



# Research Repository

## Modernism

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## Chapter 11

### *Modernism*

*Sanja Bahun*

‘Southern Slav’ artist Ivan Meštrović’s 1915 solo exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London was a sensation.<sup>1</sup> An event that reflected the taste and politics of Great War Britain, the ‘new European celebrity’s’ exhibition engendered fervent exchanges in the press – it was described as ‘astonishing’, ‘morally offensive’ and ‘monstrous’ – a record-breaking audience, multiple catalogue reprints, and widespread desire to own a piece, or a photograph of a piece, by the sculptor.<sup>2</sup> The exhibition was a highly politicised affair: it brought visibility to the demand for an autonomous state of the South Slavs at the heart of Europe and represented the beginning of the First World War as a righteous rebellion of the oppressed under the Austro-Hungarian yoke, thereby justifying the British Empire’s participation on the side of the Allied Powers. Although the V&A exhibition eventually created ‘less public and critical interest in Meštrović as a representative of his people and their aspirations than in his achievement as an exceptionally talented individual’, the well-orchestrated public campaign and mythopoeic handling of Meštrović’s unusual biography did imprint a particular vision of the sculptor and his compatriots in the public imagination.<sup>3</sup> Routinely omitting the sculptor’s academic training from his biography, the press propounded the image of a brave delegate of a rural population resilient in the face of poverty and ‘symbiotically linked’ to the karst of Istria and Dalmatia – a landscape unlike anything found on the British shores – whose ‘genius’ was ‘guided by the folklore of the Serbian Croatian

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<sup>1</sup> The exhibition ran 24 June-15 August 1915. The artist’s nationality appears as ‘Southern Slav’ on the poster.

<sup>2</sup> Frank Rutter, ‘A Serbian Sculptor (The Mestrovic Exhibition at South Kensington)’, *Sunday Times*, 27 June 1915.

<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth Clegg, ‘Meštrović, England and the Great War’, *The Burlington Magazine*, 144/1197 (2002), 746.

peasantry'.<sup>4</sup> Yet, such descriptions were at odds with more than seventy boldly cut stone and bronze figures, wooden reliefs, and architectural-structural compositions exhibited at the V&A and Meštrović's opus more generally. His amorphous stony mothers, peasants, and infants are vitalist anthropological absolutes rather than folkloric utterances; and they present a modernist mediation of tradition rather than scandalous avant-gardism. The responses to Meštrović among British modernists depended as much on these features of his work as on the narratives that surrounded them. His work resonated with those who had a bent for sculptural imagination and mythmaking, an appreciation of the monumentality and materiality of artistic text, and consonant political interest in liberation movements. It appealed, among others, to James Joyce, who kept a triptych of photo-reprints of Meštrović's 1910s sculptures on the wall in his room in Trieste; W. B. Yeats who, having seen the V&A exhibition, 'could think of little else' but Meštrović's 'supernatural & heroic yet full of tenderness' figures; and Adrian Stokes whose visit to Meštrović's Istria and Dalmatia transformed his own art.<sup>5</sup> By contrast, Anglophone avant-gardists like Ezra Pound and Wyndham Lewis despised the Meštrović rave. And, while Meštrović's name was on everyone's lips at the time (and it entered modernist literature, for example, D.H. Lawrence's *Women in Love* and Yeats's *A Vision*), he is now more often remembered as an 'imported' artist of significance in American, French, and Italian cultural histories than in Britain.

There are multiple reasons for this semi-oblivion, all of which illuminate the dynamics addressed in this chapter. Meštrović's opus did not come to Britain with the cultural capital that routinely escorted new artists from France or Germany. At the same time,

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<sup>4</sup> *The Globe*, 13th May 1919.

<sup>5</sup> Ivo Vidan, 'Joyce and the South Slavs', *Atti del Third International James Joyce Symposium* (Trieste: Università degli Studi, 1974), p. 275 (pp. 265-277); W. B. Yeats, Letter to Lady Gregory, 2 July 1915, *The Collected Letters of W. B. Yeats*, gen. ed. John Kelly (Oxford: Oxford University Press, electronic edition, 2002). Francesca Cuojati, 'On Ivan Meštrović, Adrian Stokes, and the Sculptural Imagination', in Caroline Patey, Giovanni Cianci and Francesca Cuojati (eds.) *Anglo-American Modernity and the Mediterranean (AAM&M henceforward)* (Milano: Università degli Studi, 2006), pp. 153-208.

