” (“From Text” par. 39). In fact, McGann’s conception of the digital archive is strikingly similar to Ed Folsom’s description of the database: both prefer networks of interconnection over narratives, complexity over decisiveness, and place value on the open-ended and user-shaped edition.

There is no Ostenson archive, and for the moment there are no manuscripts. My task as an editor would thus involve bringing together information that is currently uncollected, including texts, images, documents, and contextual information, to create a digital edition that does not privilege any single author, medium, document, or interpretation of the material at hand.⁷ In imagining what this kind of edition might look like, I am particularly drawn to Folsom’s metaphorical articulation of the database as a non-narrative rhizomatic construct suggesting “virtuality, endless ordering and reordering, and wholeness” (1575). By making possible endless links between discreet units of information, the database destabilizes familiar,

sometimes calcified narratives and allows new and unexpected connections to emerge, displacing the messianic centrality of the author-figure and instead creating a portrait of authorship that is messy, fluid, and inevitably collaborative (1576). Price echoes Folsom's interest in undermining the narrative of author-as-isolated-genius by drawing out the fundamentally collaborative nature of Walt Whitman's work (para. 13). Neither Price nor Folsom, however, seems particularly interested in the power disparities that inform and shape collaborative relationships, and that a digital database may have to *actively work against*. I worry, in fact, that the "database" or "arsenal" has taken on a messianic role in their scholarship, with genre becoming a panacea for all editorial ills, especially the narratives that surround an author like Ostenson. Thus, while social-text editing is the starting point for my editorial intervention, my own work will have to go further, highlighting not only the collaborative nature of authorship but also the gendered narratives often attached to collaboration.

3. Collaboration and Gender

Scholarship on collaborative or multiple authorship points out the ubiquity of the notion of authorship as singular, describing it as "so widespread as to be nearly universal" (Stillinger 183). The image of the creative genius composing a work in isolation is both iconic and highly gender- and class-specific, and has been interrogated by a variety of recent critical turns. After Barthes famously declared the death of the author, Foucault challenged the notion of authorship through his concept of the "author-function," which works to rationalize a text using an author's biography, to unify a body of writing despite its discrepancies through narratives of maturation and influence, and to "neutralize the contradictions that are found in a series of texts" ("What" 128). This is the kind of work that literary-historical narratives do in turning the author-function into the author. Other areas of scholarship, from "research on the history of copyright" to "studies of contemporary compositional practices," have contributed to the destabilization of the singular author (Stone and Thompson 9).

The death of the author, however, has not been decisive. For Harold Love, it is not the notion of authorship that has died, but a very particular model of it: "What is happening is closer to 'The author is dead: long live the author' with the nature and lineaments of the new successor still fully to reveal themselves" (9–10). The author that has died is the solitary genius; the author that lives is a point of considerable debate in the fields mentioned above, as well as in attribution studies, linguistics, and cognitive science. Jack Stillinger argues convincingly for not eliminating the author altogether, but for multiplying it: "Real multiple authors are more difficult to banish than mythical ones, and they are unquestionably, given the theological model, more difficult to apotheosize or deify as an ideal for validity in interpretation or textual purity. The better theories may turn out to be those that cover not only more facts but more authors" (24). The development of a "better theory," however, relies upon meticulous literary-historical work and an extensive archive through which scholars can reconstruct the details of particular collaborations. Creative relationships, Marjorie Stone and Judith Thompson point out, come in various forms and are understood in different ways depending on the relationship in question (5). These

scholars concur on the importance and pervasiveness of multiple authorship but warn against turning collaboration into a new myth of authorship.

