The Whitechapel Renaissance and its Legacies: Rosenberg to Rodker

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, University of London

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I, Alexander Grafen, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

This thesis does not exceed the regulation length, including footnotes and references, but excluding the appendix and bibliography.

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Abstract

This thesis studies the writing and painting of several members of a generation that grew up in the Jewish East End in the early twentieth century, mostly the children of immigrants from the Russian Empire. Previous work on the subjects of this thesis has tended towards one of two approaches. Either it has taken them as peripheral members of various groupings: for example, the war poets or the Bloomsbury Group. Alternatively, and with increasing frequency, they have been tied together as the 'Whitechapel Boys', a grouping with merit, but which implies a greater degree of organisation and coherency of aim than the evidence supports. The thesis contains chapters on Stephen Winsten, Mark Gertler, John Rodker and Isaac Rosenberg. It attempts to assess the descriptive and explanatory power of the 'Whitechapel Boys' as a label, while remaining attentive to the agendas and strategies of the figures taken separately. More broadly, it looks at the significance of the Jewish East End in early twentieth-century cultural production. On the one hand, my thesis considers this question in the terms of how these writers and artists were shaped by the Jewish East End: through its philanthropic and educational institutions; the opportunities it presented and the strictures it imposed; its political and linguistic commixture. On the other, it looks at how popular, frequently antisemitic conceptions of the Jewish East End conditioned the interactions of the Whitechapel Boys with different coteries, critics and little magazines in London. It asks how those conceptions changed, especially during the First World War, and how they were adapted to theories of literary and artistic renewal. What is under study then is not so much a countable number of

Whitechapel Boys, but a Whitechapel Renaissance, understood as a collection of

sociological conditions, contemporary conceptions and subsequent nostalgia.

Impact Statement

This thesis makes a significant contribution to the understanding of a set of writers and artists who have been neglected in popular and academic memory to varying degrees. It not only illuminates key and overlooked elements in work by them and others, but also opens them to new lines of enquiry.

While discussion of the 'Whitechapel Boys' has become more frequent over the last twenty years, including in art galleries and newspapers, this thesis represents the first real attempt to investigate the genealogy of the term and establish its meaning. It achieves its end and puts forward a theory of how the term developed, the uses to which it has been put, and what problems might inhere in the term itself. In its place, the thesis proposes an alternative way of imagining the period and its actors: the Whitechapel Renaissance of the thesis title. This coinage has the potential not just to sharpen discussion regarding the writers and artists under study, but to reconfigure their relationship to their social milieux, and the institutions that shaped them and enabled their art. As such, it sets in place the foundations for an interpretation that is interdisciplinary by default, since it argues through reference to a shared material base rather than simply through analogy.

By elucidating the networks and conditions of the Whitechapel Renaissance, as well as the political, religious and cultural pressures operative, this thesis does important work in opening up the early twentieth-century East End to critical analysis. So, while its focus may be cultural in a narrow sense, its implications extend to culture in the broadest sense of the word. The thesis analyses the antisemitism that these writers and artists faced, as well as their responses to it. It attempts to do so with an

attention to historical and geographic specificity that should help to recognise the structure of antisemitism without falling into eternalism or oversimplification.

My work contributes to an understanding of Jewish diasporic history and London's cultural and intellectual history. By cutting across modernist studies and taking in other aspects of early twentieth-century literary and artistic culture, it identifies ways in which the discipline's categories of attention might be obscuring not only larger trends but also its own objects of attention. By drawing on material in languages other than English, most importantly Yiddish, it does the same with English literary studies more broadly.

I have presented parts of the research growing in and out of this thesis in a variety of contexts with differing publics: reading groups that mix academic and non-academic members; symposiums open to the public; and more focussed research environments. My research has also entered and informed my teaching. I hope to continue to communicate my work and findings through different media and to different audiences.

Contents

Acknowledgements

There are more people who deserve my thanks and acknowledgment than I can fit into this paragraph. Matthew Beaumont and Mark Ford have been thoughtful and judicious supervisors. My partner, Emma, has helped in ways manifold and beyond measure. My family have also been very supportive, not least in putting us up when our landlord turned violent. I thank those friends and colleagues that reviewed chapters at various stages: Jess Cotton, Ben Gidley, Dom Hale, Dana Key, William Pimlott, Alistair Robinson, Heather Scott, Anna Van Dyk, and Simone Webb. Rebecca Beasley, Lily Ford, Daniel Langton, and Micheline Stevens kindly allowed me to draw on their unpublished work. Sarah MacDougall took time to meet me and discuss questions around Gertler and his contemporaries. I want to express particular gratitude to Evi Heinz, who has been a model of scholarship and generosity. Also to Helen Beer, without whose expertise in Yiddish and generosity with time, this thesis would have been greatly impoverished. It would also have been a much less enjoyable experience overall. I thank her for reviewing my translations and transliterations from Yiddish; any remaining mistakes are my own. My gratitude also to LAHP for their funding, and to the archival, cleaning and secretarial staff at the British Library, Harry Ransom Center, Imperial War Museum, Tate Gallery, Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives, and Whitechapel Art Gallery. Finally, after Louis Zukofsky, a nod to anyone and anything I have unjustifiably forgotten.

List of Illustrations

Introduction

On February 19th, 1972, Joan Rodker visited 2 Winchester Place in Highgate. It was a 'detached, redbrick, Victorian family house' with a 'bit of garden in front', the sort of house 'one used to visit in the '30s.' Rodker was a researcher, editor and producer for television. She was also a significant antifascist organiser, whose house in Kensington Church Street had hosted many radicals. Among them was Doris Lessing, who based the character of Molly Jacobs in *The Golden Notebook* (1962) on her.

Rodker was in Highgate to find information on her father, the writer, publisher and translator John Rodker, who had died in 1955. 2 Winchester Place was the address of her father's childhood friend Joseph Leftwich, a translator, anthologist and publicist of Yiddish literature. Joan was invited in. She observed that the house was 'rather gloomy, cold, nothing very particular or personal about it all' except for Leftwich's wife, who was 'brisk and fussing', with traces of her Warsaw upbringing in her accent. There was a handsome bronze bust of Leftwich on the mantelpiece and then Leftwich himself, 'slumped in an armchair, young looking for 80'. Joan asked him questions about her father. Leftwich described:

> [h]is memories – yes from the ages of 15 into early 20s, Jimmy [i.e.,
>
> John Rodker] indeed his closest friend with Winsten – and how sadly
>
> he kept returning to the rift with the latter, now the only other survivor
>
> – Jimmy, Nat, Rosenberg, Aaronson, Bomberg and others.. [sic] at one
>
> point his eyes brim with tears, far away, deep melancholy –
>
> remembering, the best warmest friendships, never found again….

Before Rodker went away, Leftwich gave her some booklets that had been produced for his 70th and 75th birthdays. Rodker 'cut out bits referring to Pa and the crowd, [threw the] rest away'. She typed up an account of her visit and added a marginal note in pencil: 'vain – lost vanity[,] old, sad,– clinging'.[1]

I start with this anecdote because it captures several features of the popular historiography of the Jewish East End as well as the specific history of the writers and artists under discussion in this thesis. Firstly, on Rodker's part, there is the initial motive: a sense of something lost and the desire to recover it, but that desire complicated by the suffering that the history involved. When Joan was about eighteen months old, she was sent away by her parents. Her mother, Sonia Cohen, described a 'motherly soul' in the country who took responsibility, but Joan's obituaries suggest a less idyllic 'institution'.[2] Joan's encounter with Leftwich shows nostalgia coming up against disappointment, and the backlash that follows from Leftwich veering into sentimentality.

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[1] Joan Rodker, 'Leftwich - 2 Winchester Place -', 1972, Joan Rodker Papers, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin, Box 2, Folder 5. 'Jimmy' refers in both cases to John Rodker, while 'Nat' is probably Nat Carne, a 'musician chap' recollected by an acquaintance of Rodker. If so, he is likely the same as the tenor Victor Carne, mentioned by Jacob Isaacs. See Joan Rodker, 'Notes on Harold Grimsditch Smith', Joan Rodker Papers, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin, Box 2, Folder 1; Jacob Isaacs, 'Mr. John Rodker', *The Times* (London, 11 October 1955), p. 11. The following names refer to Isaac Rosenberg, the poet Lazarus Aaronson, and David Bomberg, respectively.

[2] Sonia Rodker (née Cohen), *The End Has Various Places* (privately published, 2018), p. 175; Jenny Diski, 'Joan Rodker: Political Activist Who Acted in Ukraine, Campaigned for the Rosenbergs and Organised Postwar Peace Conferences', *The Independent*, 13 January 2011 <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/joan-rodker-political-activist-who-acted-in-ukraine-campaigned-for-the-rosenbergs-and-organised-2183097.html>; Clancy Sigal, 'Joan Rodker Obituary: Leftwing Broadcaster and Campaigner', *The Guardian*, 9 February 2011 <https://www.theguardian.com/theguardian/2011/feb/09/joan-rodker-obituary>.

As such, the meeting can be seen as a particularly concentrated instance of 'the development of an East End heritage industry' described by Devorah Baum, with its 'unmistakable, and for some critics regrettable, strain of nostalgia'.[3] This industry succeeded a period of greater reticence about the East End in Anglo-Jewish history, one in which there was a greater risk of distortion by 'self-censorship' than by volubility.[4] Baum notes the

> irony that the East End[,] whose dismal conditions turned its denizens into dreamers with dreams of getting out of the East End, or [of] transforming it, should have given rise in succeeding generations of Jewish dreamers to dream of returning and reconstructing the East End as a lost paradise.[5]

The irony is well observed, though the 'lost paradise' may not be quite right. If the East End is remembered for its simplicity and intimacy, Leftwich's 'best warmest friendships', the focus on the radical left history of the East End suggests that it is not so much the possession of a paradise that is fetishized.[6] Rather, it is the moment of lively expectancy, a point in time when the achievement of that paradise seemed not only possible but imminent. Baum emphasises the connection between mourning the loss of the Jewish East End and mourning the dead of the Holocaust; we can also identify a trend towards the celebration of a Jewish identity that is neither explicitly religious, nor part of a national teleology that culminates in the state of Israel. The East

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[3] Devorah Baum, 'Life Writing and the East End', in *The Edinburgh Companion to Modern Jewish Fiction*, ed. by David Brauner and Axel Stähler (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), pp. 221–36 (p. 225).

[4] Tony Kushner, 'The End of the "Anglo-Jewish Progress Show": Representations of the Jewish East End, 1887-1987', *Immigrants & Minorities*, 10.1–2 (1991), 78–105 (p. 79).

[5] Baum, p. 226.

[6] The classic text in this genre is William J. Fishman, *East End Jewish Radicals, 1875-1914* (London: Duckworth, 1975).

End has become an overdetermined symbol for a variety of counterpoints to a contemporary situation. While Joan remarks on Leftwich 'clinging' to the past, her visit to see him exposes her to a similar accusation.

The anecdote points not only to the involved motives of the person pursuing this history, but to the significant role played by the intermediary, who assists with the recovery of the past, while insisting on its irrecoverable elements. In this case, Leftwich appears in the role of a generous but unruly custodian of the Jewish East End. He played the same role for others, including several biographers of his better-known Whitechapel contemporaries. Ian Parsons would dedicate the 1979 edition of Isaac Rosenberg's *Collected Works* to Leftwich 'in affection and gratitude.'[7] Richard Cork prefaces his biography of David Bomberg with various acknowledgements, among them Clare Winsten (née Clara Birnberg) and 'Bomberg's lifelong friend, the late Joseph Leftwich, who with his wife helped me to understand the Whitechapel period more fully than I could otherwise have done'.[8] At the same time, Joan's account suggests some of his limitations as a historian, noting his habit of 'name dropping somewhat'. Leonard Prager's entry for Leftwich in his dictionary of *Yiddish Culture in Britain* remarks on 'a large element of affectation…in the character of the man generally' and obliquely criticises his ability as a translator.[9]

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[7] Isaac Rosenberg, *The Collected Works of Isaac Rosenberg: Poetry, Prose, Letters, Paintings and Drawings*, ed. by Ian Parsons (London: Chatto and Windus, 1979), p. ii.

[8] Richard Cork, *David Bomberg* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1987), p. viii.

[9] Leonard Prager, *Yiddish Culture in Britain: A Guide* (Frankfurt am Main; New York: Peter Lang, 1990), pp. 398, 57.
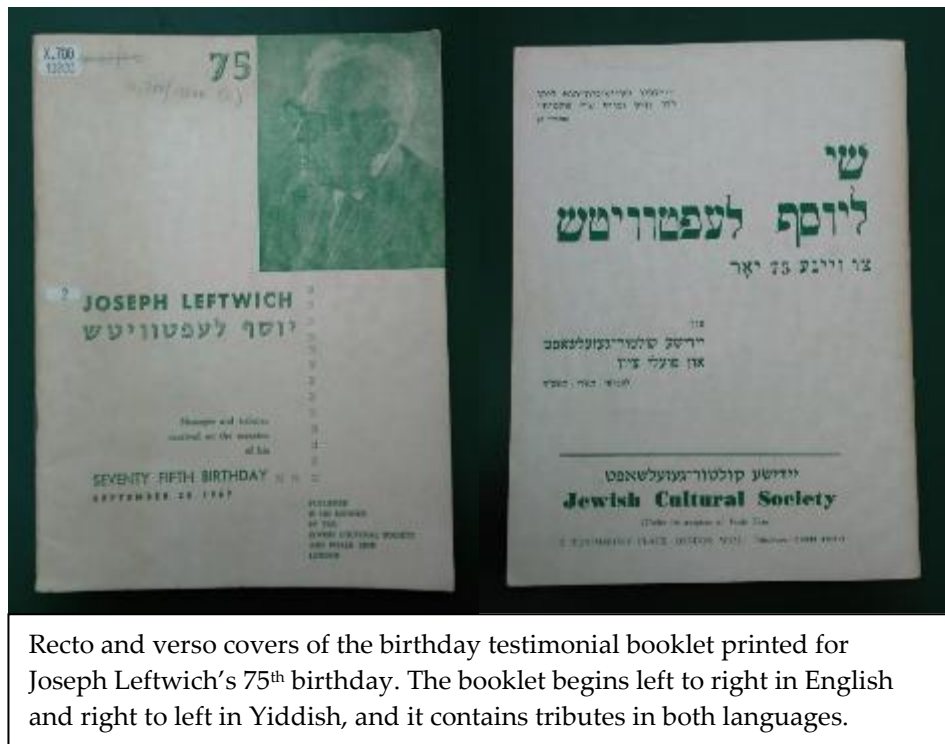
Recto and verso covers of the birthday testimonial booklet printed for Joseph Leftwich's 75th birthday. The booklet begins left to right in English and right to left in Yiddish, and it contains tributes in both languages.

For better or worse, Joseph Leftwich has been a central figure in shaping the understanding of the early lives of Bomberg, Rosenberg and Rodker. The reasons for this importance go beyond his willingness to be interviewed. In several articles and speeches written in old age he returned to the discussion of his early peers.[10] Even more significant has been the diary Leftwich kept in 1911, started when he was eighteen, and which has since been used extensively by biographers of his

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[10] See, for example, Joseph Leftwich, '"Jewish" London Fifty Years Ago', in *1915-1965: Fifty Years' Achievement in the Arts, Commemorative Volume to Mark the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Foundation of the Ben Uri Art Society* (London: Ben Uri Art Society, 1966), pp. 12–16; Joseph Leftwich, 'Autobiographical Note', in *Joseph Leftwich at Eighty-Five: A Collective Evaluation*, ed. by S. J. Goldsmith (London: Federation of Jewish Relief Organisations; Association of Jewish Writers and Journalists; World Jewish Congress Yiddish Committee, 1978), pp. 4–10 (p. 9).

contemporaries.[11] More recently, he has been credited with coining the term 'Whitechapel Boys' or 'The Whitechapel Boys' to describe the group that he and his contemporaries comprised. [12] However, as I shall show, the attribution is a problematic one.

When I began work on this thesis, it was with the aim of articulating the connections between these 'Whitechapel Boys', studying the interplay of their early work and the effects of that early collaboration on their later careers. The figures around whom the chapters of the thesis are based have all been included under the label: the poet, teacher, and biographer Stephen Winsten, né Samuel Weinstein; the painter Mark Gertler; the publisher, translator, and writer, John Rodker; and the poet and painter Isaac Rosenberg;. They were all born in the early years of the 1890s, the children of Jewish immigrants from the Russian Empire, and they spent a significant part of their youth living in the Jewish East End. It is likely that they all knew one another in the years before the war. However, it became clear to me, the more I researched, that the ties between them, the ways in which their art or writing might be understood comparatively, could not be convincingly referred to an early unity of purpose or even a looser camaraderie. Rather, the connections were rooted initially in the institutions, culture and reputation of the Jewish East End, and, later, in the changing status of Jews in Britain.

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[11] See, for example: Cork, *David Bomberg*; John Rodker, *Poems & Adolphe 1920*, ed. by Andrew Crozier (Manchester: Carcanet, 1996); Jean Moorcroft Wilson, *Isaac Rosenberg: The Making of a Great War Poet: A New Life* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2007).

[12] Rachel Dickson and Sarah MacDougall, 'The Whitechapel Boys', *Jewish Quarterly*, 51.3 (2004), 29–34 (p. 30); William Baker, 'Leftwich, Joseph (1892–1983), Writer, Editor, and Translator', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2015) <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/60250> [accessed 18 May 2019].

The first task of this introduction is to give some account of the Jewish East End, a sense of its coordinates in time and space, and the cultural institutions that played the most significant role for the subjects of this study. I will then attempt to chart the origins of the label 'The Whitechapel Boys' and to show how its use in critical literature has evolved, illuminating certain aspects of the writers and artists' careers, while obscuring others. Building on this argument, I propose that we consider Winsten, Gertler, Rodker and Rosenberg as beneficiaries of and actors in a Whitechapel Renaissance. Doing so will better enable us to plot the social forces that shaped cultural production in the period and to contextualise these figures' interactions with different sections of London's literary and artistic culture. I conclude the introduction with an outline of the chapters that follow.

Plotting the Jewish East End

In one sense, the outlines of the Jewish East End are easy to sketch. At the end of the nineteenth century, the majority of Russians and Russian Poles lived in the parishes of Whitechapel, St George in the East and Mile End Old Town.[13] The majority of those Russians and Russian Poles were Jewish immigrants, who had been living in the Russian Pale of Settlement, the western part of the empire in which Jews were allowed permanent residence. They left for various reasons. If popular history has tended to focus on the pogroms, which increased in frequency and violence after the assassination of Alexander II in 1881, David Feldman emphasises more extenuated trends that undercut Jews' economic independence in the Pale, such as 'demographic

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[13] Susan L. Tananbaum, *Jewish Immigrants in London, 1880-1939* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2014), p. 27.

growth, the beginnings of state-managed industrialisation, and government restrictions.'[14] Susan L. Tananbaum also notes fears of 'military conscription and its attendant efforts at conversion'.[15]

Raymond Kalman used the location of Jewish institutions, especially synagogues, to determine the boundaries of the Jewish East End, one that corresponds with what we know of the demographic distribution. While accounts of the East End as a whole agreed on 'an area [...] bounded to the West by the line of Shoreditch High Street and Kingsland Road (thus excluding Hoxton, for example), to the East by Bow and Hackney by the natural boundary formed by the River Lea and Bow Creek and to the South by the accepted boundary of the river Thames,' the Jewish East End was a smaller area with invisible boundaries that 'ran from Aldgate to Stepney Green, and North to Bishopsgate and Spitalfields and South to Goodmans Fields, with its principal concentration in Aldgate, Bishopsgate, Spitalfields, Whitechapel and Goodmans Fields.'[16] The population of foreign-born Russians and Russian Poles was most concentrated in Whitechapel, followed by St George in the East.[17] Although they made up only 18% of the population of Whitechapel, the Jews of the East End made up the majority of London Jewry until 1918.[18]

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[14] David Feldman, *Englishmen and Jews: Social Relations and Political Culture, 1840-1914* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1994), p. 148.

[15] Tananbaum, p. 22.

[16] Raymond Kalman, 'The Jewish East End – Where Was It?', in *The Jewish East End, 1840-1939*, ed. by Aubrey Newman (London: The Jewish Historical Society of England, 1981), pp. 3–15 (pp. 7, 10).

[17] Feldman, *Englishmen and Jews: Social Relations and Political Culture, 1840-1914*, p. 170.