he was an odd figure in the discursive field of the ‘primitive’: his artwork was neither alien enough to be identified as an attractive ‘primitive artefact’ – B.H. Dias (Pound’s alias) observed that Meštrović’s sculptures lacked ‘the horrific power of African or Mexican fetiches’ – nor avant-garde enough to be recognised as a ‘vitalist modernist primitive’ like Gaudier-Brzeska.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps most importantly, unlike art that came from far-flung places and could therefore be easily (if often wrongly) assumed to be distanced from immediate political concerns, with Meštrović European political history was hitting one in the face. His international success defied his peasant provenance in ways that largely middle-class Britain-based modernists found both thrilling and unsettling; his people’s geocultural position as both European and non-European was one of the most hotly debated topics in the 1900s and 1910s. According to at least one contemporary interpreter, Meštrović was ‘no more Serbian than English’ and was to be celebrated as a ‘new European’, a type of free-thinking, cosmopolitan identity which befitted the twentieth century and which contemporary British Europeans should adopt, too.<sup>7</sup> The row over Meštrović, then, became one of European identity: what was Europe and what was its role in the world? What would the new Europe look like? Which peoples, traditions, classes, and behaviours would (re)constitute it? Finally, was Britain part of Europe or not, and, if yes, what would be its position within it?

The case of Meštrović-in-Britain aptly captures the passions, interpretations, possibilities, and limits of British engagement with Europe in the epoch of modernism. The urgent questions of what Europe was and what it might become if its geographical, cultural, and social boundaries were redefined constituted the driving forces of what is today guardedly described as modernism on British soil. The latter’s interest in the question of Europe was intimately connected to modernists’ obsession with borders and boundaries – of

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<sup>6</sup> B. H. Dias [Ezra Pound], ‘Serbo-Croatians’, *The New Age* (20 December 1917), 153.

<sup>7</sup> Robert Ross, ‘Meštrović’, *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 27/149 (1915), 206.

spaces, political possibilities, customs, conditions, and humans – and their reimagination of both others and themselves as insiders, outsiders, or something in between.

### **Modernism reconsidered: Anglophone, ‘British’, European, Global**

While the visibility of Britain in the modernist imaginary is substantive, and London is among the most exploited ‘modernist’ locations, there has never been a (narrowly) British modernism. Well-known modernists who worked in what was, differently at various times, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and (Northern) Ireland, rarely perceived themselves as detached from global currents and often had complex affiliations with Britishness. Caught in the maze of citizenships and rooted and emergent nationalities, Joseph Conrad, T.S. Eliot, Henry James, H.D., Ezra Pound and other modernists who made Britain their temporary or permanent home, or others who belonged to it by virtue of imperial citizenship (James Joyce, W. B. Yeats, Katherine Mansfield), or yet others who were British-born but made conscious choices to move away from Britain (D. H. Lawrence, Nancy Cunard, Mina Loy), all defy the designation ‘British modernist’. The same applies to the interactions they pursued with other European countries and beyond. Like other artists and writers of the period, most modernists based in Britain perceived the origin, shape, and function of their art as a project ‘without frontiers’.<sup>8</sup> Yet, as we shall see, there were also those who affiliated themselves vociferously with Britishness in defiance of the perceived modernist hegemony of other European nations (Wyndham Lewis) or professed Britishness under the charge of grave historical fissures in an attempt to marry the regional, the continental, and the universal (Virginia Woolf in *Between the Acts*, 1941). Furthermore, even when they affiliated themselves with Britain, British-born writers and artists like D.H. Lawrence or Hugh MacDiarmid identified more strongly with

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<sup>8</sup> Raymond Williams, ‘When was Modernism?’, in Tony Pinckney (ed.), *The Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists* (London: Verso, 1988), p. 34.

one of the constituent regions than with Great Britain or indeed the British Empire.<sup>9</sup> Just as Europe was being reassessed in terms of its political and cultural boundaries and their meanings, so was the United Kingdom of Great Britain and (Northern) Ireland.

The diversity of voices and national identities glossed above is indicative of wider questions relating to modernism as an aesthetic and ethical response to the condition of modernity. As recent scholarship has demonstrated, modernism was a *global* phenomenon occurring in various spaces at various times.<sup>10</sup> Today, the modernist corpus has been expanded to encompass geocultural spaces beyond Europe (including former British colonies), alongside underdiscussed regions and marginalized strata within Europe (for example, Catalan, Finnish, Yugoslav, or Yiddish modernisms), and broader modes of artistic production and public expression (e.g., periodicals, radio, textile design, the circus etc.). Similarly, re-examining how texts circulated, how artists and writers interacted and migrated, how they appropriated, vernacularised, and imagined their work has changed our understanding of modernist communities. Some ‘modernists on British soil’ rewardingly summarise modernism’s complexities for us – none better, perhaps, than Jean Rhys, who grew up in the Caribbean island of Dominica, lived in England, Austria, and France, was influenced by an English writer of German heritage in Paris (Ford Madox Ford) and (spurred by the enthusiasm of Dutch actress, writer and painter Selma Vaz Dias) wrote her modernist postcolonial masterpiece *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) in the villages of Cornwall and Devon. Our record and reinterpretation of such figures and spaces of modernism have been built on the gradual realization that ‘Europe’ and ‘Britain’ are themselves contestable tropes that convey contextually and temporally variegated meanings and on the radical questions about the nature of Europe and European heritage that, I believe, modernism itself engendered.