This is precisely the pitfall into which Ostensio scholars have fallen. In the absence of textual evidence, the nature of the Ostensio–Durkin collaboration can be ascertained only from unreliable second-hand sources that tend to rely on gendered stereotypes where real data are lacking. This specifically gendered aspect of collaboration turns me to Joanna Russ’s *How to Suppress Women’s Writing*, a survey of the strategies through which literary criticism and history erase women writers. Russ sums up the problem of gender and collaboration quite succinctly: “Since women cannot write, someone else (a man) must have written it” (20). A remarkable number of the strategies that Russ describes align with the history of Ostensio reception and criticism, including the assignment of the label “regionalist” (53) (Ostensio is primarily studied for her contribution to prairie realism); “*the myth of isolated achievement*” (62, her emphasis) (critical consensus has generally asserted that *Wild Geese* is the only Ostensio novel worthy of critical attention); and the propensity of women to write in vernacular or popular forms (128–29) (the bulk of the Ostensio corpus has been labelled as middlebrow “potboilers”). The patriarchal undertones of Ostensio criticism come through in Arnason’s description of the Ostensio–Durkin collaboration, based on an interview with Ostensio’s younger brother Barney. Ostensio, Arnason summarizes, did most of the actual drafting of the writing, while Durkin charted out detailed plots, “revise[d] and polish[ed]” Ostensio’s prose, and “handle[d] the business details of contracts and sales. Martha ... would contribute the poetry of the novel. Durkin, who was interested in D.H. Lawrence, would handle the ‘grit’” (Afterword 305). In the context of Russ’s claims about the suppression of women’s writing, this account of the collaboration emerges in a different light. Above all, it suggests that the collaborative dimensions of authorship should not be simplistically lauded without considering the power differentials at work in most collaborative partnerships.

The narrative that Ostensio wrote *Wild Geese* with the assistance of her husband suggests an attempt to account for an unlikely achievement, thus constructing Ostensio’s career in terms of a gendered and hierarchical model of mentor and ingenue. This is clearly the narrative that scholar Peter E. Rider has constructed out of the limited evidence of the Ostensio–Durkin collaboration: “Flamboyant, vibrant, and imaginative, Martha had a creative literary ability which was to become the source of many fine novels. Douglas, on the other hand, had the technical skills and experience to give her ideas shape and strength” (xvii). The source of Rider’s particular version of the collaboration is unclear, and thus it is difficult to say whether he is drawing upon primary materials currently unavailable to other critics, or speculating based upon preconceived notions of how a collaborative writing relationship *must* function in the context of a heterosexual relationship between a younger woman and an older man. Rider’s subsequent discussion emphasizes Durkin’s lack of critical acclaim for their joint work, implying that the presence of Ostensio’s name on their co-written novels in some way threatens familiar notions of gendered authorship, especially because, within husband–wife collaborations, the husband is more likely to be the declared author

(Stillinger 50). Furthermore, the patriarchal implications of Durkin's contribution to the Ostenso novels may account for why the collaboration often goes unaddressed in feminist work on Ostenso.

Why, then, should the response to this unaddressed and undertheorized collaboration be an editorial rather than an exclusively critical intervention? The goal of editorial work is to provide a textual and historical environment in which other scholars can perform more rigorous scholarly work. To demonstrate the heuristic possibilities that might be generated by a social-text digital edition, I will turn to one story, "Good Morning, Son," which I will discuss in terms of production, print, and reception history. Through this reading, I will gesture toward the potential of particular editorial strategies and the critical interventions they make possible.

4. Collaboration, Social-Text Editing, and Critical Reading Strategies

"Good Morning, Son" was published in the September 1938 issue of *McCall's* magazine. *McCall's* began in 1870 as an advertising supplement for McCall's sewing patterns called *The Queen: Illustrating McCall's Bazaar Glove-Fitting Patterns*. Over time it was extended to include information on homemaking and handiwork, then children's issues, health, beauty, and foreign travel. In the 1920s, with the advent of Harry Payne Burton as editor, it began to publish popular fiction by authors such as Zane Grey and Kathleen Norris. Perhaps the most significant shift in the magazine's editorial policy occurred in 1928, when Otis Wiese was promoted to editor. Between 1928 and 1947 Wiese increased the circulation from 2 million to 3.6 million. It was also Wiese who, in 1932, created the "Three Magazines in One" format, in which *McCall's* was separated explicitly into three sections: News and Fiction, Homemaking, and Style and Beauty. Each section "had its own cover, and ads appropriate to it inside" ("The Press" para. 4). Wiese also worked on associating *McCall's* with more serious or quality fiction. In a 1947 *Time Magazine* article titled "The Press: Man in a Woman's World," Wiese is quoted as saying that "women were ready for more significant fiction than Gene Stratton Porter and articles more serious than the featherweight stuff they were getting" (para. 3). He privileged "realistic" writers and "went after the taboos that governed the sweetness & light fiction of women's magazines" (para. 4). Taboos Wiese was interested in breaking included adultery, homosexuality, and – in the story I will be discussing – divorce.