[18] Tananbaum, p. 27; V. D. Lipman, 'Jewish Settlement in the East End of London 1840-1940: The Topographical and Statistical Background', in *The Jewish East End, 1840-1939*, ed. by Aubrey Newman (London: The Jewish Historical Society of England, 1981), pp. 17–40 (p. 40).
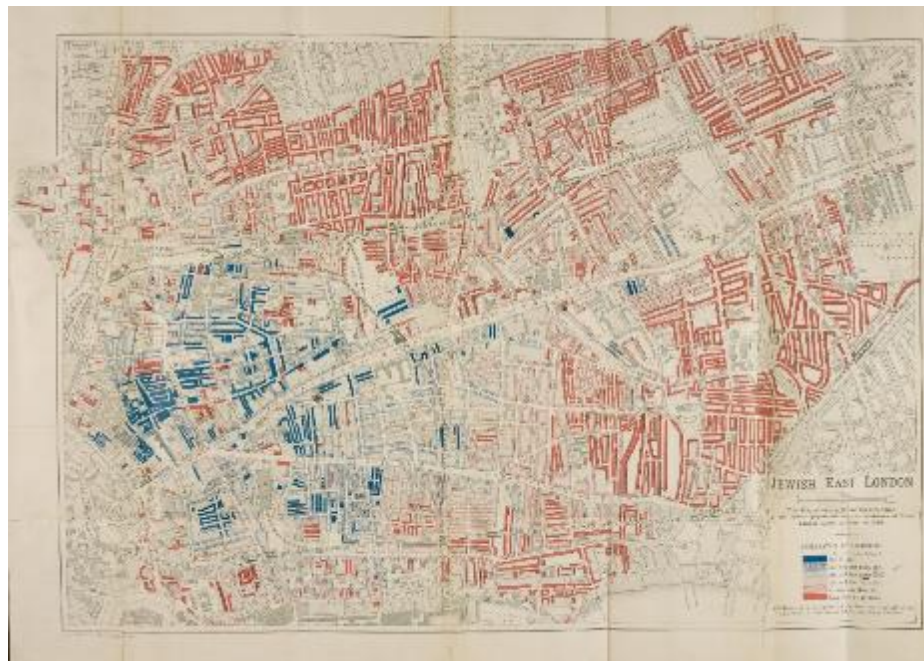
George Arkell's map of the Jewish East End from Charles Russell and H. S. Lewis's *The Jew in London: A Study of Racial Character and Present-Day Conditions* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1900). Streets marked in blue indicate a Jewish majority of inhabitants, with the darker blue indicating a higher percentage. This scan is taken from the British Library website (www.bl.uk/collection-items/jewish-east-london).

The Jewish East End had boundaries in time as well as space, albeit similarly loose. For this thesis, it makes sense to put the beginning around 1880, with the start of large-scale Jewish immigration from the Russian Empire, although there was already a history of Jewish immigration to the area. We can place its end around 1940, when the Jewish population of the East End, already a minority of the Jewish population in London, entered accelerated decline.[19] There was a long history of both Jews and immigrants living east of the city of London, with important synagogues in Duke's

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[19] Lipman, p. 40.

Place and Bevis Marks frequented by Jews of mixed economic positions.[20] In the early

nineteenth century, wealthier Jews began to move away from the East End,

anticipating later patterns of movement.[21]

In the years before 1880, the majority of English Jews lived in London, and were

disproportionately middle-class by English and by London standards.[22] Between 1880

and 1939, England's Jewish population grew from about 60,000 to between 350,000 and

370,000.[23] With the substantial increase of immigration from Eastern Europe in the

1880s, London retained the majority of English Jews, but the class makeup began to

shift dramatically. There was a change in class position for many of the immigrants as

well: workers comprised a far larger proportion of the Jewish population in England

than in Eastern Europe.[24] Contrary to the belief that the majority of emigrants were

artisans, many who came to England did so on account of overcrowding in petty

commerce in the Russian Empire.[25] Settlement in London led to 'a loss of economic

independence for Jewish emigrants', with a sharp increase in immigrants becoming

engaged in 'manufacturing, mechanical or labouring occupations'.[26] With the

demographic shift of English Jews, English Gentile perceptions of what Jewishness

signified also shifted. The words 'Jew' and 'alien' became increasingly interchangeable,

and Feldman describes a shift in Jews being characterised in political debates as

plutocrats, manipulating global politics, especially the Boer War, to an impoverished

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[20] Lloyd Gartner, *The Jewish Immigrant in England, 1870-1914*, 2nd edn (London: Simon Publications, 1960), p. 144.
[21] Lipman, p. 27.
[22] Feldman, *Englishmen and Jews: Social Relations and Political Culture, 1840-1914*, pp. 1, 22.
[23] Tananbaum, p. 22.
[24] Feldman, *Englishmen and Jews: Social Relations and Political Culture, 1840-1914*, p. 7.
[25] Feldman, *Englishmen and Jews: Social Relations and Political Culture, 1840-1914*, pp. 161, 149.
[26] Feldman, *Englishmen and Jews: Social Relations and Political Culture, 1840-1914*, p. 164.

and unmanageable drain on the empire from below.[27] That shift was part of a broader one in terms of Gentile understandings of Jewishness, which received its next substantial remotivation with increasing anti-German feeling in the run-up to the First World War.[28] However, in each case, the previous understanding was not entirely erased, but continued in an uneasy partnership with the newer, taking on greater and lesser importance depending on which was more useful to those adapting the prejudice.

The scale of immigration to Britain was dwarfed by that to America. Tananbaum notes that 'England's tradition of asylum and the pre-existing Jewish community rendered it an attractive destination', but acknowledges that, for some who stayed in London, it was the consolation prize for a frustrated transmigration.[29] In his memoirs, the jeweller and patron of the arts Moyshe Oyved, himself an immigrant to London from Skampe in Poland, described how he posed pleading questions to the London Ghetto Sphinx, whose 'right paw was Commercial Street', its left 'Leman Street, having its claws stuck in the thick mud of the Thames'.[30] Finally, she answered. The Sphinx told him that '[t]he wealthy, clever brains, the ten-pound self-important men, those who can create ideas and write them down on blank paper—those, with their gold and

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[27] David Glover, *Literature, Immigration, and Diaspora in Fin-de-Siècle England: A Cultural History of the 1905 Aliens Act* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 4; Eitan Bar-Yosef and Nadia Valman, 'Introduction: Between the East End and East Africa: Rethinking Images of "the Jew" in Late-Victorian and Edwardian Culture', in *'The Jew' in Late-Victorian and Edwardian Culture: Between the East End and East Africa*, ed. by Eitan Bar-Yosef and Nadia Valman (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 1–27 (p. 9); Feldman, *Englishmen and Jews: Social Relations and Political Culture, 1840-1914*, pp. 264–76.

[28] Colin Holmes, *Anti-Semitism in British Society, 1876-1939* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1979), pp. 121–40.

[29] Tananbaum, p. 22.

[30] Moyshe Oyved [Edward Good], *Visions and Jewels*, trans. by Hannah Berman (London: Faber and Faber, 1952), p. 40.

their cleverness, went off to America', while '[t]he poorest and the most unhappy, those who were robbed of even a good upbringing, gathered together their possessions of two, three, and four pounds, and came to tolerant England.'[31] Of course, that tolerance too could be overstated. In 1905, the Aliens Act emerged as the result both of organised anti-alien activism in the East End and of a divided and unpopular Conservative Party that saw in the Act a way of making the party appear responsive to working-class interests, without threatening property rights.[32]

The Aliens Act created the immigration officer, a state official empowered to interpret and apply a set of criteria to determine whether immigrants to the country were allowed to land, and insulated to some extent from legal scrutiny.[33] It was 'the first example of peacetime legislation that explicitly limited entry into the United Kingdom'.[34] If the barrier it presented was 'more psychological than actual', that may have been in part because it was continuing work already done by the Jewish Board of Guardians and the Russo-Jewish Committee.[35] Anglo-Jewry feared the effects of mass immigration on the labour and housing markets, and on British Gentiles' perceptions of Jews. Between 1881 and 1906, '[e]migration and repatriation were two of the foundations of Anglo-Jewish social policy'.[36] Applicants for relief whom the Board judged could not become suitably self-sufficient or English were deported back to

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[31] Oyved [Edward Good], *Visions and Jewels*, p. 41.

[32] Feldman, *Englishmen and Jews: Social Relations and Political Culture, 1840-1914*, pp. 281–89.

[33] Glover, pp. 1–2.

[34] Daniel Renshaw, 'Prejudice and Paranoia: A Comparative Study of Antisemitism and Sinophobia in Turn-of-the-Century Britain', *Patterns of Prejudice*, 50.1 (2016), 38–60 (p. 60).

[35] Gartner, p. 49.

[36] Feldman, *Englishmen and Jews: Social Relations and Political Culture, 1840-1914*, p. 304.

Europe and Russia.[37] Others were sent on to America or South Africa, Canada or

Argentina.[38] Between 1881 and 1906, the Jewish Board of Guardians never repatriated

fewer than 30% of its new cases.[39]

The parts of the East End in which the immigrants settled were overcrowded,

unhygienic, and characterized by minimal privacy. As a result of these conditions,

there was smallpox and tuberculosis, which had devastating effects. Immigrant men

were especially affected: Gertler suffered from recurring tuberculosis, and Rosenberg

may have as well.[40] Feldman summarises the observations of George Duckworth, a

social investigator, on the 'particular detritus' found on the streets of the Jewish East

End: 'the waste of the street markets and workshops, fish heads, orange peel, bread,

vegetables and paper'.[41] Men and women worked at subsistence level if they could,

mostly in garment trades, though men were able to earn substantially more than

women for the same time worked.[42] Tananbaum's account of the years following their

arrival is on the whole one of the success of the efforts of Anglo-Jewish institutional

philanthropy, in terms both of actual amelioration of conditions for Jewish immigrants

in the East End, and in the project of acculturation, making the immigrants correspond

more to English expectations.

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[37] Eugene C. Black, *The Social Politics of Anglo-Jewry, 1880-1920* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), p. 285.

[38] Black, p. 300; Feldman, *Englishmen and Jews: Social Relations and Political Culture, 1840-1914*, pp. 303–4.

[39] Feldman, *Englishmen and Jews: Social Relations and Political Culture, 1840-1914*, p. 304.

[40] Tananbaum, pp. 35–36; Sarah MacDougall, *Mark Gertler* (London: John Murray, 2002), p. 192; Wilson, *Isaac Rosenberg: The Making of a Great War Poet: A New Life*, p. 60.

[41] Feldman, *Englishmen and Jews: Social Relations and Political Culture, 1840-1914*, p. 166.

[42] Tananbaum, pp. 151–53.

The waning of the Jewish East End can be dated from around the time of the First World War. As V. D. Lipman observes, '[t]he immigrant quarter carried within itself the seeds of its own dissolution', its undesirable living conditions driving residents to move out of the area as soon as they could.[43] By 1914, much of the middle-class Jewish population of the East End had moved north, though continuing immigration meant that the East End remained the heart of Britain's Jewish population. Working-class Jews were likelier to move east as 'cheap railway fares and tramways' opened up into the Lea Valley, and the furniture industry moved out east as well.[44] Between 1918 and 1939, a considerable number of Jews lived in the East End, but they were a minority in London.[45] The Jews who came to London from Germany and Central Europe during the 1930s were likelier to settle in North London than in the East End.[46]

The Second World War saw further decline in the East End's Jewish population, as the air raids that had disproportionately targeted the area during the previous war returned. Even so, there remained signs of continuity. The East End conference organised by the Jewish Historical Society of England in 1980 demonstrated the ambiguity of the survival. While the opening talk by Kalman placed the Jewish East End in the past, a later panel on Yiddish prose and poetry was disrupted by a clash between those who wanted to conduct the discussion in English and the Yiddish poet Avrom Stencl and his 'staunch associates' who had understood that the entire session would be in Yiddish. A hasty compromise was reached, but the contributions recorded

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[43] Lipman, p. 35.
[44] Lipman, p. 37.
[45] Lipman, p. 40.
[46] Lipman, p. 39.

show that the question of survival remained: according to one, Yiddish might be 'studied as a scholastic subject since it would not fit into a modern industrialised world'; according to another, 'Yiddish has never died anyway!'.[47]

Instituting Culture

In *The Jewish Immigrant in England, 1870-1914*, Lloyd Gartner judged that 'Jewish cultural life in England had little distinction, especially in comparison with the intellectual lustre of the emancipated Jewries on the Continent'. [48] Immigration from Eastern Europe did little to change it. Those who left to come to England, he wrote, 'were not the pious and learned' nor were they members of the intelligentsia influenced by the *Haskalah*.[49] Occasional luminaries of Jewish thought appeared in London, most notably the advocate of spiritual Zionism Ahad Ha'am (Asher Ginsberg). However, the overall picture was bleak: the 'Russified or Polonized Jew' was faced with a choice, 'to revert to the Jewish environment or pass on to the English, since no middle ground existed for him'.[50] The severity of Gartner's description is partly explained by his focus on specifically Jewish culture: *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, rabbinic culture, and literature in Hebrew and Yiddish.

Nevertheless, there have been refinements and challenges to Gartner's argument, even within the area of his attention. In 1889, in the midst of the doldrums described by Gartner, the editor of the *Jewish Chronicle*, Asher Myers, approvingly

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[47] Hester Mallin, 'Discussion Group Report: Yiddish Prose and Poetry', in *The Jewish East End, 1840-1939*, ed. by Aubrey Newman (London: The Jewish Historical Society of England, 1981), p. 312.

[48] Gartner, p. 241.

[49] Gartner, p. 241.

[50] Gartner, p. 243.

described an increase in scholarship. He observed that '[v]eterans', such as 'that erratic luminary' Solomon Marcus Schiller-Szinessy, were being joined by a new band of Jewish scholars, both foreign and native, thereby 'helping to form a school of learned Jews in England, whose fires shall not pale even before the radiance of Continental scholarship.'[51] Daniel Langton has given a nuanced picture of the state of English *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, the movement to study Judaism and the Jewish people rigorously and accurately, which was begun by several German Jewish scholars in the nineteenth century. Langton sees the achievements in England as creditable, given the small size of the Jewish population. While German *Wissenschaft* may have made the more enduring achievements, the 'more ambivalent, less overtly hostile, state of Jewish-Christian relations in England' meant that English *Wissenschaft* reached a larger and less exclusively Jewish readership than its German counterpart. At the same time, the marginality, conscious eccentricity and respectable amateurism that characterised English *Wissenschaft* can be attributed, at least in part, to a 'dearth of academic positions' for such scholars. [52]

The mixture of popular interest and institutional neglect that met English *Wissenschaft* anticipates the early reputations of David Bomberg and Mark Gertler, as well as the struggles with money which followed, and which persisted till their deaths. In their youth, however, we can observe more sophisticated structures of institutional support, as well as looser networks of patronage. There are enabling factors within the

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[51] Asher Myers, 'The New Intellectual Movement', *Jewish Chronicle* (London, 17 May 1889), pp. 10–11 (p. 11); discussed in Daniel Langton, 'Wandering Jews in England's Green and Pleasant Land: *Wissenschaft Des Judentums* in an Anglo-Jewish Context', in *Wissenschaft Des Judentums in Europe: Comparative and Transnational Perspectives*, ed. by Christian Wiese and Mirjam Thulin (Berlin: De Gruyter, forthcoming).
[52] Langton.

smaller sphere of the family unit and the larger sphere of philanthropic institutions targeting the East End. The analysis that follows draws mostly on common strands identified in biographies of Bomberg, Gertler and Rosenberg, all three of whom were trained painters. As a result, some of it is less applicable to the writers Rodker, Winsten and Leftwich. Painting was more expensive and required more space and time than writing; in the trenches, with both in short supply, Bomberg and Rosenberg turned their attention more to poetry.[53] Painting was also understood to require institutional training in a way that poetry was not, and so Leftwich, Rodker and Winsten did not find themselves so bound in obligation to Anglo-Jewish philanthropy.

Leftwich left school and began work in 1906 at the age of fourteen.[54] The same year, Bomberg was apprenticed to a lithographer and Rosenberg to a firm of engravers; the following year, Gertler began his apprenticeship at Clayton and Bell, glass-painters. Bomberg, Gertler and Rosenberg took evening classes in art. They would later apply and each ultimately succeed in acquiring loans from the Jewish Education Aid Society, enabling them to attend the Slade School of Fine Art. That they were able to do so was testimony primarily to their mothers, who worked to cordon them off from work that would have been more directly remunerative.[55] Not only were potential earnings lost to the family, but other money would have to be found for paints and class fees. An anecdote from a 1913 letter sent by Gertler to the artist Dora Carrington shows that the

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[53] Rosenberg's poetry written in the trenches is well-known; Bomberg's have also been published as David Bomberg, *Poems and Drawings from the First World War* (Gillian Jason Gallery, 1992).

[54] William Baker.

[55] Cork, *David Bomberg*, p. 10; Wilson, *Isaac Rosenberg: The Making of a Great War Poet: A New Life*, p. 51.

encouragement of a painter in the family could cause substantial upset to the predicted distribution of labour:

> Today my father gave me a big row and almost wanted to hit me, because, whilst painting my mother, I forgot the dinner hour and went on painting till 2.30! Oh! he was wild – he was so hungry. He dines at 1 o'clock! The meat and potatoes had burned! Everybody was annoyed with me. They said I love my art more than them![56]

While comic, the anecdote gives a sense of the pivotal role of the mother in the organisation of the family, and the disruptive force that the decision to encourage one child in painting could represent. In the cases under study, it is possible to see the decision as a failed gamble, or at least as an investment that never paid off in material terms.[57] While the enabling factors of patronage and institutional support took off some pressure, it was still a decision that put a serious burden on the family and on the mother especially. Another way of explaining the decision is to see it in terms of symbolic capital. When the painter William Rothenstein sent a letter to Gertler's parents acclaiming their son's artistic ability, they framed the letter, suggesting the significance they perceived in their son's painting and the approbation it received.[58] Gertler's painting not only brought him into contact with an eminent figure in Anglo-Jewry; it also won his praise.

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[56] Mark Gertler, *Selected Letters*, ed. by Noel Carrington (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1965), p. 59.

[57] In a 1915 letter to Dora Carrington, Gertler complained that his parents were angry with him, and that he owed them £8. Gertler, p. 96.

[58] MacDougall, *Mark Gertler*, p. 27.

Investment in the arts should be seen as one facet of the ambitious Anglo-Jewish philanthropic programmes that became increasingly 'interventionist' in the years after 1880.[59] However, the aim of fostering artistic talents among the immigrants had an unusual significance. In her 1853 *A Few Words to the Jews by One of Themselves*, the philanthropist Charlotte Montefiore had anticipated the arrival of a 'true Judaism', one more attentive to 'the spiritual life, the life consecrated to God, to the mind's progress, to the soul's free communion with the beautiful, the true, the holy, and eternal.'[60] The 'true Judaism' would give rise to 'poets and painters, then sculptors and musicians' whose duty it would be

> to clothe in words, to breathe in melody, to portray in canvas, and to chisel from out marble, their own varied conceptions of the true and beautiful, of the pure and holy.[61]

Feldman has argued that the Reform movement in Britain should be seen in part as a response to Christian evangelical critique of Judaism, which depicted it, as it also did Catholicism, as dead ritual.[62] Evangelical efforts to convert Jews were concentrated in the East End.[63] The encouragement of art-enjoyment and creation there could serve as a riposte to the charge of Jews' spiritual death.

Education in art can also be understood as a strategy for bringing Jewish immigrants in line with English cultural values, although the picture is complicated by the interpenetration of artistic styles across Europe. Furthermore, the decline of

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[59] Tananbaum, p. 15.

[60] Charlotte Montefiore, *A Few Words to the Jews by One of Themselves* (London, 1853), p. 29.

[61] Montefiore, p. 33.

[62] Feldman, *Englishmen and Jews: Social Relations and Political Culture, 1840-1914*, p. 63.

[63] Feldman, *Englishmen and Jews: Social Relations and Political Culture, 1840-1914*, p. 54.

specifically Christian painting in Europe led to an increase in the number of famous

Jewish artists which, in turn, seems to have reduced the sense in which figurative art

contravened the Mosaic injunction against creating idols.[64] By 1914, when David

Bomberg gave an interview to *The Jewish Chronicle* in which he described Futurism as

being 'in accordance with Jewish law, for its art resembles nothing in heaven above,

the earth beneath nor the waters under the earth', the issue seems, at least in England,

to have been more a source of humour than anything else.[65]

Another reason for the concentration of money and effort on the arts in the East

End may have been its ostensible political neutrality, at least when compared to

lectures or direct political addresses. Patronising efforts at uplifting Jewish immigrants

were by no means ineffective, but they ran the risk of inspiring resistance, and the

communist, anarchist and Zionist organisers of the East End were all ready to make

use of that resistance. In a 1917 letter published in *The New Age*, Leftwich responded

with anger to Bulvar Schwartz's article in favour of Jewish assimilation that had

appeared in the previous issue. Leftwich attacked the article's 'Bulvar-Schwartzian

Utopia', in which 'we poor heathen Jews will be transformed into highly respectable

citizens [and] live happily ever after'.[66] Against Schwartz's promise that Jews living in

England would be absorbed into an English identity, Leftwich insisted that, 'for Jews

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[64] The shift in Jewish artists' attitudes towards representation is discussed briefly in Charles Spencer, 'Anglo-Jewish Artists: The Migrant Generations', *Jewish Quarterly*, 30.4 (1983), 46–63 (pp. 49–50).

[65] David Bomberg, 'A Jewish Futurist: Chat with Mr. David Bomberg', *Jewish Chronicle*, 8 May 1914, p. 13.

[66] Joseph Leftwich, 'Jews and Assimilation', *The New Age*, 21 June 1917, 177–79 (p. 177).

that feel the spirit of their people, there can be no assimilation'.[67] Schwartz's argument

was thus not only challenged, but mobilised into advocacy for Jewish nationalism.