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<sup>9</sup> Marina MacKay, ‘Great Britain,’ in Pericles Lewis (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to European Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011), p. 94 (pp. 94-112).

<sup>10</sup> See, Mark Wollaeger, ‘Introduction’, in Mark Wollaeger (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Global Modernisms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 3-22.

Thus, the following remaps the relationship between Britain, continental Europe, and modernism not through a set of axiological-aesthetic definitives or fixed identities, but through tendencies of engagement and a network of differently scaled, geographically convoluted, and epistemologically knotted trajectories.

### **Continental Encounters**

Elite tourism, an heir to the Grand Tour, played an important role in the self-identification and development of early modernism on British soil. However, the motivations, speed, and routes of late Victorian and early Edwardian 'tourists' were different from those of an earlier age. Living in an era of unprecedented technological advances, affluent Britons had cars at their disposal, and many more used long-distance trains. The price of transport steadily decreased in the first decades of the twentieth century, and travel became available to wider cohorts of cultural explorers who, in turn, presented new vistas to those less capable of travel. (All of this contributed to the rise in popularity of the travel book, a sub-genre of memoir that captures the writing subject's encounter with unfamiliar territories, of which Christopher Isherwood's *Goodbye to Berlin* (1939) and Rebecca West's *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon: A Journey Through Yugoslavia* (1941) present excellent modernist specimens.) The terms of engagement differed, too: distinct European regions became attractive to early twentieth-century artists and writers not primarily for their heritage-value but for their capacity to act as the dynamic centres of exchange (of cultural and other goods) and/or as the embodiments of the models of behaviour that they sought to probe, emulate, or avoid. As an emanating hub of modernist activities, Paris attracted substantive cohorts of new talent. For writers like Joyce, Beckett, Loy, Leonora Carrington, and Cunard, among others, their Paris sojourns had a formative influence on their development as modernists. Yet, the number of British artists in Paris never matched the American expatriate community, and their relationship with the city

was one of consumption rather than dialogue or identification; its general allure for British travellers palpably waned in the 1920s and 1930s. Other cities encouraged a different type of affiliation. As the vibrant site of advances in the arts and technology, but also a place of sexual permissiveness and progressive liberalism, Berlin became the destination of choice for those Britons who were keen to experience, analyse, and envisage a kind of Europe where such liberties were possible. British modernist travellers were even keener to explore untrodden European paths: Puglia in Italy, Provence in France, the Dalmatian shore, Greek islands, Sicilian villages, off-track Nordic routes.<sup>11</sup> They often decided to spend extensive periods at or even emigrate to such less frequented places.

These relocations – Madox Ford’s in Provence, Somerset Maugham’s at the Riviera, D. H. Lawrence’s on Sicily, Joyce’s in Pola and Trieste, Lawrence Durrell’s on Corfu, Robert Graves on Majorca – allowed modernists to inhale and memorialise in writing what Lawrence called ‘the spirit of place’: the special ‘vital effluence, [...] vibration, [...] chemical exhalation’ of a location which undoes the dulling of the senses and the automatism of affective responses generated by the routine of mechanised travel (say, a train journey).<sup>12</sup> Unlike their predecessors, the interwar writers and artists often traded Britain for other European spaces in the belief that their country was simply uninhabitable. Their reasons ranged from the lack of sunshine and silted lives (‘dingy’, ‘verminous’, ‘dull-coloured’ are George Orwell’s adjectives for Britain), through the regimentation of everyday life and discriminatory regulation of sexual behaviour, to the shifting political alliances, unchallenged class system and avaricious capitalism that sustained it (‘moribund’, ‘repugnant’, ‘pro-German’ [in 1936] – again Orwell).<sup>13</sup> Other European spaces seemed more

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<sup>11</sup> Similarly, Caroline Patey, ‘Foreword’, in *AAM&M*, p. 12.

<sup>12</sup> D. H. Lawrence, *Sea and Sardinia*, ed. Anthony Burgess (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2007), p. 55.