This masculine editing of a women's fiction magazine gives us another opportunity to consider the power dynamics at work within collaboration between men and women. According to the *Time* article, Wiese was "certain that women need men to edit their magazines. Says he: 'A woman has the courage to think for herself but not for other women. It takes a man to do that'" (para. 6). Compare this to Arnason's and Rider's descriptions of the Ostenso–Durkin collaboration. These narratives do a similar kind of work. Neither silences the contribution of women, but both subsume that contribution within a literary world dominated by the mastery of men. Women, these narratives tell us, can write for themselves, but it takes a man to turn that private writing into something public. These are old gender roles, and not all that surprising. And Arnason is correct: without archival evidence, scholars have very little hope of coming up with anything more *accurate*.

A different editorial approach, however, opens up a space in which to critique these narratives. More specifically, a social-text editorial approach that situates all textual production as part of a complex collaborative network provides readers of this text with information that plain text – in, say, a print anthology of Ostenso’s short stories – could not duplicate.

“Good Morning, Son” can thus serve as a case study. The story is reminiscent of radio drama, narrated entirely in the distinctive voice of a woman identified as the mother of Jerry, the grown son to whom the story is addressed. More than halfway through the story Jerry’s mother is named as Josephine, just in time for that same name to be given to Jerry’s first-born daughter. Josephine discusses her son’s recent marriage while attempting to come to terms with his divorce from his previous wife, Anna. As the story progresses, it becomes increasingly apparent that a major cause of the breakdown of Anna and Jerry’s marriage, as well as Anna’s emotional collapse, was Josephine’s perverse emotional manipulations and her determination to turn her daughter-in-law into a mirror image of herself. The voice of the story is entirely that of the mother; her son is completely silenced, made present to the reader only through traces: an ellipsis, a hasty response, a cup of coffee going cold, an ashtray full of cigarette butts. In fact, as Jerry’s new wife worries, he is effectively “pinched” out by the women in the story (13), particularly his manipulative mother and his ex-wife Anna. But while Jerry is silent, he is also the centre of the story and the unspeaking mover of all these women’s worlds. How do we read a woman’s voice in relation to a male voice that is silent but everywhere felt? Such is the voice of Wiese, declaring Ostenso’s work adequately “realistic,” subdividing a woman’s proper life into definable and differentiated areas, deciding which products should be advertised where. This is collaboration – in many ways Wiese is as much an author of this text as Ostenso – but it may be a troubling collaboration, one that suggests the limited contexts in which women could publish in the early twentieth century.

The context of the magazine and its editorial policy, as proclaimed by Wiese, sheds further light on gender and collaboration. The goal of the magazine was to provide women with serious, taboo-breaking literature. The audience, as evinced by the advertisements and the editorial policy, is clearly gendered. This is “gritty” work written by women, for women. It is a space in which the familiar narratives of motherhood and wifedom at least seem to be interrogated. The figure of Anna is key to such a reading; she rejects society’s ownership of her body and the old-fashioned notions of femininity espoused by her mother-in-law but is ultimately destroyed by her failure to evade those norms, a failure both evidenced by her representational containment within her mother-in-law’s speech and undermined by the ways in which she constantly erupts through that containment. Like the new wife Betty, Anna proves “a little difficult to understand” (13). This story, then, stands as a counter-narrative to the gendered roles of the Ostenso–Durkin collaboration: Ostenso providing the poetry, Durkin the grit. That is, grit is cast in the feminine here.

There is another layer of narrative available to the story’s readers, however, depending on the editorial approach, which allows for a radically different reading of the story. To make such a reading

possible, an editor must incorporate information about circulation as well as production history, paying heed to the story's print format – a context that is central to the methodologies of periodical studies.