If art was just as susceptible to being repurposed, it was at least less vulnerable

to direct rebuttal. As such, it could serve as a stalking-horse for radical immigrants as

well as Anglo-Jewish philanthropy. Art offered a back-route, a way of doing political

work that could dodge some of the counterattacks that such work invited. However, it

could also result in the political message evaporating. When the Jewish Working Men's

Club on Great Alie Street staged a production of Henrik Ibsen's *Ghosts* in Yiddish, they

probably did so at least in part to show the deleterious effects of bourgeois hypocrisy

around sex. If so, their efforts met with mixed results.

In a diary entry from October 1911, Leftwich describes going with Rodker to see

this performance. Rodker would later write about the 'tremendous virility and

irresistible carrying force' of the East End Yiddish theatre, which had avoided the

emasculation that comes from 'elaborate staging [,] over-refined acting' and

censorship.[68] In fact, according to Rodker, the production of *Ghosts* was one of the few

cases where 'a subscribed performance' was necessary on account of Ibsen's

international notoriety. And while Rodker may have picked up partly from Ibsen the

'very curious ideas [...] on sex morality' that gave Leftwich so much discomfort, few

were so sensitive.[69] Leftwich observed that

[67] Leftwich, 'Jews and Assimilation', p. 177.
[68] John Rodker, 'The Theatre in Whitechapel', *Poetry and Drama*, March 1913, 43–44 (p. 43).
[69] Joseph Leftwich, 'Facsimile of Diary', 1911, Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives, entry for 24 July.

the audience was damnable. During the whole time, half of it was carrying on a loud conversation, while the other half kept walking about, going out and coming back again, and banging the doors as they went.[70]

Worse still, 'most of the audience kept on giggling whenever there was a sexual reference'. Leftwich mused afterwards that he felt 'that "Ghosts" even now is a play for which the audience should be carefully selected – sifted', an elitist conclusion that might have disheartened the organisers.

Anglo-Jewish philanthropy was extensive and animated by shared concerns and collaboration, though it did not achieve the same degree of centralised control as did the charities targeting Jewish immigrants to New York.[71] As well as Anglo-Jewish institutions like the Jewish Board of Deputies and the Board of Guardians for the Relief of the Jewish Poor, there was collaboration with the efforts of Christian social reformers, most notably Henrietta and Samuel Barnett, who established the Whitechapel Gallery and Toynbee Hall. The Whitechapel Library, since celebrated as the 'University of the Ghetto', was endowed by the newspaper-owner and advocate for temperance John Passmore Edwards.[72] It not only allowed Rosenberg and others to read widely in English poetry, but served as a meeting-place, as it would too for a later generation of writers.[73]

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[70] Leftwich, 'Facsimile of Diary', entry for 8 October.

[71] Black, p. 157; Irving Howe, '"Americanizing" the Greenhorns', in *Painting a Place in America: Jewish Artists in New York, 1900-1945* (New York; Bloomington: Jewish Museum; Indiana University Press, 1991), pp. 14–21 (p. 14).

[72] Interview with Bill Fishman, quoted in Rachel Lichtenstein, *On Brick Lane* (London: Penguin, 2008), p. 32.

[73] Elaine Rosa Smith, 'East End Jews in Politics, 1918-1939: A Study in Class and Ethnicity' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Leicester, 1990), p. 17.

There was also the South Place Ethical Society, a freethought organisation based in Finsbury. Sonia Cohen described being taken there to hear the concerts by her friend, Lily Margolis, an aspiring violinist. By attending the concerts, Cohen found out about the morning lectures. While Margolis considered them patronising, Cohen was more receptive. As well as lectures on Keats, she heard Joseph Martin McCabe, the freethought writer.[74] The long night-walks described in Cohen's memoirs and Leftwich's diaries point indirectly to the importance and limitations of these institutions: there were only so many heated indoor places where young people could gather without paying entry in the East End; walking was affordable and their own homes were crowded and uncomfortable. Although Rodker's family was seen as one of the more financially secure among Leftwich's acquaintances, Leftwich described his shock on visiting his home:

> It is a coal-cellar! And this is Jimmy's study and workroom! This is where he sits for hours studying physiology and reading poetry. How can he do it?[75]

For painters, the home often had to serve as a studio as well as a study. Leftwich is said to have told 'with some relish' a story about Rosenberg's mother being dismayed on finding a half-naked model in her kitchen.[76]

The most important philanthropic initiative for the painters was the Jewish Education Aid Society. Founded in 1898 as the Jewish Education Aid Committee before being renamed in 1907, the JEAS has been credited by Lisa Tickner as 'the only charity to play a significant role in the social history of art in the pre-war period', although

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[74] Rodker (née Cohen), pp. 69–70.
[75] Leftwich, 'Facsimile of Diary', entry for February 10.
[76] Wilson, *Isaac Rosenberg: The Making of a Great War Poet: A New Life*, p. 141.

Eugene Black, less flattering, has described its tendency to function 'as a somewhat capricious deus ex machina'.[77] The initiative was started by the Maccabeans, a group that had grown out of the Wanderers of Kilburn. Whereas the Wanderers had been an intimate and informal circle around the scholar Solomon Schechter (1847-1915) which had hoped 'to revive the ardent Jewish spirit which was dormant in England after the achievement of political and civil equality', the Maccabeans was more of a formal club, consisting of 'Jews in the literary and learned professions and the arts, to the exclusion of those engaged in commerce'.[78] Asher Myers, the journalist and diplomat Lucien Wolf, and the author Israel Zangwill, were members of both groups. The purpose of the JEAC and, later, the JEAS was 'to afford poor Jewish children possessed of exceptional talent an opportunity of developing them by providing the means of pursuing those studies for which they might be peculiarly fitted.'[79] While the majority of the recipients were initially promising musicians, the JEAS provided loans to Bomberg, Gertler and Rosenberg to attend the Slade.[80] It funded the painter Jacob Kramer for three terms at the Slade, and also provided the sculptor Jacob Epstein with loans, which, like many others, he failed to repay.[81] A JEAS board meeting remarked on the irony that '[t]he worst delinquent is a sculptor, Epstein, who is probably the most distinguished of them all'.[82] As well as money, the JEAS provided an avenue of

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[77] Lisa Tickner, *Modern Life & Modern Subjects: British Art in the Early Twentieth Century* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 149; Black, p. 119.

[78] Norman Bentwich, 'The Wanderers and Other Jewish Scholars of My Youth', *Transactions (Jewish Historical Society of England)*, 20 (1959), 51–62 (pp. 53, 56).

[79] JEAC, *Report to Subscribers*, 22 July 1898, quoted in Micheline Stevens, 'A Biographical Study of the Early Beneficiaries: The Jewish Education Aid Society' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Southampton, 2016), p. 34.

[80] Stevens, p. 67.

[81] Stevens, p. 29.

[82] JEAS minutes 9 February 1920, quoted in Stevens, p. 29.

contact with members of established Anglo-Jewish society, contact which Micheline

Stevens has observed in some cases translated to a sustained relationship of

patronage.[83]

It is worth dwelling on individual patrons as a further enabling context for the

artists and writers of this thesis. In doing so, there is the risk of falling for modernist

myth-making: seeing a patronage-system in the style of the Italian Renaissance where

there was in fact a more knowing engagement with twentieth-century art and literature

markets. John Rodker's late, unpublished work *An Ape of Genius* (c.1931-3) would

satirise Wyndham Lewis for flattering himself with just such a mythology.[84] However,

as long as we see patronage as one more capricious offering within the range of

putative options for artists and writers, we should be able to acknowledge its

significance. The lives of Bomberg, Gertler, Rosenberg and Rodker show a dependence

on individuals operating outside of institutional philanthropy. The most important

such figure was Edward Marsh, secretary to Churchill, collector of modern art and

editor of *Georgian Poetry*. Marsh was a keen patron and advocate of Gertler. In turn,

Gertler introduced Marsh to Rosenberg and encouraged him to buy work by

Bomberg.[85]

The physical proximity of people living at the extremes of poverty and wealth

in London affected the ways in which cultural access could work as a tool of social

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[83] Stevens, p. 30.

[84] John Rodker, 'An Ape of Genius', 1932, John Rodker Papers, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin, Box 35, Folder 7. For further discussion, see chapter three of this thesis and Ian Patterson, 'John Rodker, Julius Ratner and Wyndham Lewis: The Split-Man Writes Back', in *Wyndham Lewis and the Cultures of Modernity*, ed. by Andrzej Gąsiorek, Alice Reeve-Tucker, and Nathan Waddell (Farnham; Burlington: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 95–107.

[85] MacDougall, *Mark Gertler*, p. 89.

stratification. Ezra Pound could still say of Rodker that his father 'did not have a library full of classics', and other social markers could always be invented or invoked as necessary.[86] However, Rodker was able to access much of the same cheap theatre and lectures that a richer London intellectual attended.[87] Similarly, Gertler was able to be as well-versed in the contents of the National Gallery as a richer painter. By bringing him into the Slade, the JEAS loan also brought Gertler into an institution whose artists, to varying degrees, rejected and competed with Royal Academy standards and were receptive to French influence.[88] The point should not be overemphasised: the geographic overlay would be meaningless without the accessibility brought by a Victorian state that had put emphasis on collective improvement, and there were still exclusions enough. But the speed with which Bomberg, Rosenberg, Rodker and Gertler made an impression on different London coteries depended on their physical proximity to them as well as a familiarity with those coteries' codes and values.

Patronage could also overlap with the more institutional philanthropic efforts outlined above. When the philanthropist and JEAS committee member Conway Wertheimer offered to send Gertler to Italy to improve the painter's sense of colour, Gertler refused, a decision which led to a breakdown in his relationship both with

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[86] Ezra Pound, *Pound*/The Little Review*: The Letters of Ezra Pound to Margaret Anderson:* The Little Review *Correspondence*, ed. by Thomas L. Scott and Melvin J. Friedman (London: Faber and Faber, 1989), p. 63.

[87] Letter to Margaret C. Anderson, September 1917, quoted in Ezra Pound, *The Letters of Ezra Pound, 1907-1941*, ed. by D. D. Paige (London: Faber and Faber, 1951), p. 179.

[88] MacDougall, *Mark Gertler*, p. 31; Under the professorship of Frederick Brown, one of the founders of the New English Art Club, the Slade was pedagogically progressive and exposed to the influence of the French Impressionists. See Anne Pimlott Baker, 'Brown, Frederick (1851–1941), Painter', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2009) <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/32107>.

Wertheimer and with the JEAS as a whole.[89] But individual patrons differed from

philanthropic institutions in that they were less likely to be interested in turning those

they patronised into upstanding English citizens. On the contrary, in the case of Marsh,

it is evident that much of Gertler's appeal for him lay in the frisson of incongruity he

perceived in a beautiful, talented East-End Jew.[90] The more intimate relationship that

came with individual patronage could put the artist or writer in a vulnerable position,

as when Gertler felt obliged to write to Marsh in 1915, severing contact because of the

latter's support of British participation in the First World War.[91] However, it could also

imply support without a cut-off imposed by geography, age or period of study.

Rodker's relationship with the writer André Germain shows the latter willing to

support Rodker across countries and prospects. It may not be coincidence that

Germain, like Marsh, was gay.[92] Not only were they men with money, but they were

also childless, less attached to passing down money through inheritance and

consequently freer to spend it on the artistic young men in whose company they

delighted.

These factors allow us to go some way in explaining how certain painters and

poets of Whitechapel were enabled to progress in the early stages of their careers. It

should also hint at some of the reasons that they ceased to receive the attention and

support in later years that they might have expected. On an institutional level, support

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[89] MacDougall, *Mark Gertler*, p. 59.

[90] Christopher Hassall, *Edward Marsh, Patron of the Arts: A Biography* (London: Longmans, Green & Co, 1959), p. 241.

[91] Gertler, p. 102.

[92] Rodker and Gertler felt differently about the way in which this framed their relationship of patronage: John Rodker, 'Diary 1919-1921', Joan Rodker Papers, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin, Box 5, Folder 1, entry for 8 May 1921; Mark Gertler's letter to Dorothy Brett (13 June 1913) in Gertler, p. 54.

was focussed on the East End, and on lifting people out of the East End. On a familial level, artists moved out, parents died, and wives made inadequate substitutes for mothers. As for patronage, as Lawrence Rainey has observed, it 'could nurture literary modernism only to the threshold of its confrontation with a wider public', after which it required 'critical approbation and some measure of commercial viability.'[93] The point can be extended from literature to painting, though in the latter case commissions and portraits allowed for greater fluidity between the status of client and patron. The recovery or construction of posthumous reputations can be attributed to the same factors, the efforts of Rosenberg's sister, Annie Wynick, and Bomberg's wife, Lilian Holt, requiring particular notice.

Just as important as these changes, however, were developments in the character of English antisemitism and the cultural and political position of Jewish immigrants in England. Throughout this thesis, I use 'antisemitism' as a recognised shorthand for a host of prejudicial beliefs held about Jews as well as discriminatory action taken against Jews.[94] In my second chapter, I distinguish philosemitism from antisemitism to clarify a difference in rhetorical strategies. On the whole, however, I

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[93] Lawrence S. Rainey, *Institutions of Modernism: Literary Elites and Public Culture* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1998), p. 170.

[94] Jonathan Judaken has expressed important reservations about the use of the term 'antisemitism' as part of a larger push against accounts of it characterised by 'exceptionalism, eternalism, teleology, apologetics and theoretical naïveté'. Insisting instead on an 'entangled history' of antisemitism, he proposes the use of the word 'Judaeophobia' as one that defamiliarizes the concept, allows for better periodisation and which is more attuned to the nuances of prejudice as discussed by Frantz Fanon. Judaken's project strikes me as admirable and his complaints just. However, I have chosen to continue with the use of an unhyphenated 'antisemitism' in the hopes that its deployment within a suitably nuanced and historicised context will do more to complicate its application than a neologism with its own unhelpful freight. Jonathan Judaken, 'Introduction', *American Historical Review*, 123.4 (2018), 1122–38; see also David Feldman, 'Toward a History of the Term "Anti-Semitism"', *American Historical Review*, 123.4 (2018), 1139–50.

understand philosemitism to fall under a larger bracket of antisemitic thought and behaviour.[95] In the years before the war, the appearance in the East End of figures as unlikely as Lewis, Marsh and Ottoline Morrell points to an outsider curiosity in the Jewish East End for which it is hard to find an equivalent after the war. Neither do we find equivalents for the images of the East End and manipulation of its mythology that we find in the pre-war work of Bomberg and Gertler.[96] The shift may be partly explained by the men having left the East End. It is also possible that East End squalor was losing its power of fascination by comparison with increasingly lurid accounts of trench warfare. A further factor may have been an increasing tendency to treat Jews as crypto-Germanic.[97] When Gertler's painting *The Creation of Eve* was exhibited at the London Group show in November 1915, it was attacked both as 'a piece of impertinence, with a seasoning of blasphemy' and as 'hunnishly indecent'. One visitor appended a label to the belly of Eve reading: 'Made in Germany'.[98]

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[95] Bryan Cheyette has argued for the use of the term 'semitic discourse' to capture the ambivalences and avoid the 'inherent moralizing attached' to the terms 'antisemitism' and 'philosemitism'. Zygmunt Bauman has seen antisemitism, like philosemitism, as 'an offshoot or a variety' of 'allosemitism'. While the ambivalences in prejudicial utterances and writings regarding Jews are important to observe, it seems to me more useful to treat both antisemitism and philosemitism as falling under a category of hostility. The justification for subordinating philosemitism to antisemitism is that the ambivalences of expression do not seem to map on to ambivalences of material treatment. The 'reward' of philosemitism tends to be restricted to words, while antisemitism receives expression in violence on the level of individual and structure. Bryan Cheyette, *Constructions of 'the Jew' in English Literature and Society: Racial Representations, 1875-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 1–12; Zygmunt Bauman, *Life in Fragments: Essays in Postmodern Morality* (Oxford; Cambridge: Blackwell, 1995), p. 207.

[96] I have in mind works like Bomberg's *In the Hold* (c.1913-14) and Gertler's *Rabbi and his Grandchild* (1913).

[97] Colin Holmes, pp. 121–40; the subject has been treated more recently in Susanne Terwey, *Moderner Antisemitismus in Großbritannien, 1899-1919: Über Die Funktion von Vorurteilen Sowie Einwanderung Und Nationale Identität* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2006).

[98] The reviews, from the *Pall Mall Gazette* and *Morning Post* respectively, are quoted in MacDougall, *Mark Gertler*, pp. 122–23; Gertler describes the label in a December 1915 letter to Carrington, along with the acknowledgment that the hostile criticisms 'seem to have done [him] more good than harm' in terms of sales: Gertler, p. 106.

Together, these factors also allow us to sketch a rough trajectory for the subjects of this thesis. The focus of the chapters is directed mostly on the years between 1914 and 1925. When the First World War began, many of the children of immigrants who had come over in the 1880-1905 period were moving through early adulthood. Bomberg, Gertler, Leftwich, Rodker, Rosenberg and Winsten were all born in the early 1890s outside of London. They were mostly born in Jewish centres in other cities in England, though Leftwich and Winsten were born in the Netherlands and Poland respectively.[99] Their families moved to London's East End while they were still children. They attended schools, then entered apprenticeships or work in the first decade of the twentieth century. Gertler joined the Slade in 1908, Bomberg and Rosenberg in 1911, and the 1910s mark their increasing involvement in literary and artistic circles in London, particularly those concentrated around the Café Royal. Rosenberg had his first pamphlet of poems, *Night and Day*, printed in 1912. The same year, Rodker had poems published in *The New Age*; his first book, *Poems*, appeared in 1914.

The war initially made little impact on their lives, but there was increasing pressure to enlist. Before the war, Gertler and Rosenberg had taken studios in Hampstead, though they were frequently back among their families in the East End. The war drove Bomberg and Rosenberg to France, Gertler to the Morrell residence in Garsington, and Rodker to Dartmoor Prison. Born in the Netherlands, Leftwich ran no risk of conscription by either English or Russian forces and alone remained in the East End. While Winsten was exempt as a teacher, he insisted on conscientious objection

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[99] William Baker; Stephen Winsten, Winsten, Stephen Samuel (Oral History), 1976, Sound Archive, Imperial War Museum, cat. no. 784, reel 5.

and was imprisoned in Wandsworth, Bedford and Wormwood Scrubs. He would

publish poems about his experiences in 1920, both as a book, *Chains*, and in the little

magazines *Voices* and *Renesans* [*Renaissance*].[100] Rosenberg was killed in France in 1918

and the post-war years saw more divergent fortunes in those left alive.

While Gertler and Rodker remained closely involved in artistic and literary

networks, Bomberg was more isolated; his move to Jerusalem in 1923 and the

subsequent change in the style of his painting cut him off further from the London

coteries of which he had been a part. Leftwich joined the Jewish Telegraphic Agency in

1921 and became increasingly involved in Yiddish literary projects, among them his

collaboration on Leo Koenig's little magazine *Renesans*. It is at this point that we can

observe Bomberg and Winsten turning to Yiddish cultural projects in a way that they

had not done previously.

The subjects of this thesis were products of the Jewish East End not only in the

sense that it formed the backdrop to their youth, but in the sense that their education,

formal and informal, was imbricated in the competing efforts of radical immigrants,

established Anglo-Jewry and orthodox religious resistance to both. Their work shows

differing reactions to this competition and it is not a coincidence that it was Leftwich

who did most to emphasise their shared upbringing in the East End. Not only did he

live in the East End longer than any of the others, but he was keener to assert an

immigrant Jewish identity separate from established Anglo-Jewry.[101]

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[100] Stephen Winsten, *Chains* (London: C. W. Daniel, Ltd, 1920); Stephen Winsten, 'Ten Poems', *Voices*, November 1919, 188–91; Stephen Winsten, 'In Gefengenish', *Renesans*, January 1920, 50.
[101] See, for example, Leftwich, 'Jews and Assimilation'.

Tracing the 'Whitechapel Boys'

Who were the Whitechapel Boys? The label has been used in passing in a range of

critical materials, obituaries, and exhibition reviews. Most of these are from the last

twenty years. Definitions vary, as do the capitalisation of the definite article and of

'boys'. There are names that come up with reasonable consistency: David Bomberg;

Mark Gertler; John Rodker; Isaac Rosenberg. Less frequently but still fairly regularly,

there are Joseph Leftwich and Stephen Winsten. More rarely one also finds one or more

of the following: Lazarus Aaronson; Jack and Selig Brodetsky; Horace Brodzky; Jacob

Epstein; Bram Fineberg; Morris Goldstein; Jacob Kramer; Ruth Lowy; Bernard

Meninsky; Albert Rothenstein; Hubert Schloss; Mark Weiner (also known as Mark

Wayner); Edward Wolfe; Alfred Wolmark; and Clare Winsten (née Clara Birnberg).[102]

The listed names have little in common except for being Jews born towards the

end of the nineteenth century who spent at least some time in England. They were all

also writers or artists in some sense, albeit a tenuous one in the case of Selig Brodetsky,

a mathematician and later president of the Jewish Board of Deputies. It is also worth

noting that there were eighteen years between the births of Epstein and Aaronson. If

Jewishness, birthdate, literary-artistic capacity and a connection with England were the

only criteria for membership of the 'Whitechapel Boys', the name would have a

peculiar over-specificity, and there would be many people who ought to be included

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[102] These names are drawn from a spreadsheet I have compiled of 43 sources that use the exact phrase 'Whitechapel Boys' (with variable capitalisation) with reference to some collection of Whitechapel artists and/or writers from the early twentieth century. The appendix of this thesis includes a frequency table for the different figures named.

but have not been. It is likelier, therefore, that different writers have brought different criteria to bear when numbering its members.