<sup>13</sup> Cited in Paul Fussell, *Abroad: British Literary Travelling between the Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 16-17. See also David Farley, *Modernist Travel Writing: Intellectuals Abroad* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2010) and Stacy Burton’s *Travel Narrative and the End of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).



habitable, although that perception was challenged, too, notably by Isherwood, as the 1930s progressed and travel became more politicised, for example, through some Britons' participation in the Spanish Civil War (see Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia* [1938]). Most importantly, however, when and if these travellers resettled in Britain, they brought back with them the changed perception of those invisible 'behavioural boundaries' of Europe – reflecting on what attitudes and behaviours could/should be acceptable, and what regimes of everyday life might be transformed in a future Europe, or a future Britain.

Not all modernist travellers were enchanted by what they discovered on their continental journeys. In one case of intercultural misunderstanding, young Virginia Woolf commented on modern Greece as 'an impure nation of peasants, [...] a nation of mongrel element', 'so flimsy and fragile that it goes to pieces entirely when it is confronted with the roughest fragment of the old'.<sup>14</sup> This unfavourable comparison is telling. To Woolf, a Philhellenist from an early age, the encounter with modern Greece in 1906 defied the inherited ideas of linear progression of European civilisation and of classical Greece as a guarantor of the potentials, indeed survival, of that civilisation. For those artists coming of age at the turn-of-the century it was easier to explore and celebrate 'living primitives' in far-flung spaces than to recognise the unsensational, mundane manifestations of difference within the 'cradle of Europe' itself; or to recognise any contemporary cultural parity in modern Greece. Woolf remained a passionate scholar of ancient Greek language and culture – that passion playing 'a distinct role in defining her sense of Englishness'<sup>15</sup> – and she revisited Greece in 1932. Yet, she would never fully overcome her discomfort with modern Greece as a living European cultural entity, and she never reported any knowledge of or interest in Greek modernist writers like Kostas Karyotakis or Georges Seferis.

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<sup>14</sup> Virginia Woolf, *The Travels of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Jan Morris (London: Pimlico, 1990), 220-21 (p. 213).

<sup>15</sup> Rowena Fowler, 'Moments and Metamorphoses: Virginia Woolf's Greece', *Comparative Literature*, 51/3 (1999), 217-242 (p. 218).

Woolf's Greek contemplations often self-critically address the illusions of a superior antiquity as well as the binary between the 'primitive' and the 'civilised' itself. In one of her subtle satires of the Edwardians in her first novel *The Voyage Out* (1915), she recasts this conundrum into a primitivist paradox: 'When I think of the Greeks I think of them as naked black men', exclaims one of her characters, an elderly English teacher on holiday in fictitious Latin American country Santa Marina.<sup>16</sup> The turn of the century witnessed an epistemic turn in ethnographic discourses on the primitive, which David L. Hoyt describes as the replacement of 'an archaeological metaphor of the primitive' with the 'vitalist one', where much of 'what was construed as evidence by ethnographic writers after 1890 was avowed to be alive and walking the earth in all the various regions of "savagery", if not at the heart of "civilisation".'<sup>17</sup> Galvanized by the work of 'Cambridge Ritualists' like Jane Ellen Harrison and compellingly embodied in Polish-British Joseph Conrad's masterpiece *Heart of Darkness* (1899), this discursive switch fuelled the modernists' zeal for the discovery of texts and artefacts that came from other continents; these promised a fresh sense of the objects and reality to be laid on a page or a canvas and an antidote to the 'ills' of Western civilisation.<sup>18</sup> Yet, while British audiences gladly celebrated African sculptures or Aztec art, their engagement with living, working 'primitivist' expression from within Europe itself, as we have seen in Meštrović's case, was markedly uneasy. The successful reception of the 'primitivist' texts, performances and artefacts often depended precisely on the extent to which they could be (re)signified as non-European.

Such dynamics also applied to the reception of European modernists' artworks in a primitivist key. Routinely arriving in London via Paris, they were more successful if they

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<sup>16</sup> Virginia Woolf, *Melymbrosia: An Early Version of The Voyage Out*, ed. Louise A. DeSalvo (New York: New York Public Library, 1982), p. 114.

<sup>17</sup> David L. Hoyt, 'The Reanimation of the Primitive: Fin-de-Siècle Ethnographic Discourse in Western Europe', *History of Science*, 39/125 (2001), 331-354 (p. 332).