5. Periodical Studies and the Possibilities of the Digital Archive

Modern periodical studies, with its investment in interdisciplinarity and digital humanities methods, emerges in part from the social-text school of editorial theory, in which the material contexts of publication are considered paramount to a critically rigorous reading of a text. However, unlike social-text editing, with its roots in Romantic studies, modern periodical studies has been articulated by scholars of modernism including Sean Latham, Robert Scholes, and Clifford Wulfman, and piloted in the *Modernist Journals Project*, an online database of early-twentieth-century periodicals of cultural significance, particularly modernist literary magazines.⁸

The basic premise of modern periodical studies is, in brief, as follows. Modernity marked the emergence of an unprecedented mass literary culture made possible by several technological advancements in printing – including the rotary press, lithography, and offset printing – as well as the emergence of new cheap sources of pulp for paper. At the same time, editors of periodicals came to a realization: they could achieve wider circulation by selling magazines at less than the cost of production and making profit instead through the advertising they attracted via circulation. This important production shift led both to the emergence of mass culture magazines and to the modernist little magazine as a space of resistance to the popularism and celebrity culture of the mass magazines. Contrary to the high/low cultural binary that has often characterized modernist studies, however, canonical modernist authors published across the cultural spectrum, and all of these periodicals, from the little magazines to pulp sensationals, included advertisements as a fundamental component of their circulation and appeal, and thus of their content. Unfortunately, librarians have long followed the practice, based on economy of space, of stripping the advertisements from periodicals when binding them into larger volumes, thus “suppress[ing] the cultural context in which our literary monuments first saw the light of day” and depriving readers and scholars of the function of periodicals as “a priceless window into [another] world” (Scholes and Wulfman 42). From the perspective of modern periodical studies, the solution involves high-quality digital editions of periodicals that re-create the original reader experience by including full advertisements as well as adequate contextual information to make the texts meaningful to present-day readers and scholars.⁹

Editing, from the perspective of periodical studies, is no longer the painstaking comparison of textual variations to a copy text in pursuit of a definitive version. Instead it includes the exhaustive archival research necessary to find full, unstripped runs of these magazines, the creation of coherent mark-up and metadata to make them searchable and usable, an explanatory introduction, and adequate historical and contextual data (Scholes and Wulfman 150). This is the sort of editorial approach suitable to, and possible with, Ostenson's work. Uncollected, scattered across uncounted libraries and archives, in need of order and context to make it meaningful to a new generation of scholars, her oeuvre demands the same editorial intervention as periodicals in general.

“Good Morning, Son” can once again serve as a testing ground for investigating the general claims of periodical studies and the heuristic value of advertisements. The pages I have been working with come from the *McCall's* microfilms at the University of Alberta, black-and-white images that obscure the detail of the magazine's many illustrations and advertisements. Despite much progress on this front, there is no existing standard for how magazines are scanned, photocopied, or otherwise preserved, and much information is lost as a result. Nevertheless, a rich variety of contextual information is still provided by the microfilm of the September 1938 issue. First, it demonstrates Wiese's division of the magazine into three parts, each with its own title, cover photograph, and distinctive content. At the same time, it complicates this seemingly neat division: single stories span across the three sections, defying these purported boundaries and suggesting similarly non-linear reading patterns. The other fiction contributors – Helen Hull, Josephine Bentham, Sarah-Elizabeth Rodger, Charles Bonner, and Norma Patterson – are invaluable in providing a sense of literary context. Hull's story, for example, begins with a note from the editor that emphasizes its “gritty” content: “Here begins the strongest story ever to appear in a woman's magazine. It is certain to excite controversy because – with warmth and wisdom – the author explores a woman's fundamental emotions, evaluates the code of marriage and examines intricate relationships in the searching light of honesty” (Hull 7). The controversial content of this story contrasts with the generic familiarity of romances like Rodger's “Doctor Wyatt Speaking” and Bentham's “Wedding Cake Is To Dream Upon.” Ostenso's work enters into a network that includes her other publication venues as well as those of these other authors. A database would make it possible to create visualizations of these interconnections, representing the complexity of early-twentieth-century periodical publications and middlebrow cultural production. Plotting those periodicals and authors against a map might give us an equally strong sense of the transnational networks of publication in this period that would certainly belie the assignment of the “regional author” label to Ostenso.