Definitions provided tend to describe a group of talented young artists and writers of the early twentieth century, the children of émigrés from the Russian Empire who grew up together in Whitechapel.[103] Occasionally, the definitions are more specific: in some cases, they are 'friends' or even a 'coterie'; in other cases, they are 'avant-garde' or 'modernist'.[104] The more specific the definitions become, the fewer names on the above list can be convincingly included. This exclusion would not be a problem, except that the refinements do not tend consistently towards a standard grouping.

In trying to arrive at a more nuanced understanding of the term, it makes sense to start with the work of Rachel Dickson and Sarah MacDougall, who have given the most sustained attention to the comparative study of those grouped under the label. They have done so in connection with their curatorial work at the Ben Uri Gallery and Museum, where they have organised exhibitions on Alfred Wolmark, David Bomberg and others.[105]

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[103] The phrasing occludes whether the artists and writers were first- or second-generation immigrants. There is a marked mixture in the above names. Putting aside the question of talent, it is worth noting that Hubert Schloss was not a child of immigrants but from an established Anglo-Jewish family. Albert Rothenstein's parents were German Jewish immigrants. Schloss and Rothenstein are two of several names on the list that did not grow up in Whitechapel.

[104] Patterson, 'John Rodker, Julius Ratner and Wyndham Lewis: The Split-Man Writes Back', p. 97; Gloria Tessler, 'Bomberg - Art That Defies Definition', *Jewish Chronicle*, 22 June 2018, p. 42; Diski; Julia Weiner, 'Isaac Rosenberg - a Portrait as an Artist', *Jewish Chronicle*, 28 March 2008, section Arts & Books, p. 41.

[105] The most relevant work consists of a co-authored 2004 article in the *Jewish Quarterly* titled 'The Whitechapel Boys', written to tie in with the Ben Uri Gallery's retrospective on the artist Alfred Wolmark; *Whitechapel at War: Isaac Rosenberg and his Circle* (2008), a book which the pair co-edited for the Ben Uri's exhibition of the same name; finally, a chapter by Sarah MacDougall in *London, Modernism, and 1914* (2010), focussing on the Jewish Section of the Whitechapel Art

The connection with the Ben Uri is apt. Although it is now based in St John's Wood, the Ben Uri Art Society was founded in 1915 in Whitechapel by the decorative artist Lazar Berson, a Jewish immigrant from Lithuania via Paris.[106] Berson proposed 'to establish a Jewish art collection in London', and the Society sought to collect 'pictures and paintings of both the older and younger Jewish artists, irrespective of school, or tendency, or period'.[107] They purchased four paintings by Bomberg in 1920 and, around the same time, Winsten took up a role as the Society's secretary.[108] Bomberg and Winsten also contributed work to Leo Koenig's Yiddish little magazine *Renesans*, which Leftwich served as secretary, and which the Ben Uri Society briefly patronised.[109] The connection to the Ben Uri has shaped the use of the term 'Whitechapel Boys'. Dickson and MacDougall's 2004 article in *The Jewish Quarterly* concluded with the remark that:

> It is […] to be hoped that the Ben Uri's continuing series of 'Whitechapel Boys' exhibitions will contribute to the reappraisal of a number of reputations. […] The most prominent of the Whitechapel Boys – Bomberg, Gertler, Rosenberg, Kramer, Meninsky and, as we can now see, Wolmark – all left their distinctive

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Gallery's 1914 exhibition *Twentieth Century Art: A Review of Modern Movements*. See: Dickson and MacDougall, 'The Whitechapel Boys'; Sarah MacDougall, '"Something Is Happening There": Early British Modernism, the Great War and the "Whitechapel Boys"', in *London, Modernism, and 1914*, ed. by Michael J. K. Walsh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 122–47; *Whitechapel at War: Isaac Rosenberg & His Circle*, ed. by Rachel Dickson and Sarah MacDougall (London: Ben Uri Gallery, 2008).

[106] David Mazower, 'Lazar Berson and the Origins of the Ben Uri Art Society', in *The Ben Uri Story from Art Society to Museum and the Influence of Anglo-Jewish Artists on the Modern British Movement* (London: Ben Uri Gallery, 2001), pp. 37–58 (pp. 44, 40–41); some of the problems with the traditional account of the Society's origins are discussed in Lily Ford, 'Dreams of Art in the Jewish East End: The Early History of the Ben Uri 1915-1930', 2015, p. 13.

[107] Judah Beach, 'Ben Uri — Its History and Activities', in *Catalogue and Survey of Activities* (London: Ben Uri Art Society, 1930), pp. 12–18 (p. 14).

[108] Beach, p. 14; Ford, p. 36.

[109] Ford, p. 31.

mark on the art of the era; some of the lesser names have yet to be

rediscovered.[110]

The 'Whitechapel Boys' label asserts continuity among the exhibitions, so that a

gallery-viewer who knew the name of one of the grouped artists, or who enjoyed one

of the Ben Uri's single-artist exhibitions, would be encouraged to come to another on

account of the perceived connection. The name supports the general project hinted at

in the final line: the elevation of forgotten names into consciousness.[111] However, the

label comes with restrictions. While MacDougall has worked to popularise the

'Whitechapel Boys', she has simultaneously named Clare Winsten 'the only

"Whitechapel Girl"'.[112] Although the mobilisation of the 'Whitechapel Boys' looks like

it is primarily directed at getting names into a more inclusive canon, codicils are

required to compensate for the term's own implicit exclusions.

Perhaps more troubling for arriving at a clear understanding of the

'Whitechapel Boys' is uncertainty over how the name originated. The *Jewish Quarterly*

article includes the following definition:

The name 'Whitechapel Boys' was invented retrospectively by one of them, the

writer Joseph Leftwich, to describe the half-dozen would-be writers and

artists who, in the years leading up to the First World War, met at the

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[110] Dickson and MacDougall, 'The Whitechapel Boys', p. 34.

[111] This can be usefully compared with the 2009 exhibition on the Whitechapel Boys held by the Whitechapel Art Gallery, curated by Nayia Yiakoumaki. The exhibition took place shortly after the gallery's expansion to include the former Whitechapel Library. The exhibition might be seen as trying to counter the interpretation that the gallery was itself complicit in the forgetting of Whitechapel's artists and their history.

[112] MacDougall, '"Something Is Happening There": Early British Modernism, the Great War and the "Whitechapel Boys"', p. 127.

Whitechapel Art Gallery, the library next door and other local cultural

institutions, such as Toynbee Hall, to discuss their ideas about art, literature

and politics.

Dickson and MacDougall go on to sketch the growth of the group:

The original group consisted of three writers – Leftwich (1892-1983), John

Rodker (1894-1955) and Samuel Weinstein (later known as Stephen Winsten) –

and the poet/painter Isaac Rosenberg (1890-1918). Most probably through

Rosenberg, who was also a pupil at the Slade, the group soon expanded to

include other painters, notably Whitechapel residents David Bomberg (1890-

1957) and Mark Gertler (1891-1939). They, in turn, introduced other students

from their wider social circle, including Jacob Kramer (1892- 1962) and Bernard

Meninsky (1891-1950), both scholarship boys from the North of England,

alongside a handful of Bomberg's Slade companions, whose names are less

well-known today: Hubert Schloss, Morris Goldstein, Mark Weiner (1888-1980)

and Clara Birnberg (1894-1989).[113]

The definition given in MacDougall's chapter is closely related, while giving some

more information on the different figures drawn under the name.[114] Both pieces take

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[113] Dickson and MacDougall, 'The Whitechapel Boys', p. 30.

[114] MacDougall, '"Something Is Happening There": Early British Modernism, the Great War and the "Whitechapel Boys"', pp. 125–26. MacDougall writes that '[t]he name the "Whitechapel Boys" was first coined by one of its own members, the writer, critic and Yiddish translator Joseph Lefkowich, known as Leftwich, to describe the half-dozen would-be writers and artists who, in the years leading up to the First World War, met at the Whitechapel Art Gallery, the library next door and other cultural institutions, particularly Toynbee Hall in Commercial Street and the Young Socialist League in Stepney, where they engaged in lively debates about art, literature and politics'. MacDougall then gives an expanded version of how Leftwich's small friendship circle overlapped with others, its essentials apparently drawn from Leftwich. In the same chapter she notes that "strong bonds of identity, ethnicity, background, training and local institutions all helped to unite the Whitechapel Boys" (p. 135).

the name 'Whitechapel Boys' as a given descriptor, which it is their work to describe

and further illuminate. Both attribute the origins of the name to Leftwich, but in neither

case do they give a source. The same attribution appears in the *Palgrave Dictionary of*

Anglo-Jewish History and William Baker's entry for Leftwich in the *Oxford Dictionary of*

National Biography.[115] The article quotes Leftwich twice, both times from his essay

'"Jewish" London Fifty Years Ago', which was published in 1965 in a book celebrating

the fiftieth anniversary of the Ben Uri Gallery. However, at no point in the chapter does

Leftwich use the phrase 'Whitechapel Boys', though he describes the groups and

events much as MacDougall will before observing that each group

> was self-contained, but most of us knew each other, and sometimes we
>
> overlapped. Somehow we all linked together.[116]

Significantly, the account of an expanding group is not fully supported by Leftwich's

essay. What he describes is a more contingent and occasional joining of his own small

group to others. The confusion perhaps comes from the description in the same essay

of how '[o]ur friends who were at the Slade brought back to Whitechapel some of their

new friends there'.[117] But the next sentence clarifies that this refers to 'Jacob Epstein […]

and Augustus John, and many others', not an accumulation of a group identity or an

expansion within a Whitechapel milieu.

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[115] *The Palgrave Dictionary of Anglo-Jewish History*, ed. by William D. Rubinstein, Michael A. Jolles, and Hilary L. Rubinstein (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 455; William Baker.
[116] Leftwich, '"Jewish" London Fifty Years Ago', p. 14. It is worth noting that Leftwich presents the observation as a quotation from his 1936 article on Rosenberg for the *Jewish Chronicle*, though the quotation is not exact. MacDougall quotes the '"Jewish" London' version in her chapter (p. 127), but without reference to the earlier piece.
[117] Leftwich, '"Jewish" London Fifty Years Ago', p. 15.

If we look for earlier uses of the name, we come across the following footnote in

Ian Parsons's *The Collected Works of Isaac Rosenberg* (1979), which glosses a reference to

Bomberg in a letter from the poet: '[l]ike Gertler and Rosenberg … a member of that

remarkable group of talented East-end painters and writers known as "the

Whitechapel Boys", which also included Joseph Leftwich, John Rodker and Samuel

Winsten'.[118] Given Parsons's dedication of the book to Leftwich, we might seek to close

the matter there, imagining some oral communication from Leftwich in which he

named the loose constellation that he would describe elsewhere in print without

naming it.

While the above communication is not impossible, there may be a less elegant

but more persuasive explanation of the term's evolution. In 1975, four years before

Parsons's *Collected Works*, three biographies of Rosenberg were published, where

previously there had been none.[119] Those of Jean Liddiard and Jean Moorcroft Wilson

describe Rosenberg's friendships with Leftwich, Rodker and Winsten, and, separately,

with Bomberg and Gertler, but they make no use of the 'Whitechapel Boys' as a term to

describe any constellation or network. The third biography, Joseph Cohen's *Journey to

the Trenches: The Life of Isaac Rosenberg 1890-1918*, is different.

The fifth chapter of Cohen's biography is titled 'The Whitechapel Boys: Jan-Feb

1911' and describes how Rosenberg met and befriended Winsten, Leftwich and

Rodker. Both Leftwich and Winsten, Cohen writes, 'were Whitechapel boys, a year or

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[118] Isaac Rosenberg, *The Collected Works of Isaac Rosenberg: Poetry, Prose, Letters, Paintings and Drawings*, p. 194n1.

[119] Joseph Cohen, *Journey to the Trenches: The Life of Isaac Rosenberg, 1890-1918* (London: Robson Books, 1975); Jean Liddiard, *Isaac Rosenberg: The Half-Used Life* (London: Gollancz, 1975); Jean Moorcroft Wilson, *Isaac Rosenberg, Poet & Painter: A Biography* (London: Cecil Woolf, 1975).

two younger than Rosenberg, from similar backgrounds'. With 'a third Whitechapel boy, John Rodker', they formed 'a close-knit threesome'.[120] Cohen uses the term 'Whitechapel boys' several times in the chapter, always with 'boys' uncapitalized. On no occasion does he suggest that the term is anything more than his own shorthand to refer to this group of three, with Rosenberg sometimes included and sometimes distinguished from them. When, for example, Cohen writes that '[w]ith the possible exception of Rodker, the Whitechapel boys kept to their politics in their associations with the Young Socialist League and left Monkey Walk [part of the Embankment known as a couples' rendezvous] to others', he evidently means to distinguish a group from their contemporaries, therefore excluding other Whitechapel boys in the broader sense of the term.[121]

Cohen's restricted use of 'Whitechapel boys' marks the first step towards its crystallisation. If we might quibble with the form or value of the label, we can at least define its reference with ease, because it maps on perfectly to the description of the exclusive group described by Leftwich, both in his diary and in later material. As Leftwich put it in a letter to Joan, written shortly before her visit: 'Rodker, Winsten and I were a three musketeers group, which became a quartette when we met Isaac Rosenberg'.[122] In a letter written to Stephen Winsten after John Rodker's death, he observed that '[t]here was Aby Feinberg and there was [Jesse] Heitner. There were others. But primarily there was Jimmy and you and I.'[123] Leftwich's description returns

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[120] Cohen, p. 35.

[121] Cohen, p. 44.

[122] Joseph Leftwich to Joan Rodker, 17 January 1972, p. 1, Joan Rodker Papers, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin, Box 2, Folder 5.

[123] Joseph Leftwich to Stephen Winsten, 18 October 1955, Joan Rodker Papers, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin, Box 2, Folder 5.

to the one he gave in 1936, where '[a] few members of other groups sometimes overlapped and became half-attached' to his own group of three, a description that draws boundaries even while admitting their porousness.[124] Three or four, for Leftwich and so for Cohen's chapter, is the decisive number.

Matters become more involved when Cohen turns to describing Rosenberg's study at the Slade. Distinguishing Rosenberg from the richer students, Cohen comments on the 'handful of working-class students' at the Slade, such as Stanley Spencer, and 'the three ill-clothed, self-conscious Whitechapel boys, used to living by their wits.'[125] What 'living by one's wits' means is not made entirely clear. What is clear is that this time Cohen uses 'Whitechapel boys' to refer to Bomberg, Gertler and Rosenberg. In doing so, he overlooks Clare Winsten, Morris Goldstein and William Roberts, who were also from the East End and whose period of study at the Slade overlapped. Cohen's use of 'Whitechapel boys' this time is unconnected to the previous except in its descriptive application (the people described in both instances are young men from the East End) and a quiet exclusion of others who might seem to fit into his argument.

Cohen uses 'Whitechapel boys' again, once more to refer to Rodker, Winsten and Leftwich, but the last significant use of the term in the biography is in a quotation from a version of an article by Leftwich published in the *Jewish Chronicle* in 1936.[126] Wilson has written that the article was probably prepared for an exhibition of Rosenberg's work in the Whitechapel Art Gallery the following year.[127] In the relevant section of the

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[124] Joseph Leftwich, 'Isaac Rosenberg', *Jewish Chronicle* (London, 6 March 1936), section supplement, pp. i–iii (p. i).

[125] Cohen, p. 59.

[126] Cohen, pp. 66, 98. Cohen refers in a note to a much longer unpublished typescript for Leftwich's article, from which he draws (p.194, note to pp.97-98).

[127] Wilson, *Isaac Rosenberg: The Making of a Great War Poet: A New Life*, p. 414n37.

article, Leftwich appears to quote from a conversation with Rosenberg, albeit more than twenty years after it can be thought to have taken place:

> Rosenberg once had a studio at Chalk Farm, which he lent to Redmond, the son of the famous Irish politician, who, in a fit of high jinks with some of his friends, smashed up a good many things in the studio that had cost Rosenberg a lot to get. It is all very well for them to play the Bohemian, he said to me. They can afford to run riot for a couple of years. And then they go back to their roots; the old life is waiting for them, good homes, family, connections. But we poor Whitechapel boys have nothing to go back to, we dare not let go.[128]

As Leftwich reports it, 'we poor Whitechapel boys' is ambiguous. The phrase could register a general precarious situation that explains a certain mixture of caution and tenacity. More specifically, we might see 'Whitechapel boys' as marking off Rosenberg and the other beneficiaries of loans and scholarships from those whose families were able and willing to pay the Slade fees. Rosenberg's 'Whitechapel boys' are

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[128] Leftwich, 'Isaac Rosenberg'. The Redmond in question would presumably be William Archer Redmond (1886-1932), son of John Redmond (1856-1918). The behaviour described fits with General Sir Lawrence Parsons's assessment of Redmond as a 'perfectly poisonous bounder', although, in 1912, when Wilson places the event, he was MP for Tyrone East, so subletting a studio in Chalk Farm would have been an eccentric if not impossible choice. Wilson's suggestion that the Redmond in question might have been the nephew of John Redmond seems misplaced, since John had only one brother to hand down 'Redmond' as a surname, Willie Redmond (1861-1917). Willie had only one son, who died, aged five, in 1891. Wilson, *Isaac Rosenberg: The Making of a Great War Poet: A New Life*, p. 137. See also: Paul Bew, 'Redmond, John Edward (1856–1918), Politician', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2011) <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/35702>; Alan O'Day, 'Redmond, William Archer (1886–1932), Politician', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2005) <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/65858>; Terence Denman, 'Redmond, William Hoey Kearney [Willie] (1861–1917), Irish Nationalist', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2006) <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/35703>.

distinguished by a set of conditions which determine their actions and mark them off as objects of sympathy, even pity, with 'poor' doubling up as literal and figurative.

In any case, the phrase sounds more like it belongs to Leftwich than it does to Rosenberg. Leftwich used the term 'Whitechapel boys' in print on another occasion, one that feels more amenable to the current use of the term, though it is still ambiguous. In the speech printed in his 80th birthday testimonial booklet, Leftwich considered the 'several generations of younger Jewish writers with whom [he had] retained contact', among them 'that very fine poet Abraham Abrahams, who was as much as I and my contemporaries, a Whitechapel boy. He died much too young.'[129] Abrahams, born in 1897, is within the generational bracket that some have set up around 'Whitechapel Boys', but Leftwich draws a distinction that indicates that any grouping done by the term is one of category use rather than a description of a coterie. The mention of Abrahams's early death points to a further function of the label of 'Whitechapel Boys'. While Rosenberg died at twenty-seven, and so hardly a boy, the word points towards a sense of promise cut short, just as it looks back to the mixture of promise and precarity that Leftwich identifies with his own youth and that of others.

By quoting Leftwich's article, Cohen brings the sum of meanings of 'Whitechapel boys' in his biography to three: firstly, the Leftwich quartet; secondly, three Whitechapel students at the Slade; thirdly, a general descriptive meaning, though one which still has resonances beyond its literal meaning. To make matters worse, all

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[129] Joseph Leftwich, 'Joseph Leftwich Replies', in *Joseph Leftwich: Messages and Tributes Received on the Occasion of His Eightieth Birthday, September 20 1972* (London: The Federation of Jewish Relief Organisations, 1972), pp. 21–24 (p. 22). On the same page, Leftwich had referred to his youth as a 'child immigrant' and 'a Whitechapel schoolboy who used to roam the Whitechapel streets with my boyhood friends'.

the above uses of the term are gathered under an index heading for 'Whitechapel boys' without visible differentiation. If we look back to the list of people who have been collected under the label of 'Whitechapel boys', not only do we find that most people named fit into one of these groups, but that the frequency of citation corresponds roughly to Cohen's use, with Bomberg, Gertler, Rosenberg and Rodker in the lead, and with Leftwich and Winsten not far behind. If this can be partly attributed to fame, the prominence of Winsten in comparison to Epstein makes it clear that something else is at work.

Here, then, we seem to have a likely starting-point for the merging of Cohen's separate groupings, and the belief that there was a cohesive group that included both Gertler and Leftwich. While the term's etymology need not vitiate or determine its current application, it is worth acknowledging the possibility that current reference to the 'Whitechapel Boys' may have its origins in an indexing error. It makes clear that the question 'who counts as a Whitechapel Boy?' is an unproductive one and instead frees us up to look for a more accurate picture of the networks and groupings operative.

It also allows us to shed some of the less helpful associations of the term. The substitution of 'Whitechapel Group' for 'Whitechapel Boys' proposed by Wilson and, subsequently, Rebecca Beasley, seeks to fix the exclusion of women in the term.[130] The 'Whitechapel Group' has some precedent in Jacob Isaacs's 1955 description of 'that brilliant East End group' in which he numbered the poet Lazarus Aaronson, Bomberg, Gertler, Rodker, Rosenberg and the singer Victor Carne.[131] Furthermore, it has the

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[130] Wilson, *Isaac Rosenberg: The Making of a Great War Poet: A New Life*, pp. 93–94; Rebecca Beasley, 'Interchapter 1: The Whitechapel Group' (unpublished, forthcoming), pp. 1–2.
[131] Isaacs, 'Mr. John Rodker'.

advantage of moving away from the slightly patronising note of 'boys', reminiscent of

Edward Marsh's 'poor little Isaac Rosenberg'.[132] The label's suggestion of a criminal

gang is similarly unfortunate and, in fact, there is a brief reference to a gang of the

1950s called the 'Whitechapel boys' in David Downes's *The Delinquent Solution: A Study*

in Subcultural Theory (1966).[133] This resonance brings to mind Pound's suggestion to

Harriet Monroe that what was 'horribly rough' in Rosenberg's style might not be

entirely useless, and might even do the magazine *Poetry* good – 'we ought to have a

real burglar'.[134] The term may also bring to mind comparisons with the Glasgow Boys

and the Windermere Boys (sometimes simply referred to as 'the boys'), very different

groupings that similarly fix their members for memory at the time of their youth.