<sup>18</sup> David Richards, 'At Other Times: Modernism and the "Primitive"', in Vincent Sherry (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 64-82 (p. 64).

could be construed as embodiments of ‘alien’, non-European spaces. Their pinnacle was Sergei Diaghilev’s *Ballets Russes* production of Igor Stravinsky’s *The Rite of Spring*, which opened its British season on 11 July 1913 at The Theatre Royal, London. The assertive repetition of dissonant chords, the ritualistic, nervy movements of dancers (choreographed by Vaslav Nijinsky) in ungainly peasant dresses, against a big abstract tableau (costumes and stage set by Nicholas Roerich) – these sights and sounds captured ‘living primitivism’ for British audiences. The result of a collaboration between Russian artists in French habitat, the performances were neither intended nor received as the representation of a living space *within* Europe. The reference for these and other performances of the *Ballet Russes* was not a ‘European’ post-Petrine Russian state but a phantasm of a primordial Russia, composed of pagan culture, folklore, and traces of Byzantium, roamed about by virile primitive men, soulful mystics, and exotic Eastern Asiatic tribes. The ‘Russian craze’ in Britain, commonly dated 1910–1925, relied heavily on just such imaginings; as a review of the *Ballets Russes*’ production of *Prince Igor* (1911) in *The Times* suggests, what British audiences applauded in Diaghilev’s ballets was ‘the savage-joyful panther-leaping of the men’.<sup>19</sup> Such images persisted throughout the British-Russian alliance in the First World War and even in the wake of the October Revolution but were enhanced by the imaginings of new Soviet modernity. When, in 1921, T. S. Eliot praised Stravinsky’s score for *The Rite of Spring*, he singled out the composer’s unique capacity to evoke the spirit of ‘primitive ceremony’ while ‘possessing a quality of modernity’.<sup>20</sup> The questions of where the eastern boundary of Europe lay, whether Europe could be both modern and primordial and what aspects of Russian culture – now itself bifurcated into that of Russian diaspora (such as the *Ballets Russes*), and new,

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<sup>19</sup> Anonymous, *The Times* (24 June 1911); 17 October 1911; 25 October 1911.

<sup>20</sup> T. S. Eliot, ‘London Letter’, *The Dial*, 71 (1921), 452.

future-oriented USSR culture (avant-garde artists, filmmakers and ideologues) – constituted European heritage would continue to fascinate modernists on British soil.

That Russian space was articulated in the British imaginary in relation to Byzantium is no coincidence, for the ‘Russian craze’ came in the wake of another one: passion for everything Byzantine. Originating among the British aesthetes, Byzantinism spread nationally and internationally from the 1880s to 1914, disseminating the belief that Byzantine history and art (erroneously understood as the early manifestation of Gothic art) presented workable models for modern Europe. The modernist routes to Byzantium – a vanished space-and-time that had occupied the fringes of Europe – were convoluted by necessity; as such, they illuminated the value of European meandering for the modernists’ formal and thematic laboratories. Yeats’s Byzantinism, forcefully articulated in poems like ‘Sailing to Byzantium’ (1926) and ‘Byzantium’ (1930), is a case in point. Yeats’s passion for Byzantium might have been sparked by his friendship with William Morris, a major British ‘Byzantist’, when Yeats lived in London in the 1880s, but it was ignited for poetic purposes much later, when he, then a citizen of newly independent Ireland, visited Sweden to receive the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1923. Having arrived in Stockholm via London and Harwich, Yeats openly enthused about the Swedish landscape, its modern meritocracy and the environment that nurtured both regional arts and crafts and modernism (including that of symbolist co-traveller August Strindberg). Engaging with the cultural tradition and contemporaneity of Sweden in this way, Yeats was particularly impressed by its aesthetic embodiment in the recently completed *stadshus* (Stockholm Town Hall, architect Ragnar Östberg), an eclectic but dominantly neo-Byzantine structure. There, as far in Europe from historical Byzantium as possible, the Irish writer reportedly felt he had come ‘to the Holy city of Byzantium’ and was

‘at home’ there; he could consolidate a vision of a wide, European cross-temporal home that Woolf failed to summon in contemporary Greece.<sup>21</sup>

### **Forms of Translation**

Yeats’s appreciation of contemporary Sweden (and Byzantium) must have been mediated through translation. One remembers some signature acts in Britain: English renditions of Henri Bergson’s treatises (from 1910 onwards) and rapid translations of Sigmund Freud’s work by Alix and James Strachey, both of which were instrumental in shaping Anglophone modernism through first- and second-hand readings and interpretations; innovative European plays that the Pioneer Theatre and other theatre-makers brought to Anglophone audiences (those of Paul Claudel, Anton Chekhov, or Nikolai Evreinov); or the exceptionally influential translations of Franz Kafka by Willa and Edwin Muir in the 1930s. Modernist writers also paraded as translators, keen to relay not so much equivalence as what Walter Benjamin described, in 1921, as ‘that which lies beyond communication [...] the unfathomable, the mysteries, the “poetic”.’<sup>22</sup> Most memorable of these efforts are D. H. Lawrence’s interlingual translations of Giovanni Verga’s novels set in Sicily, and H.D.’s translations of Euripides’ plays; and intralingual translations like those with which Virginia Woolf and D. H. Lawrence supported S. S. Koteliansky in relaying Tolstoy and Dostoevsky into English. Both intralingual and interlingual translations left a huge impact on those undertaking such activities as well as the development of modernist poetry and prose in English.<sup>23</sup> They exposed the translators-authors to the ‘spirits’ of different European places, but also forced them to explore British regional experiences which might serve as local equivalences to

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<sup>21</sup> J. B. Bullen, ‘W. B. Yeats, Byzantium and the Mediterranean’, *AAM&M*, pp. 17-30 (p. 20).