The context of the magazine as a whole raises an important question about the object of study and anthologization. If the origin of editorial and scholarly interest is Ostenso herself, should an edition of her short stories include only the magazine pages on which her actual work appears or the entirety of every periodical issue? Sean Latham has suggested the aleatory dimension of magazine reading: readers are more likely to flip through the whole magazine, glancing at this and that, perusing the advertisements and illustrations, before turning back to a particular story to read it all the way through.¹⁰ As an editor, I cannot know what productive connections another scholar might find in Marian Corey's “Interview with a College Girl” or Elizabeth Woody's “Now Let's Plan Meals” – but to exclude this material would pre-emptively eliminate the possibility. As an example of one such productive connection, I might look at the issue's letter to the editor. This sentimental narrative of a mother adopting a baby boy reveals a certain anxiety over the definition of motherhood and its basis within blood relation and patriarchal reproduction. “I have been told,” writes the woman who identifies herself only as “Jan's Mother,” “that I could not know the feelings of a real mother unless I suffered the pangs of childbirth. Maybe not, but being my kind of mother is pretty grand” (“As” 2). Read against Ostenso's story of two mothers, one defined wholly by her maternal

role and the other resisting it, this anxiety over reproduction and the assertion of sentimental rather than biological motherhood offers an increasingly complex look at the politics of women's reproductive bodies in the period between the wars.

Turning to the pages on which "Good Morning, Son" appears, I encounter one of the primary paratextual focuses of periodical scholars: advertisements. The fourth page of this story features an advertisement for Lux soap that demands of the reader: "Are you as *dainty* at night as you are by day?" (fig. 1). Accompanied by a large photograph of a woman brushing her hair, it also features several small graphic illustrations with captions explaining that "dainty wives" take care of "perspiration odor" by washing their nighties "after each wearing" (81). The advertisement aggressively associates the female body with dirt and the necessity of hygiene, and is moved by the unseen and unnamed husband who is grammatically exempted from the logic of the text when we are told that "Charming wives **never** risk offending" and that "She is always adored ... the wife who is exquisitely dainty in every way!" (81). If the argument stands that advertisements are in conversation with the stories with which they share the page, what new readings might emerge from this page? In this pivotal moment in the story, Anna (Jerry's first wife) has become pregnant and, according to her mother-in-law, "the better side of her nature showed itself for the first time" (81). After the child is born, however, she proves an unsatisfactory mother, treating little Jo – short for Josephine – "almost as if Jo didn't belong to her at all" (81). This maternal failure leads to Anna's first "violent outbreak" when Josephine (senior) suggests that Anna might have another child: "It must have been one of Anna's nervous days, because she said something about an old belief that women had no souls of their own, but that women were well known to have bodies and they should have something to say in what they did with them – even if it came to keeping them under lock and key" (81). **[insert image]**

How might these two narratives – the dainty wife versus a woman demanding the right to control her own body – be read against each other? I suggested above that the story interrogates familiar constructions of motherhood. Anna's resistant voice penetrates the narrative control of her mother-in-law and seems to exist *in excess* of Josephine's representational boundaries. Her deliberate failure to understand Anna's resistance serves to heighten the emphasis allotted to it; what the story will not tell becomes what the story tells most urgently. But read in the context of the mass magazines, deliberately orchestrated by a male editor to sell more copies to housewives looking for a little titillation, does the story signal resistance to the magazine's metanarratives of femininity? Or does the advertisement signal the complicity of this resistance within the metanarrative itself, suggesting an industry of feminine identity so powerful that it can absorb and depoliticize female resistance as part of its larger economy of commercialized femininity? These are questions that can only be asked of the text as it stands: story and advertisement put into dialogue within the original print context of the magazine.

Perhaps the most exciting prospect of digital editing is its facilitation of lateral connections between unlikely texts and contexts via databases that allow for complex searches across large, variegated bodies of material. Digital editing, I am trying to argue, attempts to maintain something of the serendipity

that often accompanies the reading process. To demonstrate where such serendipity might lead, I followed the conspicuous word “dainty” to the “How Not to Offend” chapter of Marshall McLuhan’s *The Mechanical Bride*, in which he examines the cult of personal hygiene in the first half of the twentieth century. The advertisement he discusses in this chapter is for Lysol, specifically in its feminine hygiene applications. Like the Lux ad, it links the unhygienic female body to failed marriage via the trope of daintiness and the presence of a never-named husband: “Too late, when love has gone, for a wife to plead that no one warned her of danger. Because a wise, considerate wife makes it her business to *find out* how to safeguard her daintiness in order to protect precious married love and happiness” (61). In his accompanying commentary, McLuhan links anxiety over hygiene with industrialization and modernity:

Implied in the cult of hygiene is a disgust with the human organism which is linked with our treating it as a chemical factory. D.H. Lawrence, rebelling against the puritan culture in which he was reared, insisted all his life that industrialization was linked to the puritan hatred of the body and detestation of bodily tasks. This, he claimed, not only was reflected in our hatred of housework and physical tasks but in our dislike of having servants smelling up our houses while helping with that work. So that the small, hygienic family unit of our cities and suburbs is, from this viewpoint, the realization of a Calvinist dream. (*Mechanical* 61)

McLuhan’s arguments illuminate my discussion of Ostenso in two ways. First, his politicized reading of the “small, hygienic family unit” recalls the failure of that unit to cohere in “Good Morning, Son,” which suggests the possibility of reading that story as a Lawrencian critique of industrialization. It also, however, recalls the Ostenso–Durkin collaboration via the figure of D.H. Lawrence. Arnason uses Lawrence as a metonymic figure for the type of “grit” that Durkin contributed to the novels in contrast to the “poetry” of Ostenso’s contributions. However, as I argued before, insofar as this story is gritty or even Lawrencian, it is firmly ensconced in the world of stories for and by women. The binary ascribed to the Ostenso–Durkin collaboration cannot hold up in this context. The lines between serious “gritty” modernist fiction and frothy middlebrow romance fiction are thoroughly blurred. In his work on pulp publication and modernism, David M. Earle argues against the divisions of highbrow, middlebrow, and lowbrow. These cultural productions, he argues, are not opposed to one another, but are necessarily interrelated dynamics of what he calls the Paper Age (6). Thus when we incorporate the material print histories and contexts of Ostenso’s stories into scholarship on her work, via a social-text editorial approach, the old gendered narratives of collaboration begin to topple without the necessity of (unavailable) manuscript evidence.

6. Middlebrow Studies and the Digital Turn

From print and production history, Earle’s problematization of “brows” leads to the question of reception history. Critics have tended to approach Ostenso’s work from an evaluative framework. Atherton’s

assertion that some of Ostenson's novels "deserve to be more widely known" but that most "should be left to gather dust on library shelves" (241) is paradigmatic of her reception, as is his argument that "instant access to large amounts of money was at the root of her inability to develop as a serious novelist" (244). Hammill, as I mentioned earlier, has discussed Ostenson in the context of the middlebrow and argued convincingly for a more holistic approach to her body of work that reads it in relation rather than subdividing it into worthy and unworthy texts. Such an approach is made difficult by the unavailability of the texts that seem to lend themselves most clearly to an examination of middlebrow culture: the short stories. Even a single story such as "Good Morning, Son" provides a variety of ways in which to interrogate the clash of high and low culture, the dialogue between advertising and literature, and the gendered dynamics at work throughout. A corpus of stories ranging across publication venues and genres would only increase the possibility for this sort of critical engagement.

Modern periodical studies, because of the central position of the *Modernist Journals Project*, has been dominated by a relatively highbrow aesthetic in which scholarly interest in advertising emerges from the already-established canonicity of modernist authors and critical investment in little magazines. The time is ripe to complicate this scene. Earle has done so with lowbrow or pulp magazines through his excellent *Re-Covering Modernism: Pulp, Paperbacks, and the Prejudice of Form*. Scholes and Wulfman point to the importance of similarly engaging the "often excluded middle range of literature," which they describe as "a rich mixture of the new and the traditional, of art and advertising, of the poetic and the rhetorical – a mixture that allowed new writers to reach a wider audience" (128). Hammill and Michelle Smith dedicate sustained critical attention to these questions in *Magazines, Travel, and Middlebrow Culture: Canadian Periodicals in English and French 1925–1960*. It is in this liminal space between the avant-garde little magazine and the pulp magazine that most of Ostenson's stories and serialized novels are to be found.