However, 'Whitechapel Group' has its limitations as a substitute. It hinges

again on the extent to which 'group' is an adequate description of the loose and

contingent network that appears to be described by Leftwich's 'sometimes we

overlapped' and '[s]omehow we all linked together'. Stephen Winsten, interviewed in

the 1970s, would describe 'a group of about 20, 25' but in terms that suggest something

equally diffuse.[135] For Winsten, his own success and that of the 'little group in that area'

took place within a larger 'struggle between the destructive and the constructive'. The

constructive side was represented by the group's achievements as creators, broadly

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[132] Edward Marsh and Christopher Hassall, *Ambrosia and Small Beer: The Record of a Correspondence between Edward Marsh and Christopher Hassall* (London: Longmans, 1964), p. 53.
[133] David M. Downes, *The Delinquent Solution: A Study in Subcultural Theory*, revised edition (Oxford: Routledge, 2013), p. 201.
[134] Undated letter stamped 20 September 1915 by *Poetry* staff, quoted in Wilson, *Isaac Rosenberg: The Making of a Great War Poet: A New Life*, p. 105.
[135] Stephen Winsten, 'Winsten, Stephen Samuel (Oral History)', reel 3.

understood; the destructive side could be seen in Wonderland, the converted musical
hall that held boxing matches until it burned down around 1917.[136]

Evidence is scanty for a sustained and coherent grouping any larger than the
Leftwich quartet. Perhaps for this reason, critics have used single occasions to focus
discussion of the 'Whitechapel Boys'. Following Lisa Tickner, MacDougall and Dickson
use the 'Jewish Section' of the 1914 Whitechapel Art Gallery exhibition as a focal
point.[137] Bomberg and Epstein organised the section, which included Jewish artists
from London and Paris. Naturally, the grouping discussed is one of visual artists.
Rosenberg was exhibited, but the remaining members of the quartet are excluded.
More plausible long-term projects based, at least initially, in Whitechapel and built
around a conscious Jewish identity in the arts can be found. 1915 saw the creation both
of the short-lived *Jewish Association of Arts and Sciences* and of the more successful Ben

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[136] Stephen Winsten, 'Winsten, Stephen Samuel (Oral History)', reel 3. Winsten explicitly
mentions Rosenberg and alludes to Rodker, but makes no reference to Leftwich or the quartet
so central to Leftwich's diary and later recollections. In addition to Rodker, those he refers to
without naming are Rose Rosenberg, 'the private secretary to Ramsay MacDonald when Prime
Minister', Jesse Heitner, 'editor of the Sphere', a film producer, who may be Isidore Ostrer, and
the scholar Jacob Isaacs. According to Winsten, 'that was that little group in that area'. When
asked if they were 'all boys [Winsten] would have gone to school with', Winsten redirected the
emphasis to 'the neighbourhood', before mentioning a further member who returned to Russia
and wrote 'the authoritative life of Lenin'. This may be Joseph Fineberg, mentioned in
Leftwich's diary, who moved to Russia in 1918 and became a prominent translator of Lenin into
English. However, I have not found evidence for the biography referred to by Winsten.
Fineberg's role in the foundation of the Communist International and his report on Britain can
be seen in *Founding the Communist International: Proceedings and Documents of the First Congress:
March 1919*, ed. by John Riddell (New York: Anchor Foundation, 1987).
[137] Tickner, pp. 158-163 especially; see also Juliet Steyn, 'Inside-out: Assumptions of "English"
Modernism in the Whitechapel Art Gallery, London 1914', in *Art Apart: Art Institutions and
Ideology Across England and North America*, ed. by Marcia Pointon (Manchester: Manchester
University Press, 1994), pp. 212–30; and Janet Wolff, *AngloModern: Painting and Modernity in
Britain and the United States* (New York; London: Cornell University Press, 2003), p. 143.

Uri Art Society.[138] Both were noticeably eclectic in their criteria for art, rather than strictly traditional or experimental in their tastes.[139]

The most persuasive sustained instantiation of the 'embryonic East End avant-garde' described by Tickner is probably to be found in the meetings held in John Rodker and Sonia Cohen's flat on Osborn Street between 1913 and 1915.[140] They are described in Cohen's memoirs and have been discussed by some biographers since then.[141] Inspired by the example of two followers of Raymond Duncan, whom they had met through the meetings organised by *The Freewoman*, Rodker and Cohen entered into an informal marriage, despite Bomberg and Roberts's attempts to dissuade Cohen. The couple moved into a room above a stationer's. Cohen described the room, dubbed by Bomberg the 'slot-meter' for its size:

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[138] Leftwich, '"Jewish" London Fifty Years Ago', pp. 13–14.

[139] Throughout this thesis I occasionally refer to 'avant-garde' or 'modernist' writers and artists, writings and artworks. I do so with an awareness of both the extensive competition over their definition and the breadth of their application. Given the inconsistency of its application contemporary with the subjects of this thesis, there is an element of quixotry to attempts to constrain its meanings too rigidly. At the same time, their usefulness as categories seems to me to depend to a certain degree on their power to distinguish works and creators. As I use them, 'modernism' and 'modernist' refer to formally experimental work in various media, but particularly associated with T. S. Eliot, Wyndham Lewis and Ezra Pound and taking in its later institutionalisation. It thus attempts to hold in focus both contemporary practice and the swift creation of 'modernism' as a historical period. The twin emphasis takes on most importance in my fifth chapter. As I use 'avant-garde' it means something similar to 'modernism', but less constrained to the canonical modernists, and with a greater emphasis on conscious oppositionality and social intervention. Institutionalisation is considered as a meaningful dilution of the avant-garde in a way it is not for modernism. Critical discussions I have found useful for considering the question include Raymond Williams, *The Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists*, ed. by Tony Pinkney (London; New York: Verso, 1989); David Peters Corbett, *The Modernity of English Art: 1914-1930* (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 1997); Mark Wollaeger, 'Introduction', in *The Oxford Handbook of Global Modernisms*, ed. by Mark Wollaeger and Matt Eatough (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 3–22.

[140] Tickner, p. 146.

[141] Rodker (née Cohen), pp. 144–46; Wilson, *Isaac Rosenberg: The Making of a Great War Poet: A New Life*, pp. 181–83.

Our furniture we contrived from boxes, which we sandpapered and then covered with blue and scarlet paint. I stitched to the casement cloth that covered our bed, scarlet bands in the key pattern Helen wore on her Greek robe. On the wall over the mantelshelf we pinned a poem, printed and sold by Harold Munro's [sic] Poetry Book Shop, about a goblin whose eyes were green glass beads ['Overheard on a Salt Marsh']. Jimmie [i.e. Rodker] was at that time friendly with the artist and writer Wyndham Lewis, and on the larger walls we had the latter's *'Timon of Athens'* woodcuts.[142]

Between Lewis, Monro, and the Greek key pattern, the decoration of the room expresses the commitment to London's pre-war avant-garde as a collection of people and interests rather than any definite aesthetic credo. The room became a salon that '[a]t evening time […] was crowded with young men' who 'sat on the unsprung divan, balanced on the scarlet and blue boxes or squatted on the rush floor matting' and 'talked and talked art, religion and politics'.[143] With 'money that otherwise would have paid for meals', Cohen bought 'freshly ground coffee' and 'almond cakes of the delicious variety baked by East End confectioners.' William Roberts would sit quietly with a knowing smile eating fish and chips from 'newspaper saturated with vinegar', a feature that Cohen suggests dissuaded Gertler from attending the meetings more than

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[142] Rodker (née Cohen), p. 144. Cohen describes Helen as a follower of Raymond Duncan, and her example of living unmarried with a man was influential on Cohen.

[143] Rodker (née Cohen), pp. 145–46. The memoirs note that these 'young men' included 'the "Whitechapel Boys" as they would later be known'. An endnote by the editors (p.302n45) identifies them as '[a] group of Anglo-Jewish artists and writers including Mark Gertler, Isaac Rosenberg, David Bomberg, Joseph Leftwich, Jacob Kramer, Morris Goldstein, Stephen Winsten, John Rodker, Lazarus Aaronson and Clara Birnberg'. However, the difficulty of dating the memoir (there was a manuscript of some sort in 1941 and she went on 'editing it and working on it until at least the 1970s' (p.4)) means that it is hard to gauge the significance or application of the reference. Given the discussion of Gertler, Cohen's use implicitly excludes him from membership.

once. Clare Winsten's memoirs also mention attending once, and she describes with

some acidity how those present 'discussed or rather "aired" their knowledge of

psychology, art and "the movements" in literature.'[144]

These meetings are a sufficiently important part of the history of the British avant-garde that they should take their place in memory alongside their West End equivalents, but the presence of Roberts should alert us to the

Detail from Arkell's map of the Jewish East End, including Osborn Street. The cover of Rodker's *Poems* (1914) announced that it was '[t]o be had of the Author 1 Osborn Street Whitechapel'.

sense in which they diverge from some of the meanings commonly attached to the

'Whitechapel Boys'. Beasley has observed that '[d]iscussion of the Whitechapel

Group's collective identity has concentrated almost exclusively on its Jewish

ethnicity'.[145] Roberts was born in Hackney and attended the Slade on a London County

Council scholarship. There is no sense from Cohen's descriptions of the meetings that

Roberts was marked out by not being Jewish; it was his mannerisms that set him apart.

When she describes evenings with Rodker, Roberts and Bomberg in Bomberg's studio,

[144] Clare Winsten, 'Memoirs', p. 52, Whitechapel Gallery Archive; See also Wilson, *Isaac Rosenberg: The Making of a Great War Poet: A New Life*, p. 182.
[145] Beasley, 'Interchapter 1: The Whitechapel Group', p. 3.

there is an identification of social position and aesthetics, but it is one of class rather than ethnicity:

> 'Down with romanticism and sentimentality!' was the cry. This was not to be interpreted in the 'naughty boy' manner of painter C. R. W. Nevinson and that of the brown bread man Dr Allinson's son [i.e. Adrian Allinson]; these two young men thought they were being suitably anti-romantic by dressing in the clothes of the East End 'tough' and then visiting Music Halls for the sole purpose of interrupting the performance. Mere gentlemanly undergraduate high jinks we called this.[146]

In the same key, Gertler's embarrassment at Roberts's fish and chips is attributed to him being 'too genteel' for the circle.

Of course, the emphasis on class rather than Jewishness may reflect Cohen's priorities as much as that of the gatherings in either her room or Bomberg's studio. As a child, Cohen had been sent to a boarding school in Newington Green set up by the missionary John Wilkinson with the aim of converting Jews to Christianity.[147] Her memoirs describe the physical abuse, hypocrisy and antisemitism she found there. While Cohen never became a Christian, she did not have the same Jewish education that we know Rosenberg, Leftwich and others received. The South Place Ethical Society and Young Socialist League were there for her instead.

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[146] Rodker (née Cohen), p. 140. Adrian Allinson's father was Dr Thomas Allinson, an advocate of vegetarianism, contraception and wholemeal bread. His mother, Anna, was a Jewish painter from Berlin.

[147] Rodker (née Cohen), p. 25; Samuel Hinds Wilkinson, *The Life of John Wilkinson, the Jewish Missionary* (London: Morgan & Scott, 1908). Wilkinson locates the 'Home and School for poor Jewish Children' at Cromwell Lodge, 27 Newington Green (p.212).

Cohen's memoirs make a useful counterpoint to Leftwich's reminiscences.

While Leftwich's emphasis is more on the specific inheritance from an upbringing

among Jewish immigrants, both are attentive to the shaping influences of location and

milieu. In his 1936 article, Leftwich embeds Rosenberg in that milieu: Rosenberg may

stand out from his contemporaries, but he should not be lifted out of Whitechapel. In

the piece on Rosenberg, Leftwich dedicates a whole paragraph to Lazarus Aaronson,

whom Leftwich met the same month as Rosenberg and whom Leftwich identifies as

'one of the most significant English poets, marked out by his mystical intensity'.[148]

Although Leftwich begins the article with Edith Sitwell's evaluation of Rosenberg as

'one of the two great poets killed in the war' along with Wilfred Owen, Leftwich's

concern is not with Rosenberg as a war-poet, but as a product of Whitechapel.[149]

Anecdotes, physical description and the linking of his name to those he knew are all

deployed to give Rosenberg a firm actuality, a life before the war. Rosenberg is not to

become just another poet in uniform, though the effect is somewhat undercut by the

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[148] Leftwich, 'Isaac Rosenberg', p. i.
[149] Leftwich, 'Isaac Rosenberg', p. i.

decision of the *Jewish Chronicle* to illustrate Leftwich's article with a photograph of Rosenberg in a peaked cap.

The first page of Joseph Leftwich's article on Isaac Rosenberg in *The Jewish Chronicle*, 1936.

The article recalls that Leftwich, Winsten and Rodker were 'intensely proud of [Rosenberg]', and that the teenagers had solemnly concluded one night in 1911 that Rosenberg was a genius. In this respect, Rosenberg's friends are distinguished from the established poets and 'the upper strata of Anglo-Jewry' who might praise Rosenberg (especially posthumously) but did so belatedly and with an edge of condescension.[150] Leftwich was critical of established Anglo-Jewry, and not only in its treatment of Rosenberg. In the introduction to his 1956 translation of Rudolf Rocker's *The London*

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[150] Leftwich, 'Isaac Rosenberg', p. ii.

Years (1952), he was forthright: 'I belong to the East End generation which revolted against the indifference and condescension of the "West End" towards us'.[151] Although his stridency lessened towards the end of his life, Leftwich's writing on Rosenberg and others from his childhood aimed to counter not only the assimilation of Jewish writers and artists into English nationalist narratives, but also the absorption of Whitechapel Jews' lives and works into a more general Anglo-Jewish narrative.

Leftwich's key premises are hard to fault: Rosenberg was a product of his youth in the East End; during his youth, the East End saw the development of extensive literary and artistic activity; and the character of that development was in some respects distinct from contemporary developments in other parts and strata of London culture. While the 'Whitechapel Boys' label points usefully to some of these same elements, it is a term of uncertain, convoluted and apparently recent history. It seems to have expanded from different coherent categories with varying degrees of overlap, the effect of which can be seen in the vagueness and inconsistency of its contemporary application. Where more capacious accounts of the 'Whitechapel Boys' or the 'Whitechapel Group' have been attempted, they have generally turned to the institutions of the Jewish East End, to 'how in that setting art/education/politics interconnected and were constructed as options', and the diversity of ways in which the loose network described by Leftwich as well as the smaller units described by him and by Cohen responded to that setting.[152]

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[151] Rudolf Rocker, *The London Years*, trans. by Joseph Leftwich (London: Robert Anscombe & Co., 1956), p. 28.

[152] Andrew Crozier, 'John Rodker (1894-1955)', p. 6, Joan Rodker Papers, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin, Box 1, Folder 7. This dossier on the poet was sent with a letter to Joan Rodker dated 3 September 1985.

Towards the Whitechapel Renaissance: Jacob Isaacs's Implicit Criteria

If the 'Whitechapel Boys' at its most useful points to a larger social complex rather than a discrete set of individuals, it might be that a new term will prove better-suited to the task. In what follows, I want to outline some reasons why talking in terms of a Whitechapel Renaissance might achieve such an object. It is not my intention to present this alternative as unproblematic so much as to suggest that the problems that it generates might be more productive than those coming out of the 'Whitechapel Boys'.

In suggesting that we talk of a 'renaissance', I am making use of a term which had international currency in describing cultural movements in the period and beyond. Furthermore, there were discussions of Jewish and British renaissances, in which we can see the subjects of this thesis implicated. One of the clearest examples of the direct relevance of the term is the name of Koenig's magazine. Its title asserts a self-conscious proclamation of renaissance, one made in London's Jewish East End, but which the magazine's contents implied stretched far wider. However, I want to filter discussion of 'renaissance' through an instance of its deployment by Jacob Isaacs, a literary scholar occasionally cited as a Whitechapel Boy.[153] Isaacs's use of the term appeared in the tribute he wrote to Joseph Leftwich on the latter's seventieth birthday. Leftwich found the tribute sufficiently memorable to quote it approvingly fifteen years later.[154] In the tribute, Isaacs observed that both he and Leftwich had

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[153] Dickson and MacDougall, *Whitechapel at War: Isaac Rosenberg & His Circle*, p. 60; Rubinstein, Jolles, and Rubinstein, p. 455.
[154] Leftwich, 'Autobiographical Note', p. 4.

known Isaac Rosenberg, Lazarus Aaronson, David Bomberg, Jacob Kramer, Mark Gertler, John Rodker and Jacob Epstein, all poets, painters, sculptors and men of spirit, and though neither of us may have been fully worthy of such company, we all shared in that renaissance in modern Jewry of which, in Isaac Rosenberg and David Bomberg, even the world outside has taken cognizance. 'The stone which the builders refused has become the headstone of the corner'.[155]

The usefulness of Isaacs's tribute is partly that it provides a retrospective, collective assessment of several of the key writers and artists discussed above, written by a contemporary with some claim to membership. As such, it achieves the result aimed at by the attribution of the term 'Whitechapel Boys' to Leftwich. In the emphases and occlusions of Isaacs's tribute, it also serves as an early criticism of the writers and artists and a map to some of the priorities shaping our understanding of them.

Isaacs's renaissance is ostensibly one that takes in all 'modern Jewry', although the use of the demonstrative determiner 'that' allows the possibility that Isaacs is pointing to one 'renaissance in modern Jewry' among several. The renaissance in question would then be the one in which he and Leftwich shared, and the one which has won the world's attention despite initial rejection. Whether we are dealing with a consciously delimited renaissance or not, it is a renaissance in which London's East End emerges as a significant location, although not an exclusive focus. We recognise the names Isaacs lists from discussions of the Whitechapel Boys, including the cases

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[155] Jacob Isaacs, 'From J. Isaacs, Emeritus Professor of English Language and Literature in the University of London and Sometimes Professor of English Literature in the Hebrew University of Jerusalem', in *Joseph Leftwich: Messages and Tributes Received on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday, September 20, 1962* (London: Federation of Jewish Relief Organisations, 1962), p. 4.

where the label feels less appropriate. Rosenberg, Aaronson, Bomberg, Gertler and Rodker all grew up in the East End, as did Leftwich and Isaacs; Kramer and Epstein, however, had little connection to the area. Kramer lived most of his life in Leeds, where he worked variously as a portraitist and as a teacher in the Leeds School of Art, renamed for Kramer several years after the artist's death. Epstein, who grew up in New York's Lower East Side, spent more time in London than Kramer, but he never lived in the East End. On the other hand, both artists knew Bomberg and Gertler, and Kramer also studied at the Slade. Both also received loans from the JEAS. Epstein stands out as belonging to a different generation as well as a different milieu: he was ten years older than any of the others, who were all born in the 1890s. However, there are at least ties of acquaintance, the same which grant Leftwich and Isaacs vicarious membership in the renaissance described.

Isaacs's main criteria for inclusion seem to be Jewishness, birthplace, age and the perceived quality of output, but there are others that bind together the listed members and hint at the exclusion of others. Perhaps the most striking absence is that of any female writers or artists, an absence underlined by Isaacs's 'men of spirit' and reproduced in the label 'Whitechapel Boys'. We could explain the absence simply in terms of an oversight due to sexism, and this must be part of the answer, but there may be other factors to consider. Sorrel Kerbel begins her entry on Anglo-Jewish women writers of the twentieth century with the abrupt remark that '[t]here was no renaissance of Jewish women's writing in Britain in the early twentieth century,' arguing that it was only after World War II that '[w]riting by Anglo-Jewish women [...]

flourished.'[156] We do not need to accept Kerbel's statement as it stands. The writings in Yiddish of the journalist and poet Basheve Mastboym and the philosopher and writer N. M. Seedo serve as important counterpoints, as does the work of the prolific translator and novelist Hannah Berman, though her legacy remains controversial.[157] Isaacs shows no interest in Yiddish literature so, even had they been men, they probably would not have been included. The extent to which we entertain the possibility that Isaacs accurately described a renaissance restricted by gender should, however, point us towards an investigation into where women's labour was being directed, if it was not into the arts. It should also direct us towards the forces that have obscured the work of women who did write and paint.

Two further criteria require notice. Firstly, the only writers listed are grouped under the heading 'poets', although the term is inadequate to the range of Rodker's literary activities for one. The emphasis accords with Isaacs's priorities elsewhere. In the first of a series of lectures on modern literature that Isaacs recorded for the BBC Third Programme in 1949, he proceeded from criticising the 'over-simplified and diagrammatic' character of most literary history to clarify that, 'by literature one means, of course, poetry'.[158] The status he affords poetry means that he sidesteps a possible literary history for the novels and memoirs of the Jewish East End, one that might have taken in Israel Zangwill, then later Willy Goldman, Simon Blumenfeld, Wolf Mankowitz and Alexander Baron, most of whom also worked as screenwriters.