<sup>22</sup> Walter Benjamin, ‘The Task of the Translator’, in Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (eds.), Harry Zohn (trans.) *Selected Writings*, 10 vols (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), I, pp. 253-263 (p. 253).

<sup>23</sup> See Roman Jakobson’s tripartite taxonomy of translation in ‘On Linguistic Aspects of Translation’, in R. Brower (ed.), *On Translation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1959), pp. 232-239 (p. 261).

translated phrases and gestures, and helped to transform their sense of British identity, with new attention to gender, sexuality, race, and diaspora.

Of course, modernist writers themselves were subject to translation at a quicker pace than their Victorian predecessors. Woolf's writings, in particular, spread rapidly: starting with the 1926 French translation of 'Time Passes' section of *To the Lighthouse* (1927) while this novel was still in progress, Woolf's texts were promptly rendered into a variety of European languages – French, Swedish, German, Czech, Catalan, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, Latvian, Greek, Hungarian, Danish (to count only those that appeared during her lifetime) – by translators that included amateurs, professionals, and writers like Marguerite Yourcenar and Jorge Luis Borges. This vibrant translation activity made the modernists publishing in Britain aware on how they themselves could be 'constructed in translation' and therefore forced them to reflect on translatability and untranslatability of words, climes, affects. The modernist practice of non-translation, incorporation of untranslated fragments from various languages in the writings of Eliot, H.D., Woolf, Pound, Joyce, and others, thus came to serve an equally important cultural function, paradoxically underscoring how impossible it was to reconcile the different 'spirits of place'.<sup>24</sup> Both translation and non-translation, in turn, sustained the key vehicle of European modernist collaboration: periodicals. The collaborations among the editorial teams and contributors across national boundaries, like that between T. S. Eliot's journal *The Criterion* (1922–39) and José Ortega y Gasset's *Revista de Occidente* [*Review of the West*] (1923–36), provided necessary contact zones for reimagining the heritage and futures of Europe.

Perhaps one of the most significant pan-modernist discoveries was, however, the potential of another kind of translation: intersemiotic.<sup>25</sup> Modernists translated artforms into

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<sup>24</sup> Jason Harding and John Nash (eds), *Modernism and Non-Translation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), pp. 1-18.

<sup>25</sup> Jakobson, 'On Linguistic...', p. 261.

one another (music, literature, painting, theatre, film, architecture) through both adaptations and drawing out of thematic correspondences and formal features at the scale and with the impact unseen before, and they used those moments of translation to generate debate about what modernism, avant-garde, and Europe itself were or could be. The most widely referenced of these instances of cross-pollination of the arts was an event known colloquially as the ‘First Post-Impressionist Exhibition’.<sup>26</sup> A critical disaster at the time, the exhibition introduced Britain to the work of painters like Manet, Seurat, Van Gogh, Gauguin, Cézanne and Picasso and produced ripples that were felt across modernist production in Britain and beyond. Woolf’s famous observation, in her essay ‘Mr Bennet and Mrs Brown’ (1924), that ‘on or about December 1910 human character changed’ is customarily taken as a covert reference to this exhibition and an acknowledgment of inter-art operation of modernism itself.<sup>27</sup> The exposure to contemporary art at this exhibition and its 1912 and 1913 sequels (featuring French, Spanish, Russian, and British artists) and later international cross-art ventures like the London premiere of Stravinsky and Ramuz’s *L’Histoire du Soldat* (July 1927) or the London International Surrealist Exhibition (11 June-4 July 1936, New Burlington Galleries) provided British modernist writers with translatable ‘new forms for [their] new sensations’.<sup>28</sup> The same applied to British modernists’ engagement with what was then called European ‘ultra-modern music’ (Stravinsky, Arnold Schoenberg, Anton Webern, and Béla Bartók) through performances or BBC broadcasts, and contemporary European cinemas.<sup>29</sup> Some products of these intersemiotic exchanges, like the poetic film *Borderline* (shot in Switzerland in 1930, produced by the British Pool Group, featuring a transatlantic cast of writers, singers and actors and using cinematic techniques and styles developed,

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<sup>26</sup> ‘Manet and the Post-Impressionists’, curated by Roger Fry, 8 November 1910-15 January 1911, the Grafton Galleries, London.