Susan Brown argues that the ways in which "digital media and methods" is rapidly and profoundly "retool[ing]" the humanities calls for new and increasingly self-critical methodologies (203). In the context of scholarly editing, this digital turn demands a reconceived notion of what it means to be an editor and of the relation between scholarly editing and research. As Brown points out, the highly experimental nature of digital scholarly production means that "working at the interface of the digital-humanities divide constitutes, in itself, research" (218). Digitization is an enormous and accelerating phenomenon, and the task of the digital humanist is to render the sheer mass of information meaningful and usable for scholars via contextualization and metadata that will allow for navigation and searching (211–13). In some ways the advent of large-scale digitization and digital editorial projects recalls the canon debates and their encouragement of a self-reflexive relation to our objects of study. But the context of these debates has shifted dramatically with the technologies – a reminder that research and tools are mutually interdependent. Critical attention to digital modes of dissemination and their impact on textuality has only increased scholarly engagement with the material and technological contexts of print culture, while the "crisis" of an overflowing digital archive exponentially greater than the sum of print production (203) demands reconsideration of how cultural production is hierarchized and why.

Ultimately, I view Ostenso as less extraordinary than exemplary. She exists within a complex network of early-twentieth-century cultural production that includes novels, periodicals, and films. While she is a fascinating figure, and much of her work has been unjustly neglected for the reasons I have outlined, the critical questions her work opens up – on collaboration, middlebrow magazines, authorial fluidity, transnationalism, and so on – are not limited to her work. Thus the devising of a theoretically rigorous digital editorial practice, using Ostenso’s work as a blueprint, will have outcomes that extend beyond a single author, a single archive, or a single scholar, and thus beyond author(ity) itself.

Editing Without Author(ity): Martha Ostenso, Periodical Studies, and the Digital Turn

Hannah McGregor

¹ *Wild Geese* was adapted in 1926 as a silent film. Atherton claims it was adapted a second time in a 1941 version starring Henry Fonda (4, 36n14), but *Wild Geese Calling* was in fact based on a novel of the same name by American author Stewart Edward White. *Wild Geese* was adapted for a second time in 2001 under the title *After the Harvest*.

² The current critical moment may in fact be ideal for such a reevaluation of Ostenso, characterized as it is by the rise of middlebrow studies and increasing interest in the transnational formulations of early print culture (see for example Gerson, “Writers Without Borders”).

³ For more on the twentieth-century concern with establishing the criteria for Canadian literature, see Mount.

⁴ Most of the gaps seem to lie in Canadian periodicals, an unsurprising omission, as Buckley is an American scholar. Michelle Smith has discovered at least three previously undocumented stories in *Chatelaine* alone (see McGregor and Smith, “Martha Ostenso, Periodical Culture, and the Middlebrow”).

⁵ Scholars Kenneth Price and Ed Folsom have debated adequate terminology for large-scale digital editorial projects such as their own *Walt Whitman Archive*. The fact that they arrive at different conclusions suggests the ongoing problematic of naming new forms of research production.

⁶ See the Spring 2009 issue of *Digital Humanities Quarterly*, “Done,” edited by Matthew G. Kirschenbaum, which engages with the problematic of finishing large-scale digital humanities projects.

⁷ A version of this work was done when EMiC UA, in collaboration with the University of Alberta Library Digital Initiatives and the Manitoba Legislative Library, facilitated the digitization of *The Western Home Monthly*, including the five-part serialization of *Wild Geese*. For more on this work see modmag.ca.

⁸ It must be noted that periodical studies in general has its roots in the Victorian period; for more on the field’s longer histories, and the problematic discontinuities between Victorian and modern periodical studies, see DiCenzo, “Remediating the Past: Doing ‘Periodical Studies’ in the Digital Era.”

⁹ This narrative draws on the work of Sean Latham, Robert Scholes, Clifford Wulfman, and David M. Earle, all major scholars in the area of periodical studies.

¹⁰ Latham discussed the serendipitous nature of periodical reading during his keynote at the 2010 Conference on Editorial Problems (23 October 2010), forthcoming as “Unpacking My Digital Library: Programming Modernist Magazines” in *Editing Modernisms in Canada*, ed. Colin Hill and Dean Irvine (UTP 2016).