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[156] Sorrel Kerbel, 'Anglo-Jewish Writers: Twentieth Century' in *Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia* <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia> [accessed September 19, 2017].
[157] Berman is described as 'a singularly unsuccessful translator of Sholem-Aleykhem and a thorn in the sides of his widow' in Prager, *Yiddish Culture in Britain: A Guide*, p. 152.
[158] Jacob Isaacs, *The Background of Modern Poetry: Delivered in the BBC Third Programme* (London: G. Bell & Sons, 1951), p. 2.

But Isaacs's understanding of literary history in terms of a recurring struggle between a small vanguard of poetry and a resistant public inclines him to give priority to an art-form whose symbolic capital and more established history outstrip its popular consumption.

Secondly, Isaacs's list is composed of first- or second-generation immigrants from the Russian Empire. He makes no mention of artists or writers of roughly the same generation from Anglo-Jewish families that predated the immigration of the 1880s, such as Siegfried Sassoon, Mina Loy or the painter John Henry Amschewitz. With this in mind, we can see a further meaning to Isaacs's reference to 'the world outside' and to his quotation from Psalms. Bomberg and Rosenberg were refused not only because they were Jews but because they were the children of poor immigrants. They were refused not only by English Gentiles, but by middle-class Anglo-Jewry. In turn, we can see Jewish immigrants as becoming the headstone for Anglo-Jewry specifically as well as for the English more broadly. There is a special frisson to Isaacs's quotation from Psalm 118 – '[t]he stone which the builders refused has become the headstone of the corner' – on account of its application in the Gospels. Jesus quotes it in the Parable of the Tenants to signify the spiritual failure of the Pharisees, and the transference of the kingdom of God to 'a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof' (Matthew 21:43).[159] Christian exegesis has interpreted it in a supersessionist light and

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[159] The translation is that of the Authorized Version. The translation of 'ἔθνει' as 'nation' in the passage obscures that the group referred to are the Jewish people as opposed to their leaders. Isaacs had himself addressed the subject of the Bible's translation into English in the two chapters he wrote in *The Bible in Its Ancient and English Versions*, ed. by H. Wheeler Robinson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940), pp. 146–234; see also 'Ἔθνος, Ους, Τό', ed. by Frederick William Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

the end of God's exclusive covenant with Jews.[160] Isaacs's use of the quotation thus

works both to reverse the supersessionist argument, since it is the Jews that are once

more the headstone, while playing more sympathetically off Jesus's argument insofar

as it is understood in terms of class. According to the latter argument, the overlooked

'publicans and harlots' take the place of the high priests. Alternatively, and perhaps

more in keeping with the breadth implied in the 'renaissance in modern Jewry', we

might see a spiritual rescue of Anglo-Jewry achieved by immigrants and the children

of immigrants.

Isaacs's application of the term 'renaissance' is polemic, as any use of the term

must be. For there to be a rebirth, there must be death, dormancy, or decadence. As

such, the 'renaissance in modern Jewry' has some analogy with the rebirth of the arts

variously hoped for, demanded and celebrated in the early twentieth century. Sue

Malvern dates the belief in an artistic renaissance tied to the war from 1916, becoming

especially powerful in the years following 1918, but the language of renaissance to

gloss recent or projected literary and artistic developments was already well

established.[161] Isaacs's work as a scholar, which spanned from the editing of early

modern texts to lectures and essays on contemporary literature, gives his own use of

the term 'renaissance' special significance. His lectures quote Aaronson and Rosenberg

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[160] See, for example, John Charles Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels*, 4 vols (London: William Hunt and Company, 1887), I: ST. MATTHEW AND ST. MARK, pp. 275–79. Ryle understands the parable as a rebuke to the Jews in general but warns the reader that 'this nation of England' might come to incur God's punishment in the same way.

[161] Sue Malvern, *Modern Art, Britain and the Great War: Witnessing, Testimony, and Remembrance* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2004), p. 12; for examples of applications of 'renaissance' to contemporary projects, see D. H. Lawrence, 'The Georgian Renaissance', *Rhythm*, 2.14 (1913), xvii–xx; Ezra Pound, 'The Renaissance: I - The Palette', *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*, 5.5 (1915), 227–33 (p. 228) Pound glosses 'renaissance' as 'awakening' and identifies such awakenings in various centuries, suggesting that 'this century may find a new Greece in China'.

and explicitly identify the situation of modern poetry with the English Renaissance. Isaacs develops the point by identifying T. S. Eliot as the inheritor of Edmund Spenser's title as 'the type of the Modern Poet'.[162] But the specificity of Isaacs's renaissance and the implicit criteria of his list mean that we cannot simply see its members as Eliot's attendant lords. If the members have access to a new English Renaissance, theirs is also a Jewish renaissance.

Isaacs's 'renaissance in modern Jewry' drew on more specific precedents. Perhaps most importantly, Martin Buber had announced in a 1901 essay that a 'Jewish Renaissance' was under way.[163] Buber drew, already somewhat belatedly, on Jacob Burkhardt's *Die Kultur der Renaissance in Italien* (1860), with both men interpreting 'renaissance' in terms of a spontaneous spiritual revolution.[164] It is this renaissance that sits most clearly behind the 'renesans' asserted by the title of Koenig's magazine, one in which spiritual rebirth is tied to a material and political rebirth, but put first in terms of both chronology and significance. As well as Buber's Zionist articulation of a Jewish renaissance, Kenneth Moss has shown how the language of 'renaissance' was used to characterise projects by various Jewish writers and artists in early twentieth-century Russia.[165]

The idea of a 'renaissance' gestures towards a particular time and place and hints at a set of enabling conditions for art and literature even while its possible

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[162] Isaacs (1951), p.5.

[163] Martin Buber, 'Jewish Renaissance' in *The First Buber: Youthful Zionist Writings of Martin Buber*, ed. and trans. by Gilya G. Schmidt (New York: Syracuse UP, 1999), pp.30-34.

[164] Asher D. Biemann, 'The Problem of Tradition and Reform in Jewish Renaissance and Renaissancism', *Jewish Social Studies*, n.s., 8.1 (Autumn, 2001), pp.58-87 (p.66).

[165] Kenneth Moss, *Jewish Renaissance in the Russian Revolution* (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London: Harvard University Press, 2009), pp. 51, 58, 83, 192.

analogies proliferate. However, the word's use as a starting-point for material analysis may seem hindered by its spiritual freight. Nor does Isaacs do much to distinguish the idea of a renaissance from one of a troupe of geniuses sprung up from the ground. His 'men of spirit' hovers between simple approbation of 'good fellows' and something more spiritual proper, the latter sense encouraged by the biblical quotation. The language of 'renaissance' risks merely shifting the mystical element from the *ex nihilo* creation of individual genius to an equally inexplicable spiritual change across a nation or people. Isaacs does, though, seem aware of the risk. If some 'men of spirit' are singled out, they are related and built into a larger architectural structure. In fact, the list functions as a gesture of inclusion whereby Isaacs and Leftwich can share some of the responsibility and honour for the spiritual change, while the causes of that change are left unnamed.

The attempt to arrive at a total demystification of 'renaissance' might miss the point. A review of the 1914 Whitechapel Art Gallery exhibition remarked that

Art, like life, is at any rate more exciting in Whitechapel than Piccadilly. Something is happening there and nothing at all at Burlington House.[166]

If the sense is primarily that of a more general comment on the passé work of the Royal Academy, the '[s]omething is happening there' hints at a sense of a developing phenomenon, defying easy or precise expression, active in art but not restricted to it, and attached to the locus of Whitechapel. A renaissance may be proclaimed by its participants and observed by outsiders, but its power as a label depends more on the

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[166] 'Challenge of Whitechapel to Piccadilly: An Exhibition in the East', *The Times*, 8 May 1914, p. 4; the article is discussed in Steyn; see also MacDougall, '"Something Is Happening There": Early British Modernism, the Great War and the "Whitechapel Boys"'.

advocacy of latecomers and also-rans. The Jewish East End has undergone a similar

transformation by the same hands. Even during the period under study, its

accumulated symbolic meanings have played a decisive role in how builders of

reputations, coteries and canons have interacted with those who grew out of its

ferment. The main advantage of 'renaissance' in this instance is that it can point both to

the actual conditions under which cultural production developed in the Jewish East

End, and to the narratives built around them and tying them together.

The Whitechapel Renaissance and Renaissancism

When we turn to the careers of the artists and writers of early twentieth-century

Whitechapel, it can be tricky to avoid the sense that what we are dealing with are

narratives of promise thwarted or misdirected, rather than anything as lofty or fully-

realised as a renaissance. In the pattern of initial support and enthusiasm that fades

away, it comes close to the narrative shape of John Rothenstein's lives of Gertler and

Bomberg: the former, the painter of talent who loses his way; the latter, the painter of

talent who falls into undeserved neglect.[167] Houston A. Baker Jr.'s analysis of the

'failure' of the Harlem Renaissance should alert us to a potential rhetorical trap. As

Baker notes, 'a too optimistic faith in the potential of art may in fact be as signal a mark

of British and American modernism's "failure" as the Harlem Renaissance.'[168] Baker

challenges narratives that would identify the Harlem Renaissance with failure by

turning attention away from the valuation of specific works of art by which the

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[167] John Rothenstein, *Modern English Painters,* volume II: Nash to Bawden (London: Macdonald, 1984)

[168] Houston A. Baker Jr., *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 14.

renaissance stands or falls, a valuation normally expressed in terms of the extent to which those works correspond to the literary styles of Joyce, Eliot or Pound. Instead, he credits the Harlem Renaissance with the birth of 'renaissancism', a nationalistic spirit among African-American artists that made them aware of the shape of the discursive field into which their work would enter, the forms of hostility it would face, and which taught them what tactics could be employed to adapt to or defy the hostility.[169]

It would be possible to graft a similar narrative onto the renaissance in Whitechapel. Gertler's paintings of East End Jews could pair with Countee Cullen's mastery of extant form. Leftwich's embrace of Yiddish, like Koenig's 'renesans', could be seen as the deformation of mastery, a defiant rejection of extant unsympathetic forms, which simultaneously accepted exclusion from a Gentile canon and asserted the expressive power of a Jewish language. As such, we might draw a comparison to DuBois's integration of spirituals into *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903). The aesthetic analogy is made more attractive by the available sociological analogy: that of a ghettoised, vilified ethnic minority in a metropolitan centre of power. However, there are limits to the correspondence. For now, at least, Rosenberg is the only obvious example of a writer that has been taken as the template for a Jewish poetics, a legacy probably most evident in the critical writing and poetry of Jon Silkin. While Bomberg and Gertler both painted pieces that can and have been interpreted in terms of Jewish immigration, the examples tend to be restricted to their pre-war work.

The process of acculturation worked differently for African Americans and for Jews in England, with different engines working for and against that acculturation.

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[169] Baker Jr., p. 91.

Baker's theorisation of renaissance is too attentive to the specifics of Harlem to allow

an easy transfer to Whitechapel. The more persuasive renaissances in light of which we

can understand the Jewish East End are those with which it overlapped: narratives of

cultural renaissance as they received inflection in England, and the more specifically

Jewish renaissance we traced from Buber to Koenig. If there is a renaissance to be

identified in Whitechapel, then that definition must rest not on its obedience to a set of

reproducible conditions, but in its specificity and the way those specifics accumulated

a mythology around them. We can set limitations to the Jewish East End in time and

space, but its legend outstrips them: an overlay of fiction, newspaper reports, anecdote

and nostalgia. By focussing on the conditions of the development, publication and

reception of the work of Gertler, Rodker, Rosenberg and Winsten, and on their

engagements with different factions of London's literary milieux, we should be able

not only to implicate the mythology of the Jewish East End in its ephemera and

contingencies, but to shape that mythology into a more accurate and illuminating form.

Thesis overview

The chapters that follow can be best understood as a series of case studies in how

writers and artists from London's Jewish East End engaged with different factions of

the city's cultural producers. In each case, this becomes at the same time a question of

how those factions engaged with them and their work. I make no apology for the

absence of an argument running across the sections, since the study of the term

'Whitechapel Boys' has shown that the idea of a unified project among them, aesthetic

or otherwise, is misplaced. The looseness of the network is reflected in their

experiences and the reception of its members, where extreme variety is balanced by recurring features and recognisable trends.

My first chapter looks at Stephen Winsten and, more broadly, the literary coterie overlapping two post-war little magazines: the English-language Georgian magazine *Voices* and the Yiddish-language *Renesans*. *Voices* was characterised by its pursuit of a literary revival led by young men returned from the war; *Renesans* also pursued a cultural revival but understood that revival in terms of a Jewish art intimately bound to the fate of the Jewish people. The chapter considers the space that the two magazines provided for the work of Jewish writers and artists and seeks to understand what conditions were attendant on that provision. The appearance of two versions of the same article by Stephen Winsten in the two magazines serves as a useful instance for their comparison, while also reflecting the symbiosis of the magazines. In uncovering the close links between *Voices* and *Renesans*, this chapter makes an important step towards understanding how Yiddish cultural production in London related to English-language cultural production. It also challenges the idea, first popularised by T. S. Eliot, that Georgianism was an insular and monoglot affair, an idea which in turn has laid the groundwork for a tradition of seeing polyglot cosmopolitanism as a distinctive feature of modernism, a myth that continues to inform even capacious understandings of modernism.

My second chapter looks at Mark Gertler's fictionalised appearance in Gilbert Cannan's novel *Mendel* (1916) and in D. H. Lawrence's *Women in Love* (1920). All three were associated with the coterie based around the Morrell residence at Garsington, and Cannan and Lawrence are significant figures in the small industry of *romans à clef*

produced by and modelled on the Garsington coterie. The chapter analyses how the historical Gertler was adapted and integrated into the structure of the two novels, while measuring those versions against the art Gertler himself produced. The character and extent of the reference to Gertler in Cannan and Lawrence's works allows us to observe the use of Gertler's artistic reputation simultaneous with the shaping of that reputation. It also shows us two models of antisemitic discourse, and how that discourse was interwoven with the writers' aesthetic concerns.

My third chapter begins by considering Rodker's involvement with several of the Men of 1914 in the years after the First World War through his work in the Ovid Press, as well as briefly discussing his appearance in Wyndham Lewis's *The Tyro* (1921-22). In the second part of the chapter, I turn to two prose-works by Rodker written in the thirties, and describe a development from an internal critique of the avant-garde in his poems to one in which the heterodoxy of the avant-garde writer and the conscientious objector is studied within a larger social system. I show that, throughout his career, Rodker was attentive to the way in which the writer was implicated and bound to his surroundings and the ways in which gestures of masculinist defiance served as safety-valves for the maintenance of stable conditions, a recognition of the limits of the avant-garde that make him an expert critic of it.

My fourth chapter addresses the poetry of Isaac Rosenberg and studies the ways in which the charge of obscurity has been attached to his poetry and reputation from his lifetime onwards. Against readings which focus exclusively on his poems written in France during the First World War, I show how the poetry that Rosenberg wrote during the war was consistent with early poetic priorities while responsive to

the contingencies of his poetic development. I look in detail at *Colour*, a magazine primarily significant for its high-quality colour reproductions of artwork, and one of the few places where Rosenberg's poems were published while he was alive. I correct Leftwich's account of the role the magazine played for him and his contemporaries, then show how Rosenberg's poems took on an antiphonal position to the magazine, while also using its material and outlook to develop his own poetics. As such it offers an alternative genealogy for the moments of documentary lucidity associated with Rosenberg's most anthologised war poems. I end the chapter with close readings of two of Rosenberg's war poems and demonstrate the continued importance of obscurity as generative rather than undermining in his work, and how it allowed for an account of death ironically at odds with those that have been brought into the discussion of Rosenberg's life and poetry since.

In my final chapter, I study Rosenberg's critical afterlife. After death, Rosenberg and his poetry were mobilised into the increasingly antagonistic factions of Georgians and modernists, with the status of war-poet and Jew also relevant. I compare the posthumous appearance of his work in *Art and Letters* and *Voices* to show the terms of the conflict over the significance of Rosenberg's work. An echo of this struggle can then be seen in Rosenberg's critical reception in the second half of the twentieth century, in the criticism of Charles Tomlinson, Jon Silkin and Geoffrey Hill. As with the struggles of the twenties, the later advocacy of Rosenberg similarly obscures the priorities of the poet's work and misrepresents the cultural landscape in which Rosenberg's poetic development took place. In both instances, Rosenberg's death in the First World War opens the poet's work up to particularly motivated and tendentious readings, based

partly on a projected, unwritten corpus. Returning to Rosenberg's poetry and its

treatment of death, I conclude the thesis by considering the ways in which the

projected achievements of Rosenberg might be seen in connection to the history of the

Whitechapel Renaissance.

Stephen Winsten's Voices

> We stood to-night for quite a long time at the corner of South Street and Jamaica
>
> Street – Simy and I – talking, saying good night to each other – and as we stood
>
> we scratched our initials entwined and joined for remembrance upon the brick
>
> front of the corner house, S. W. and J. L.[1]

Samuel Weinstein grew up on Jamaica Street.[2] He was known to friends as 'Simy', later

as 'Inca', and he took the name Stephen Winsten when he married. He appears

frequently in the 1911 diary of Joseph Leftwich, though the portrait Leftwich paints of

his friend is unflattering. Comparing Winsten to their friend John Rodker, whom

Leftwich considers a 'poseur', Leftwich writes that Winsten is

> deliberate and thoughtful, slow – hardly flat-footed, yet his mind-movements
>
> do give something of that impression. He is very self-confident though.[3]

In general, Winsten emerges from the diary as a bullying and unlikeable figure, ruining

one of the group's outings to Epping Forest by 'making nasty foolish remarks about

Rosenberg's picture and about Jimmy [Rodker]'s face'.[4] Though privately belligerent,

Winsten was opposed to the war absolutely. He would later attribute the growth of his

pacifism to his family. His elder sister took him to the Tolstoy colony at Tuckton House

in Bournemouth, though Winsten's account of his visits is unreliable in certain

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[1] Leftwich, 'Facsimile of Diary', entry for 27 April.

[2] Joseph Leftwich, 'Israel Zangwill – Isaac Rosenberg', 1976, p. 5, Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives, LC12925. A copy of the script for this Tower Hamlets lecture is also contained in the Joseph Leftwich folder in the Imperial War Museum's archives; the script is undated, but the talk is recorded as taking place in 1976 by Ian Parsons in Isaac Rosenberg, *The Collected Works of Isaac Rosenberg: Poetry, Prose, Letters, Paintings and Drawings*, p. 244.

[3] Leftwich, 'Facsimile of Diary', entry for 5 February.

[4] Leftwich, 'Facsimile of Diary', entry for 28 May.

respects.[5] Like Rodker, Winsten was imprisoned as a conscientious objector. However, where Rodker did what he could to avoid imprisonment, Winsten seems to have deliberately courted it, even refusing the immunity granted him by his teaching position.

Winsten continued to move in pacifist and socialist circles, and he was friends with the poets Ralph Hodgson and Wilfrid Gibson.[6] Later in life, Winsten became a Quaker, a vegetarian and the neighbour of George Bernard Shaw at Ayot. It is perhaps as Shaw's biographer or Boswell that he is now best remembered.[7] He was interviewed in 1976 by Margaret Brooks, the Imperial War Museum's lead sound archivist, as part of an initiative to record the experiences of conscientious objectors during the First World War. In the recordings, his accent only occasionally hints at an East End upbringing. When questioned on his family's immigrant background, Winsten is vague and attributes the change of his name in 1914 from 'Weinstein' to 'Winsten' to his marriage to the artist Clara Birnberg, who suggested a 'new mutual name for a new life'.[8] He became Stephen Winsten, she Clare Winsten.

In the interview, as in Clare's memoirs, Jewishness is passed over in silence. When asked, Winsten says that 'when [he] came over, [he didn't] remember speaking

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[5] Stephen Winsten, 'Winsten, Stephen Samuel (Oral History)', reels 1-2; Rebecca Beasley helpfully outlines some of the ways in which Winsten's testimony does not match what is known about the colony, most striking being his transportation of Tolstoy himself to Bournemouth; see Beasley, 'Interchapter 1: The Whitechapel Group', p. 14n44.

[6] Stephen Winsten, 'Winsten, Stephen Samuel (Oral History)', reel 3. Both Gibson and Winsten were regular contributors to the monthly magazine *School*, later known as *Tomorrow*, published between 1933-34.

[7] Winsten wrote three books on Shaw: *Days with Bernard Shaw* (London: 1949); *Shaw's Corner* (London: Hutchinson, 1952); and *Jesting Apostle: The Life of Bernard Shaw* (London: Hutchinson, 1956). See also: Michael Holroyd, *Bernard Shaw*, 5 vols (London: Chatto and Windus, 1991), III: 1918-1950, THE LURE OF FANTASY, pp. 466–68.

[8] Stephen Winsten, 'Winsten, Stephen Samuel (Oral History)', reel 5.

any other language than English.'[9] While unlikely, it is not impossible, and his emphasis on 'speaking' may be deliberately specific, sidestepping the question of whether he heard, read or understood other languages. In any case, the remark is important for showing Winsten's retrospective distancing from the world of East End Jewry. While the entwined initials on the corner house bricks suggest ties that retained significance for Leftwich, Winsten in the interview makes no reference to Leftwich at all.