<sup>27</sup> Virginia Woolf, *Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1924), p. 4.

<sup>28</sup> Virginia Woolf, ‘Hours in a Library’, *Times Literary Supplement* (30 November 1916) pp. 565–566.

<sup>29</sup> Jennifer Doctor, *The BBC and Ultra-Modern Music, 1922-1936: Shaping a Nation’s Tastes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 22-39.

respectively, by German G.W. Pabst and Soviet-Russian Sergei Eisenstein), stand out for their capacity to translate a border-crossing partnership into impactful artistic statements that challenged social boundaries of race, nation, and gender in modernist Europe.

### **Nationalism and Cosmopolitanism**

As *Borderline* exemplifies, nothing nurtured cross-art, pan-European interaction better than fringe avant-garde movements. Continental European-British avant-garde rapports are too multi-lateral, mediated, and layered to allow for a comprehensive discussion here, but let me alight on only one early development that served as a platform for the negotiation of national and international identities, and set a model for further such engagements. In 1910, following the transnational success of the Founding and Manifesto of Futurism that had appeared in the Parisian newspaper *Le Figaro* the year before, Italian futurist Filippo Tommaso Marinetti embarked on a propaganda tour of European capitals. Reaching Britain, he presented a ‘futurist evening’ at the Lyceum Club for Women in London on 13 December 1910, offering to his (largely suffragette) audience a diatribe against British traditionalism, snobbery, and the confines of gender roles.<sup>30</sup> Marinetti returned to London for a successful exhibition of futurist art, co-organised with his one self-proclaimed British follower, painter C. R. W. Nevinson, at the Sackville Gallery (1-31 March 1912). Two years later, a British-targeted futurist manifesto, ‘Vital English Art’, appeared in *The Observer*, signed by Marinetti and Nevinson. In the manifesto’s fanfare line Marinetti, who tended to apply the futurist label liberally (he also saw Meštrović as a futurist), semi-recruited British artists coalescing around the Art Rebel Centre.<sup>31</sup> To Marinetti’s surprise, the Rebel artists reacted with fury. They interpreted his attempt to co-opt them as Futurists as an ‘imperialistic act’, drawing parallels

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<sup>30</sup> Marinetti’s lecture was a blend of the Futurist Manifesto, his thoughts on women and love, and what became known as the ‘Futurist Speech to the English’; see *Modernism: An Anthology*, ed. Lawrence Rainey (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2005), pp. 4-8.

<sup>31</sup> F. T. Marinetti and C. R. W. Nevinson, ‘Futurism and English Art,’ *The Observer* (7 June 1914), 7.



between Italian imperial campaigns in North Africa and Marinetti's noisy tours of European capitals and their art markets; the futurists' parading internationalism, they gauged, belied nationalist conquest. Canadian-born Lewis wrote a chauvinistically intoned article 'Automobilism' (*New Weekly*, 29 June 1914), in which he spent as much energy on denouncing futurism as a puerile infatuation with motor toys as on proving England's historico-political, cultural, and artistic superiority.

As often observed, the Italian Futurists' and the English Vorticists' practices coalesce in logic and form. Hence, to understand Lewis's defensive attack, one needs to appreciate its contexts.<sup>32</sup> The perceived 'Italian invasions' resonated troublingly in a Britain coming to terms with imperial decline and increasing international competition. Further, a wide range of artists, writers, and intellectuals active in Britain in the 1910s – from Madox Ford's circle of literati through Bloomsbury and the Omega Workshop artists to the socialist radicals of Alfred Orange's *New Age* – perceived Britain as a cultural backwater or a semi-periphery. Lewis's jingoistic assertion of British creative capacity sounded refreshing. The nationalistic avant-garde movements like Vorticism, Harsha Ram writes, 'repatriate or redefine the cosmopolitan tropes of modernity as part of the semi-periphery's claim to creative agency'.<sup>33</sup> To perform this affective identity work, nationalist avant-gardists need to engage in a paradoxical practice of simultaneously rejecting national tradition or obsolete customs *and* celebrating selected aspects of national infrastructure and creative practice by aligning them with the enabling structures of modernity. The Vorticist publications speak to this contradictory mandate: they 'blast' those internal and external influences that Lewis deemed encroaching on, or questioning, the superiority of contemporary British culture (including

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<sup>32</sup> Paul Peppis, *Literature, Politics, and the English Avant-Garde: Nation and Empire, 1901-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 83-84; and 112-113.