It is surprising then that, in the early interwar years, we find Winsten an active figure in two important cultural works led by first-generation Jewish immigrants to London. By 1922 he was secretary of the Ben Uri, and Lily Ford argues that he must have been involved in organising a lecture series of the same year, which included a mixture of lectures in English and Yiddish.[10] By this point, his poetry and his criticism of art and literature had also appeared in *Renesans*, one of several magazines written in Yiddish and published in London's East End that enjoyed a short but impressive career in the years after the First World War.[11] Winsten would later explain that, when he and other conscientious objectors left prison, 'we of course had the world closed to us.'[12] The closed doors presumably drove Winsten to the available openings. Leftwich's sustained involvement in Yiddish cultural production across the course of his life suggests a commitment to the language, its literature and speakers that went beyond self-interest. Winsten's diffidence about his Jewishness makes his involvement in some

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[9] Stephen Winsten, 'Winsten, Stephen Samuel (Oral History)', reel 3.
[10] Ford, p. 36.
[11] For an overview, see Leonard Prager, 'The Glory and Gloom of the Anglo-Yiddish Press', *Jewish Quarterly*, 11.2 (1963), 9–11.
[12] Stephen Winsten, 'Winsten, Stephen Samuel (Oral History)', reel 3.

ways more valuable as evidence. It suggests that, for someone with the 'world closed

to [him]', Jewishness might offer a pragmatic coalition, and Yiddish cultural

production could be viable at least as one experiment among others.

During Winsten's work for the Ben Uri and *Renesans*, he was also working for

English-language publications. At least twice, what was substantially the same article

appeared in both languages and his poems were published and reviewed in both.

From the perspective of those working in Yiddish, this was an enviable position to

occupy. The memoirs of the philosopher and journalist Sonia Khosid, who wrote under

the name of N. M. Seedo, describe how every writer in Yiddish and Hebrew who was a

member of the Jewish Writers' Association in London 'dreamed of being one day

translated into English'. In what is likely a glancing reference to Joseph Leftwich, she

remarks that writers flattered the English translator who knew these languages a little,

even while they despised him.[13] Seedo was born in 1906 and came to London in 1930.

Here, she quickly perceived that her use of Yiddish rather than English set her apart

from those Jews her own age who had grown up in London. Instead, she found herself

grouped with the older generations.[14] She was welcomed into London's small Yiddish

literary circle with enthusiasm in part because of her youth.[15] In the early twenties,

Winsten's work appeared during a flourishing of Yiddish writing in London, but there

were already signs of Yiddish beginning to mark a division between immigrants and

the children who had grown up in the city. When the eminent Zionist orator and

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[13] N. M. Seedo, *In the Beginning Was Fear* (London: Narod Press, 1964), p. 298.

[14] Khayim-Leyb Fuks, 'Sido, N. M.', *Leksikon Fun Der Nayer Yidisher Literatur* (New York: Altveltlekhn yidishn kultur-kongres, 1965), 410; see also Joshua Fogel's unauthorised translation of the Leksikon at <https://library.osu.edu/projects/hebrew-lexicon/Yiddish-Leksikon-eng.htm>; Seedo, p. 294.

[15] Seedo, p. 299.

activist Shmaryahu Levin was invited to a ball organised by the Ben Uri for Purim

1920, he arrived ready to argue for the virtues of Hebrew against Yiddish. Observing

the crowd, however, Levin realised that the people gathered there were not interested

in the polemic between Yiddish and Hebrew, because English was their language. He

chose to remain silent instead.[16]

To a certain extent, Winsten's articles in English and Yiddish underline the

division of the languages, since the reproduction of articles across magazines

presumed a negligible crossover in readership. At the same time, however, Winsten's

own movement across languages should alert us to the fact that this division can be

overstated. If the choice between English and Yiddish drew lines that separated

sections of England's Jewish population from one another, Winsten was not alone in

bridging them.

This chapter focuses on an article by Winsten published in the same month in

the English-language little magazine *Voices* and in *Renesans*, albeit with substantial

differences in the two versions. *Voices* was published between 1919 and 1921, and

edited by the minor Georgian poet, journalist, cricket enthusiast and occasional

plagiarist Thomas Moult.[17] *Voices* showed a consistent concern with the recently

concluded war and with the question of one's duties in its aftermath, especially as

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[16] Oyved [Edward Good], *Visions and Jewels*, p. 91; Moyshe Oyved [Edward Good], *Vizyonen Un Eydelshteyner* (London, 1931), p. 95.

[17] Thomas Moult published 'The Dice-Thrower' in *Yes or No,* 14.214 (18 April 1908), 18-23 under the pseudonym Sidney Southgate. The story was a plagiarised version of a story by the American writer William C. Morrow, called either 'The Pale Dice-Thrower' or 'Over an Absinthe Bottle'. I owe the observation to William G. Contento, who remarks on the plagiarism in his online bibliography of fiction in English language magazines <http://www.philsp.com/homeville/fmi/t/t7368.htm> [accessed 6 February 2018]. The website is itself an excellent resource and remarkable achievement.

those duties operated in poetry. There were six issues of the Yiddish-language magazine *Renesans*, which appeared monthly from January to June 1920, before it stopped publication. Edited by the art critic, journalist and essayist Leo Koenig, *Renesans*, like *Voices*, saw in art a route towards spiritual regeneration. In both cases, the editors viewed formal experiment with a certain amount of suspicion: the majority of the magazines' visual art was figurative; the majority of its writing untouched by extremes of typographic or syntactic disruption. A key difference between the magazines was that Koenig's renaissance was a Jewish renaissance.

The repetition should be seen as part of the parasitism, more or less amicable, practised across ephemeral publications. However, the patterns of that parasitism, the direction and implications of their reuse, have particular significance in this case, where the crossing of magazines within the same city – a movement between Charing Cross Road and Commercial Street – was also a crossing of languages. The shift in language brought with it a different set of possibilities for expression. It also encoded a different set of priorities and implied a different relationship towards the British establishment. English was the language of power in Britain; it was consequently also the language most transparent and accessible to those in power. We can see *Voices* and *Renesans* as providing two routes of expression for Anglo-Jewish writers: the first, seeing Jews as making up part of the new coalition of youth against a corrupt establishment; the second, understanding Jewishness as the identity to which other forces were to be subordinated. The similarities in the magazines' editorial agendas get us some way towards reducing the variables in comparing the two versions of

Winsten's article, and so towards identifying what difference the change in language made.

Further linking the two magazines, there is some evidence for a shared network, which took in Yiddish and English, and crossed first-generation and second-generation Jewish immigrants. Before giving more of an introduction to the magazines under discussion, it is worth describing that network. Mark Morrisson has observed that *Voices* included 'more Jewish writing […] than was common in modernist "little magazines" of the period, especially given the anti-Semitism infecting some modernist circles.'[18] Morrisson points to the prominence in the magazine of Louis Golding and Maurice Samuel, Jewish writers from Manchester, where Moult grew up. In turn, Morrisson suggests that their prominence may have indirectly led to the magazine publishing and reviewing further Jewish writers and artists, including Winsten and Jacob Kramer. Winsten's description of 'the young and enthusiastic crowd that met frequently at the gatherings organised by Bessie Moult' does not contradict his observation that it was Thomas Moult who 'brought together' the group of writers for *Voices*. It does suggest, however, that it was Moult's wife, Bessie, who also worked as assistant editor on *Voices*, who was central to the organisation of the network around the magazine.[19] She was herself a Jewish immigrant, born in Elizabethgrad as Elizabeth Boltiansky.[20]

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[18] Mark Morrisson S., 'The Cause of Poetry', in *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines*, 3 vols (Oxford, 2013), I: BRITAIN AND IRELAND, 1880-1955, 405–27 (p. 407).

[19] Stephen Winsten, 'Mr Thomas Moult', *The Times*, 23 November 1974, p. 16.

[20] 'Sally Go Round the Moon – Thomas Moult', *BookLives* <https://booklives.ca/islandora/object/booklives:260> [accessed 20 August 2019]; Joseph Leftwich confirms that Bessie Moult was Jewish in Joseph Leftwich, *Israel Zangwill* (London: James Clarke, 1957), p. 95.

We know little about Bessie Moult. By 1938, she was clearly active in British Zionism, since the *Jewish Chronicle* mentions two addresses she gave to women's Zionist Societies in Cricklewood and Richmond.[21] While she would later refer to Katherine Mansfield as having been a 'personal friend', the writer's correspondence suggests that this was something of an overstatement.[22] A 1920 letter from Mansfield to Violet Schiff discouraged the latter from attending a dinner she was organising since the Moults would be there too:

> Tom Moult is the editor of Voices, a little, rather childish naive creature who writes poems and has a novel just coming out and Bessie is a smaller quieter creature who is everything that is good and kind but will talk to me about Madame Montessori and persist in telling me it's not so important to attract the child's attention as to guide it. This, because I am bad and wicked, bores me. I do not see why you should have to endure such people.[23]

Mansfield was slightly more patient with husband than wife, but when Thomas Moult's novel *Snows Over Elden* did come out later that year, it was too much for her. She wrote despairingly to John Middleton Murry that what Moult had written was indistinguishable from the saccharine pseudo-naivety of *The Diary of Opal Whiteley*.[24]

Most of those at Bessie Moult's gatherings were, according to Winsten, 'young and enthusiastic', a detail that fits with the insistence on the salvific power of youth

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[21] 'Palestine Movement Activities', *Jewish Chronicle*, 24 June 1938, p. 21; 'Palestine Movement Activities: Women Zionists', *Jewish Chronicle*, 30 December 1938, p. 22.
[22] 'Sally Go Round the Moon – Thomas Moult'.
[23] Katherine Mansfield, *The Collected Letters of Katherine Mansfield*, ed. by Vincent O'Sullivan and Margaret Scott, 5 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), IV, p. 20.
[24] Mansfield, IV, p. 119.

that would be a recurring rhetorical feature of *Voices*.[25] However, there were also established writers of an older generation who 'presided' over the occasions: John Galsworthy, Israel Zangwill and Arthur Quiller-Couch. All three appeared in *Voices*, and work by Zangwill, and his brother Louis, appeared in *Renesans*. Though quite different writers, all three were among the signatories of a memorandum presented to David Lloyd George appealing for the release of imprisoned conscientious objectors following the end of the war.[26] Many years later, the Moults' daughter, Joy, married Zangwill's son, Oliver.

The development of the Moults' network is the likeliest explanation for the overlap in contributors in the two magazines. It may be going too far to see the magazines as alternative crystallisations of the atmosphere of that grouping, but the significance of this network should not be understated. It shows a first-generation female Jewish immigrant at the heart of a cultural nexus that crossed language, medium, generation and publication. More specifically, it shows her bridging Yiddish, favoured by first-generation immigrants, and English, favoured by second-generation immigrants. In the crossover, not only Winsten was able to take advantage. In the same years, both magazines also published work by Bomberg, Golding, Kramer and Israel Zangwill. An article by Bessie Moult on the Russian Ballet appeared in the May 1920 issue of *Renesans*, the only work in the magazine's six issues openly authored by a woman.[27]

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[25] Stephen Winsten, 'Mr Thomas Moult'.

[26] 'The Imprisoned C.O.'s: An Appeal for Release', *Manchester Guardian*, 4 January 1919, p. 9.

[27] Bessie Moult, 'Der Rusisher Balet', *Renesans*, 2.2 (1920), 121–26.

The links fostered by the Moults with Jewish immigrants may also explain the patronage given to *Voices* by Moyshe Oyved. Oyved was the pen name of Edward Gudak, another Jewish immigrant from the Russian Empire. From 1908, he ran a jewellery shop on Museum Street called Cameo Corner under the name Edward Good. Seedo offers a short portrait of the

> rich antiquary, who had Queen Mary for a customer, and himself wrote poetry in Yiddish, a man who dabbled in painting, sculpture and jewellery, a man who was a good friend of Epstein and supported all the writers and painters who praised his poems.[28]

Adverts for Cameo Corner appeared frequently in *Voices* throughout its run. Oyved was a patron of the Ben Uri, which would financially support *Renesans* for several issues. Oyved's close involvement with *Renesans* makes another link between the magazines. As well as adverts for Cameo Corner and his Zionist prose poem *Out of Chaos*, *Renesans* published various poems by him, including a poem in praise of the Yiddish language, 'Idish (a loyb gezang)'. The April 1920 issue of *Voices* included a sizeable review of *Renesans* that praised the 'essays of a lofty spiritual tone by the editor' and singled out the 'inspirational poetry' of Moyshe Oyved. The review was attributed to Thomas Moult, but Bessie seems the likelier to have known Yiddish and so the likelier author.[29]

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[28] Seedo, p. 324.

[29] Thomas Moult, 'A Survey of Contemporaries – The Month of March', *Voices*, 3.3 (1920), 126–28.

Voices (1919-1921)

The first issue of *Voices* was printed both by
Andrew Paton & Co. in Manchester and
Henderson's in London in January 1919, two
months after the declaration of an armistice
between Allied and German military forces.
The magazine was small, green and, at one
shilling, 'a fairly typical price for a literary
monthly'.[30] When Thomas Moult died in
1974, Winsten's obituary for him appeared in
the *Times* and described how Moult had
founded *Voices* since he 'felt the need for a
renaissance in art and literature'.[31] The
obituary mentioned the youth of the
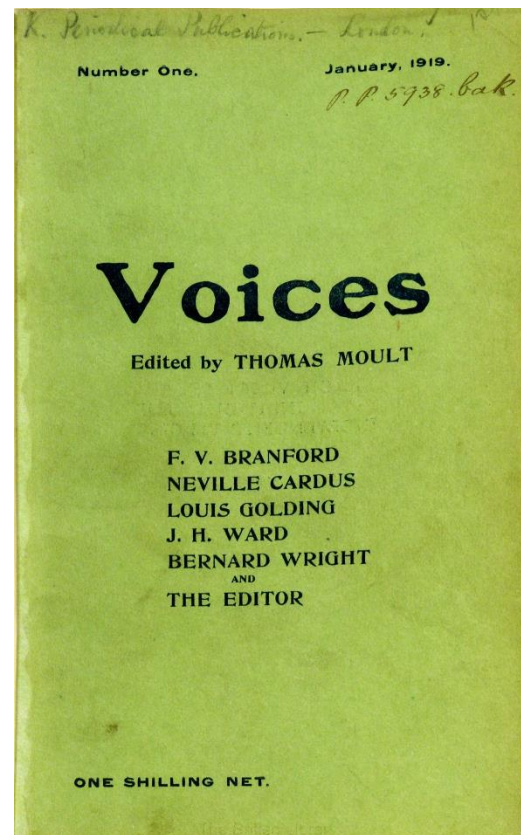
Front cover of the British Library's
copy of the first issue of *Voices* (January
1919)

contributors to *Voices* three times and, judging from the contributors to the first issue, it

seems to have been a distinctive part of Moult's ambitions that it should be young men

who led the cultural renaissance.

One reason for this emphasis was the post-war position Moult adopted in

Voices. It is fairly easy to characterise the position because it is in keeping with what is

now one of the most common ways of understanding the First World War in Britain.

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[30] Morrisson, I: BRITAIN AND IRELAND, 1880-1955, p. 407; see also Peter Brooker and Andrew
Thacker, 'General Introduction', in *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist
Magazines*, ed. by Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker, 3 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press,
2013), I: BRITAIN AND IRELAND, 1880-1955, 1–26 (p. 24).
[31] Stephen Winsten, 'Mr Thomas Moult'.

Much of the magazine would not look out of place introduced by Wilfred Owen's draft preface to his poems, with its rejection of the clichés of patriotism: 'deeds, or lands […] glory [or] honour'. In their place, Owen offered education ('[a]ll a poet can do today is warn') and elegies, truthful but 'in no sense consolatory'.[32] Where Owen wrote that English poetry was not yet fit to speak of 'heroes', *Voices* might instead be seen as offering a solution to the problem: it made itself fit by having them speak. While Elizabeth Marsland has rightly observed that 'a typical English First World War poet was not a combatant but a civilian', *Voices* drew attention to its combatant writers, identifying the poet F. V. Branford by his title of Flight Lieutenant in early issues.[33]

The magazine's narrative of the war can be given some rough expression through the set of oppositions around which much of the work in *Voices* was organized. Some constitute the medium in which the poems' speakers situate themselves: peace is contrasted with war, stability with unrest, the countryside with the city, cleanness with filth. Others provide the contours for the speaking voice itself, and the forms of authority it assumes: honesty is set against deceit, suffering against ease, loyalty against betrayal, youth against age, soldiers and veterans against civilians and politicians. This outline of oppositions has some limits, since one side may be highly flexible or left implicit. For example, while the identification of the soldier with Christ recurs with frequency in the literature and iconography of the First World War,

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[32] Wilfred Owen, *The Complete Poems and Fragments*, ed. by Jon Stallworthy, revised edn, 2 vols (London: Chatto and Windus, 2013), II: THE MANUSCRIPTS OF THE POEMS AND THE FRAGMENTS, p. 535.

[33] Elizabeth A. Marsland, *The Nation's Cause: French, English and German Poetry of the First World War* (London; New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 18. Twenty-two poems by Branford were published across the first three issues of Voices. He continued to be published thereafter, but no longer with his rank listed.

the question of who is responsible for the martyrdom is often left unanswered.[34] Where

a culprit is identified, it can range from fallen humanity in general to more specific

targets. It is also worth noting that certain pairings, most obviously cleanness and filth,

frequently receive a back-and-forth motivation: the literal filth of the trenches is

understood to confer moral purification.

What should also be obvious is that the approved side of the oppositions is a

highly restricted one. The fact that in its initial issues *Voices* seems to have been

authored entirely by men suggests not only a limited perspective on the scope of the

war, but a belief that the suffering of combat must be experienced before its truth can

be uttered. In this model, truth is not something that exists outside speakers and can be

perceived and expressed, but something that one obtains through experience, and it is

only then that one can give it plausible expression. As such, the magazine anticipated

some of the dominant trends of criticism of poetry from the First World War. [35]

Moult prided the magazine on including work only by those 'who have some

skill in writing and are fired to do it well.'[36] Ostensibly a statement of stringent quality,

the rather measured note of 'some skill' and the attention to goodwill as much as

outcome point to a tendency to value authenticity over 'artistic merit'. The writers in

Voices might occasionally go wrong, Moult wrote, but they at least did so 'with some

touch of quality or Quixotry.'[37] There may have been failures in the magazine, but they

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[34] See, for example Phyllis Marks, 'Mary Mother', *Voices*, 2.4 (1919), 135–37. Marks's poem plays with the trope of the soldier-as-Christ, without quite being willing to relinquish its symbolic value.

[35] Compare James Campbell, 'Combat Gnosticism: The Ideology of First World War Poetry Criticism', *New Literary History*, 30.1, Poetry & Poetics (1999), 203–15 (p. 204).

[36] Thomas Moult, 'Editorial', *Voices*, 5.1 (1921), 1–2 (p. 1).

[37] Thomas Moult, 'Editorial', p. 1.

were not meretricious ones. Ultimately, *Voices* was to be valued less for the technical excellence of the work included than because it was

> one of the few publications in which there has ever been printed any vital truth about the war as a human experience. For it is written, to a large extent, by men who fought in the war, and it is chiefly the poets among these men who are putting on record the only faithful account of the spiritual adventures of the combatant troops.[38]

The implicit exclusiveness of the narrative encouraged by *Voices* is surprising considering its name and its epigraph: 'Each voice speaks an individual and independent vision.' *Voices* was not remarkably polyvocal by the standards of contemporary little magazines, but neither did it mark itself out a clear position via manifestoes.

While the first issue of *Voices* avoided any editorial statement on its aims or purpose, it included a number of prose pieces that could be seen as gesturing towards one. Louis Golding's 'Voices' introduced the issue, a short prose piece written in a sonorous and purple style and which struck a pitch of aesthetic and tonal seriousness maintained for the majority of the issue. The piece describes the voices everywhere and in everything, including the voice of Cleopatra in a flower-seller.[39] At the beginning, a framing narrative is briefly established: an evening in a 'forgotten house' where the slightly sententious material is set out as the speech of an 'old man' to a 'young friend',

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[38] Thomas Moult, 'Editorial', p. 1.
[39] Golding had addressed the idea before in "Down Tottenham Court Road" in *Sorrow of War* (50-51)

an investment of authority that is ironic, though perhaps inadvertently so, considering the conflict between youth and age put forward by the magazine.[40]

Golding was born in Manchester after his parents had immigrated there from Cherkassy in modern Ukraine. During the war, he worked in hospitals in Thessaloniki. In 1919, a collection of his poems was published under the title *Sorrow of War*. Some of the poems printed there would also be printed in *Voices*, as were adverts for the book, which included a quotation from *Country Life*'s review, praising the 'beauty mingling with the horror' in the poetry. The first issue also included Golding's 'Creed', a short poem which announces the poet's intention that he shall

…insistently and proudly read

Into the mud of things a mudless creed.

The poem seems to advocate the search for order in apparent chaos, but that chaos is represented by 'mud' that evokes the trenches of the Western Front, about a thousand miles from Thessaloniki. The authenticity sought by Moult in *Voices* was vulnerable to falsification of this kind, in which the anti-war position it attempted to articulate against 'the old lie' collapsed into cliché. The ambiguity of Golding's 'read[ing] | Into', with its sense of fanciful overinterpretation, anticipates these problems.