<sup>33</sup> Harsha Ram, 'Futurist Geographies: Uneven Modernities and the Struggle for Aesthetic Autonomy: Paris, Italy, Russia, 1909-1914', in *OHGB*, pp. 313-340 (p. 321).

Meštrović) whilst patriotically defending British navy, industry, and empire.<sup>34</sup> The contraposition of ‘revolutionary’ English and ‘traditionalist’ French serves the same purpose, as does the aesthetically unsound pairing of Italian Futurists and French Impressionists, conceived, in BLAST, as a common enemy: ‘feeble Europeanism’.<sup>35</sup>

But what was Lewis really trying to challenge? What constituted the international and the cosmopolitan for Britain-based modernists? I would like to highlight, in conclusion, a feature of the relationships between Britain and the continental Europe in the age of modernism which has been implicit throughout the preceding discussion. Modernist cosmopolitans active in Britain looked primarily to the wider territory of continental Europe as their metonymy for ‘cosmos’ or a signification framework for the relationship between Britain and the world. Developing in an uncanny relation with British (mostly non-European) imperialism and anti-imperialism, modernist cosmopolitanism in Britain took on the guise of Europeanism, in form and emotional content. And when national sentiments challenged or interpolated the ‘cosmopolitan tropes’, it was with continental Europe as a reference point that they operated. It is this mental mapping that enabled not only contrastive modernist positions (e.g., Vorticists and British surrealists) but also some multi-scale thinking, at once national and European/cosmopolitan. When, in her spirited attack on masculinist-militaristic chauvinism, *Three Guineas* (1938), Woolf exclaimed ‘[as] a woman I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world’, what she really meant was: as a *British* woman, and therefore both an observer of and a participant in the wars raging on European soil, I denounce masculinist rhetoric that instigates and sustains them, and the European legacy of nation-state and border-thinking that produces and perpetuates them.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Wyndham Lewis, BLAST 2 War Number (July 1915), p. 92.

<sup>35</sup> Wyndham Lewis, ‘Manifesto, III’, BLAST, 1 (20 June 1914), p. 34.

<sup>36</sup> Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas*, annot. and intro. Jane Marcus (Orlando: Harcourt, 2006), p. 129.

## Coda

All these knotted engagements suggest that, for early twentieth-century writers and artists active in Britain, the rest of Europe was a dynamic space that operated simultaneously as the zone of belonging, the zone of distinction, and the zone of historical and aesthetic laboratory within and against which they developed their own practices. No longer conceived as a territorial phantasm to be consumed in situ or at home in the image of ‘British’ longings and aversions, diversified and ever transforming European space became a source of debate, ideas, and forms, with acknowledged capacity to change Britain itself. Europe also started operating as a conduit for global thoughts, products, and rites and thus a forcefield through which, and in relation to, the British Empire’s geopolitical contours were redefined. To understand and express the relationship between these different systems of meaning – local allegiances, nation-state prerogatives, and continental and supra-continental cosmopolitanisms – and make sense of border-changes and border-thinking was a distinct task of the writers and artists working in the epoch of modernism.

It is not coincidental, then, that it was thanks to, in significant part, British political and cultural backing, that Meštrović’s state of South Slavs became a reality in 1918. Passing through Belgrade sometime later (and having likely observed Meštrović’s colossal statue ‘Victor’ overlooking the city), Woolf was driven to describe that new entity, ‘Jugo Slavia’, as a ‘tamer’ country than Greece.<sup>37</sup> Yeats may have disagreed. In 1927, he invited Meštrović to contribute designs for the new currency of the Irish Free State. The competition featured seven artists, but Yeats, the Chairman of the Government Committee, had special hopes for the design of the ‘foremost sculptor of the day’ whose work ‘expressed a violent rhythmical

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<sup>37</sup> Virginia Woolf, *Diary of Virginia Woolf* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984) v vols. IV, p. 99.

energy unknown to past ages'.<sup>38</sup> Meštrović received the invitation late and his entry missed the competition. Instead, he gifted the design to the Irish Free State, highlighting the commensurate histories of imperial violence for Ireland and Yugoslavia, encircling Europe south east-north west. In 1965 the design was adopted as the official Seal of the Central Bank of Ireland and in 2007, the commemorative coin double-set was produced in Ireland and Croatia; it remains one of the most beautiful and sought-after Euro coin sets. London's Tate Modern Gallery owns five sculptures by Meštrović; they are rarely on display.

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<sup>38</sup> W.B. Yeats, 'What We Did or Tried to Do' (1928), *W.B. Yeats and the Designs of Ireland's Coinage*, ed. Brian Cleeve (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1972), pp. 9-16 (p. 12).