Robert H. Ross has neatly characterised the magazine as occupying an 'eminently uncontroversial' centrist position between avant-garde and reactionary literary forces.[41] Moult had published poetry in *Rhythm*, and the work of co-

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[40] Louis Golding, 'Voices', *Voices*, 1.1 (1919), 1–6 (p. 1).
[41] Robert Ross, *The Georgian Revolt: Rise and Fall of a Poetic Ideal, 1910-1922* (London: Faber, 1967), p. 203.

contributors to the earlier magazine appeared in *Voices*: J. D. Fergusson and Anne

Estelle Rice represented by artwork and D. H. Lawrence by prose and poetry. The

poems of Alan Porter, an associate of Edith Sitwell, represents something of a limit-

case for the magazine's tolerance of formal experiment. His contributions prompted

criticism in the letters section because he had not capitalised the first word of each line

of a poem. The magazine also included reproductions of work by Wyndham Lewis,

David Bomberg and, thanks to John Rodker's Ovid Press, drawings by Henri Gaudier-

Brzeska.[42] The initials Wadsworth designed for the Ovid Press also appeared in the

July 1920 issue, spelling out the magazine's name. Paul Nash contributed a woodcut

and a two-part essay 'Movement in Art' under the pseudonym Robert Derriman.[43]

Morrisson may be right that 'the logic of returning art to a connection with life

did foreclose some of the most radical directions of modernist abstraction' from their

inclusion or praise in *Voices*, and a similar argument could be made for a belief in

authentic expression.[44] However, his argument that *Voices* represented 'an aesthetic

provocation more than a political one' should be treated with care.[45] The role of the war

in determining the appropriate forms of art points to a more interlocked relationship

than this formulation suggests. However, instead of the idea that radically abstracted

work was essentially linked to a radical political challenge, or that syntactic difficulty

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[42] The contents page to *Voices* 3.3 (April 1920) notes that the inclusion of the reproductions from Gaudier-Brzeska are there 'by kind permission of the Ovid Press'. The Ovid Press had published *Twenty Drawings from the Notebooks of H. Gaudier-Brzeska* in June 1919.

[43] Robert Derriman (Paul Nash), 'Movement in Art', *Voices*, 2.3 (1919), 120–22; Robert Derriman (Paul Nash), 'Movement in Art (II)', *Voices*, 2.4 (1919), 167–69; the essay seems to have gone unnoticed and does not appear in the complete bibliography of Nash's writings given in Paul Nash, *Writings on Art*, ed. by Andrew Causey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 165–70.

[44] Morrisson, I: BRITAIN AND IRELAND, 1880-1955, p. 415.

[45] Morrisson, I: BRITAIN AND IRELAND, 1880-1955, p. 407.

corresponded to a rejection of the deceitful emphasis on ease pushed by the culture industry, Moult and the contributors to *Voices* tended towards an alternative model for how that relationship worked. For many of them, the clear communication of a subject position arriving with wisdom born of experience was the most pressing obligation of art. If, as an approach, it risked turning the lyric 'I' into a straitjacket, it still allowed for moments of occasional whimsy and Romantic visionary deviation amidst the more restrained, occasionally po-faced sincerity.

Renesans (1920)

> The 'Futuristic' people, the people of eternal movement and tragic zigzags, has recently begun to long for a standstill, for a little bit of a rest, and it nourishes itself in conscious creation and striving with imitations…. And just in the time of wanderings, races, revolutions and other forms of unrest…. Just when the sea is dangerously stormy, they put themselves in a hidden, egotistical little corner and hope to find peace from within themselves. [46]

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[46] Leo Koenig, 'Renesans-Motiven', *Renesans*, 1.1 (1920), 3–8 (p. 7) ['dos 'futuristishe' folk, dos folk fun eybiger bevegung un tragishe zigzagen hot zikh letstens ferbenkt nokh a shtilshtand, nokh a bisele ruh, un nehrt zikh in zayn bavustzinig shafen un shtreben mit nokhamungen...un dafke in der tsayt fun vanderungen, geyegen, revolutsyes un andere unruhen...dafke ven der yam iz gefehrlikh shturemdig, ferkloybt es zikh in a ferhoylen egoistish vinkele un hoft dort ruh fun zikh aleyn tsu gefinen']. Translations from the Yiddish are my own, except where stated otherwise. For transliteration here and throughout, I have followed the YIVO guidelines but I have maintained the writer's original spellings, which frequently deviate from the YIVO standard, introduced later in the twentieth century.

Such was the complaint of Leo Koenig in the opening editorial to the first issue of *Renesans*, published in January 1920. The Jewish people were a 'goen-folk', an epithet that coupled a general acclamation of 'genius' with a more specific sense of exceptional Talmudic scholars. Despite this intellectual heritage, Koenig saw the Jews as struggling, caught on fads and repetitions in the literary and visual arts, setting themselves 'before the gruff, pained, old Michelangelo, copying a classical Venus or the sick, mystical Dostoevsky.'[47] In *Renesans*, Koenig sought to collect the forces of Jewry
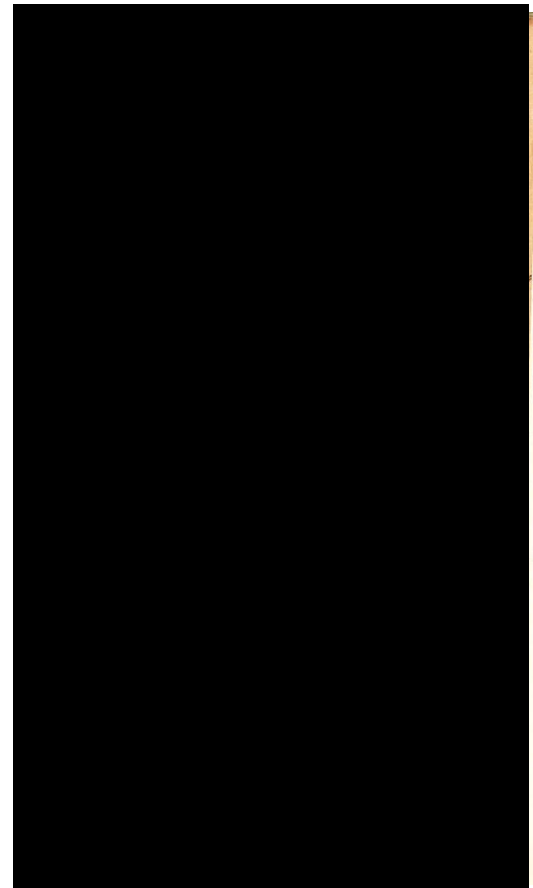
Front cover of the British Library's copy of the first issue of *Renesans* (January 1920), illustrated with Jacob Kramer's *The Jew*

to find a solution to this state of affairs. If its main intended audience was the Jews who had immigrated to London from the Russian Empire, its aspirations stretched further, to Yiddish-speaking Jews across the world.[48] The magazine's goal, as outlined in the editorial, was to interrogate the possibility of a 'renaissance' in Jewish art.[49] It was a

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[47] Koenig, 'Renesans-Motiven', p. 3 ['ihr shtelt zikh far dem rugzedigen, tsuvehtogten alten mikel andzshelo kopirendig a klasishe venus oder dem kranken mistishen dostoyevski'].
[48] In his review of the magazine, Moult alluded to '[a] great journalistic failure in America' that was making the work of promoting Renesans more difficult. Thomas Moult, 'A Survey of Contemporaries – The Month of March', p. 128.
[49] The best introduction to the magazine can be found in William Pimlott, 'The Journal Renesans and the Rebirth of Art and Literature in Yiddish London' (unpublished master's thesis, UCL); see also: Mazower.

question that had occupied its editor for some time, and the editorial expressed a credible sense of irresolution, hovering between hope and despair.

Koenig has exceptional significance as an art critic and theorist in Yiddish. He grew up in Odessa while the city was at its zenith as a literary centre for Yiddish and Hebrew. Though too young to fully participate, he described meeting I. L. Peretz and H. N. Bialik, seeing Mendele Mokher Sforim and hearing Ahad Ha'am.[50] He left Odessa to study art at the Bezalel school in Jerusalem, before studying art in Munich. He later came to Paris, where he was part of the colony of Jewish artists in La Ruche, Montparnasse. The colony at La Ruche included some of the most significant Jewish artists in Paris at the time. Koenig was especially close to Marc Chagall, and the two would maintain a correspondence in later years. Chagall would reminisce to Koenig about the paintings he made 'when you lived in a room downstairs in La Ruche, dreaming nicely, and I would come "ask" for your opinion: will I be an "artist" or not?'[51] Along with Isaac Lichtenstein, Joseph Tchaikov, Henryk Epstein and others, Koenig had been a member of the *Makhmadim*, a group which also produced a journal dedicated specifically to the question of what it meant to make Jewish art.[52] The work of several of the artists associated with La Ruche and the *Makhmadim* was reproduced in *Renesans*.

Koenig came to London in 1914, and was met by

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[50] Leo Koenig, 'My London', trans. by Jacob Sonntag, *Jewish Quarterly*, 4.1 (1956), 19–20 (p. 20).
[51] Benjamin Harshav, *Marc Chagall and His Times: A Documentary Narrative*, trans. by Benjamin Harshav and Barbara Harshav (Stanford; London: Stanford Univeristy Press; Eurospan, 2003), p. 629.
[52] Marie Vacher, 'Joseph Moiseevitch Tchaikov. De La Ruche Des Makhmadim à l'idéologie Soviétique (1910-1937)', *Les Cahiers de l'École Du Louvre*, 1.1 (2012), 1–14 (p. 7).

a multitude of Jewish business signs – *kosher*, *kosher*, *kosher*. Kosher restaurants,

kosher butchers. As if Jews did nothing else but eat; kosher, of course.

Nowhere, not in Paris or Munich or in Palestine, not even in my native Odessa

have I seen so many Jewish letterings in the streets, all spelling the one word,

kosher, as I noticed in the High Road of Whitechapel, that bulging, broad street

that was like a Jewish mother of many children….[53]

While moving to London from Paris might have been to move away from a centre of

Jewish art, London at that time was a centre of Jewish literary activity, with a wealth of

periodicals in Yiddish and Hebrew.[54] Koenig describes it as 'the "Golden Age" of

London, as far as Yiddish and Hebrew writing was concerned', with 'the "Express

Dairy" near the British Museum [assuming] the status of a Jewish Literary Coffee

House'. Koenig established a prominent position among London's Yiddish writers.

They 'trembled' before him, and those who visited him in Notting Hill saw original

works by Soutine and Chagall hanging on the walls, 'flattering dedications on the

backs'.[55] Seedo's portrait of Koenig, under the guise of The Critic, is of a man with 'a

great knowledge of European literature and art', and capable of kindness as well as

arrogance. His articles were published in Yiddish magazines in America, Poland and

Israel, and 'he most condescendingly obliged the editors of the Jewish dailies in

London with an essay every week'.[56] These articles predominantly addressed writers

and artists with reputations already established, to the chagrin of those with whom he

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[53] Koenig, 'My London', p. 19.
[54] William Pimlott's forthcoming PhD thesis should give a more detailed account of British Yiddish periodical publishing than has yet been attempted.
[55] Seedo, p. 299. According to Seedo, Koenig went further and 'claimed to have "made"' Chagall, Soutine and others.
[56] Seedo, p. 299.

kept company, including David Bomberg.[57] Even in *Renesans*, which looked to the future, Koenig's editorials tended to keep to a level of abstraction and avoid specific engagement with the writers and artists whose works made up the magazine's contents.

> According to Oyved, the magazine was planned:

> at Leo Koenig's own house, in the half-dead Notting Hill, in the year 1919. We were sitting talking about bringing out a monthly journal, to be called *Renaissance*. It was to have wafted a fresh spirit into the Yiddish word, to have given an honest, religious tone to the modern Desecration of the Holy Name. And I was so affected by the dream which we were weaving that I positively kissed his hand. It was a good thing that his hand was smooth. We issued six numbers of the *Renaissance*, until the money was exhausted, and in any case the *Renaissance* itself was spun out.[58]

The religious emphasis is perceptible in *Renesans*, perhaps especially in the contributions from Joseph Leftwich; but it reflects Oyved's priorities more than that it does Koenig's. Leftwich worked as the secretary to the magazine. As well as submitting poetry and reviews, he translated Simeon Solomon's fragmentary writings

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[57] Seedo, pp. 299–300; Bomberg's relationship with Koenig and his family is discussed in further detail in Ghisha Koenig and Terence Scales, 'Encounters with David Bomberg', *Art Monthly*, March 1988, pp. 10–11.

[58] Oyved [Edward Good], *Visions and Jewels*, pp. 150–51; Hannah Berman's translation is problematic in several respects. I have corrected the 'wearing' that appears in the English text, evidently a slip for 'weaving' ['geshpinen'] and changed 'dreams' to the singular. More significantly, in the Yiddish, the 'desecration' is restricted to 'modern god-profaning art' [moderner khilel-hashem'diger kunst']. The final sentence quoted includes the word 'mimeyle', which implies a causality: the renaissance (significantly left out of quotation marks) evaporated ['oysgevept'] because the money had run dry ['oysgeshept']. See Oyved [Edward Good], *Vizyonen Un Eydelshteyner*, p. 144. Oyved writes each sentence in a new paragraph, which enhances the lyrical quality of the account.

into Yiddish. In his 'Autobiographical Note' for his 85th birthday testimonial booklet,

Leftwich also took credit for translating Israel Zangwill into Yiddish, but there are

other errors and a tendency towards self-aggrandisement in Leftwich's writing that

encourage caution.[59]

Within the brief period of its publication, the magazine was able to give an

approximate but lively portrait of Jewish artistic production in the period, cut across

with a specific interrogation of Anglo-Jewish creativity. The latter concern led to some

of the more surprising inclusions in the magazine, such as translations of work by

Rudyard Kipling and Ralph Hodgson judged relevant to a Jewish audience. In

addition, there were questions of a more grounded Jewish national rebirth, as in the

exchange in its pages between Israel Zangwill and Shmaryahu Levin. Although Koenig

would become more sympathetic to the idea that Jewish creativity relied on a material

basis in Palestine, and he would ultimately immigrate to Israel in 1952, his initial

editorial was sceptical of attempts to materially construct a nation without having first

achieved its spiritual renewal. He batted away the conflict between assimilationists and

those who sought to establish a Jewish political state, suggesting that even the latter

'unconsciously […] strive for a mass-assimilation in a territorial framework'.[60]

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[59] Leftwich, 'Autobiographical Note', p. 9. It is on the strength of this piece that Rebecca Beasley falls into two erroneous characterisations of *Renesans*, writing that Leftwich edited the magazine and that he translated Thomas Moult in it; Rebecca Beasley, 'Literature and The Visual Arts', in *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines*, ed. by Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker, 3 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), I: BRITAIN AND IRELAND, 1880-1955, 485–504 (p. 501). The first of these errors is due to the ambiguity of Leftwich's description of how '[m]y Yiddish interests had led to Kenig [sic] and me getting out a Yiddish magazine "Renaissance"'. The second seems to be an error on Leftwich's part, since Thomas Moult was never published in Renesans, or at least not under his own name. It is possible that Leftwich is confusedly recalling Bessie Moult's article.

[60] Koenig, 'Renesans-Motiven', p. 5 ['shtreben ven unbavust [...] tsu a masen-asimilatsie in teritoriale ramen'].

What was to be the fate of Jewish art and the Jewish people? Koenig requested

'answers from all directions and perspectives […] if they should only be honestly

represented, if there only beat in them a vein of lively Jewish invention.'[61] There were

theoretical limits to Koenig's openness. When he asked in the opening editorial

whether 'all the "-ism"s which now preside over the Jewish street [were] motifs of our

renaissance, or sad signs of our decadence, of our national demise?', the uncertainty

may have been genuine but the suspicion of '-isms' was equally real.[62] Koenig's

suspicion did not stop the magazine reproducing work by an impressive array of

formally experimental Jewish artists: David Bomberg, Jacob Kramer, Jacob Epstein and

Lucien Pissarro among those based in London; as well as Marc Chagall, Moïse Kisling,

Isaac Lichtenstein and Amadeo Modigliani, whom Koenig knew from La Ruche.[63] On

the other hand, almost all the pieces included were easily legible in representational

terms; furthermore, all depict figures who can be read as Jewish. They would have to

be to match the strange advice given by Koenig in the second issue of the magazine:

that the way to create a specifically Jewish art in a medium that did not have the

national specificity of language was to focus on an archetypal Jewish physiognomy.[64]

While *Renesans* had a guiding criterion of Jewishness, it resembled *Voices* in its

moderated experimentation, in art as well as in writing, with a strong tendency

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[61] Koenig, 'Renesans-Motiven', p. 7 ['ale entferen fun ale rikhtungen un shtandpunkten […] oyb zey velen nur ehrlikh reprezentirt veren, oyb es vet nur in zey shlogen a lebediger idisher shafungs oder'].

[62] Koenig, 'Renesans-Motiven', p. 7 ['zenen di ale "izmen" velkhe hershen itst in der idisher gas motiven fun unzer renesans, oder troyerige simonim fun unzer dekadans, fun unzer natsionalen untergehn?'].

[63] Aleksandra Shatskikh, *Vitebsk: The Life of Art*, trans. by Katherine Foshko Tsan (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2007), p. 58.

[64] Leo Koenig, 'Natsionale Estetik: Idishe Literatur Un Idishe Plastik', *Renesans*, 1.2 (1920), 99–105.

towards representational legibility. They only occasionally flirted with deliberate

ugliness in art, *Voices* perhaps more so in its poetry and prose fiction.

If the description of the two magazines suggests more obviously their

differences, there were important likenesses in their patronage and in the cross-

pollination of texts. Both magazines were largely written and edited by men, and their

different articulations of rebirth are part of the afterlife of male homosociality

encouraged and idealised during the war. But the rebirth and reworking of material

across the magazines also undermined their insistence on the separateness and

integrity of each voice and each nation. In an article published in both magazines in

1919-20, Israel Zangwill rejected Levin's description of fixed nationalities and offered

in its place 'the operation of natural law in the political world [which] is for ever

creating, hybridising or eliminating them', the three processes working

simultaneously.[65] The little magazine, which tried to assert a rhetoric of the unattached,

free and autonomous intervention, was in practice involved in games of double-

publication and opportunistic reuse. The fugitive character and small readership of

little magazines encouraged the recycling and resubmission of work as well as more

dubious cases of reappearance. The section that follows addresses an instance in which

the double appearance of a text brought significant changes both in its content and in

the message it assumed within its wider periodical context. However, the doubling

should be seen as a characteristic if unusually pointed example of 'the operation of

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[65] Israel Zangwill, 'Are the Jews a Nationality?', *Voices*, 2.4 (1919), 148–52 (p. 151); see also Israel Zangwill, 'Zenen Iden a Natsionalitet?', *Renesans*, 1.1 (1920), 67–70.

natural law' described by Zangwill, one in which the borders of magazines, like the borders of language and nation, were meaningful but by no means decisive.

Winsten and *The Nation's War Paintings*

According to Arthur Clutton-Brock, the exhibition at the Royal Academy of *The Nation's War Paintings and Other Records* marked a change in British art. Formal experiment may have existed before the war, but it had lacked justification. Painters had not had anything 'momentous enough to paint' and the public had consequently perceived in the efforts towards 'new ways of expression and of representation' merely 'the bluff of incompetence or the yawn of *ennui*.'[66] As art critic for *The Times*, Clutton-Brock argued that the new exhibition promised 'something much richer, more interesting, more spiritual, than has been in English painting since the Middle Ages.' The recently concluded war, he wrote, 'like Christianity long ago, has supplied a momentous theme, while it is an event in itself so large, and so shattering of continuity, that even the dullest of us expect all things to be different after it.' The war provided the theme that experimenters had lacked and, as a self-evident break in history, it justified a stylistic break. Thus, the exhibition, which included artwork from the collections of the Ministry of Information and the Imperial War Museum, could incorporate technical experimentation without becoming frivolous. On the contrary, it showed an adaptation to the demands of the age.

There was a further, moral reason to accept the work in the new style. Clutton-Brock imagined that the organisers of the exhibition had said:

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[66] Arthur Clutton-Brock, 'Art's Fresh Start', *The Times*, 12 December 1919, p. 15.

These young men have fought for us; now they shall paint for us, what they

have seen, as they have felt it. We will not impose on them our old examination

standard; we will not ask the questions we are accustomed to ask about

pictures—as whether that left foot is not out of drawing or whether that is our

idea of a bursting shell; we will let them give us the idea and nerve ourselves to

face the result.[67]

As compensation for the trauma of the war, art reviewers now had a duty towards the

'young men'.[68] The belief in the authenticating power of witness trumped quibbles

over details of expression. The rest of the review shows Clutton-Brock attempting to

enact that duty as he understood it. There are short paragraphs on paintings in the

exhibition by various painters from the experimental wing of British painting, broadly

understood: Stanley Spencer, Henry Lamb, William Roberts, and Paul Nash, with

Clutton-Brock reserving special praise for Wyndham Lewis's powers of 'illustration'.

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[67] Clutton-Brock.

[68] Sue Malvern attributes the popularisation of this idea to Ford Madox Ford's defence of the artwork of the dead Gaudier-Brzeska. Malvern, p. 6.
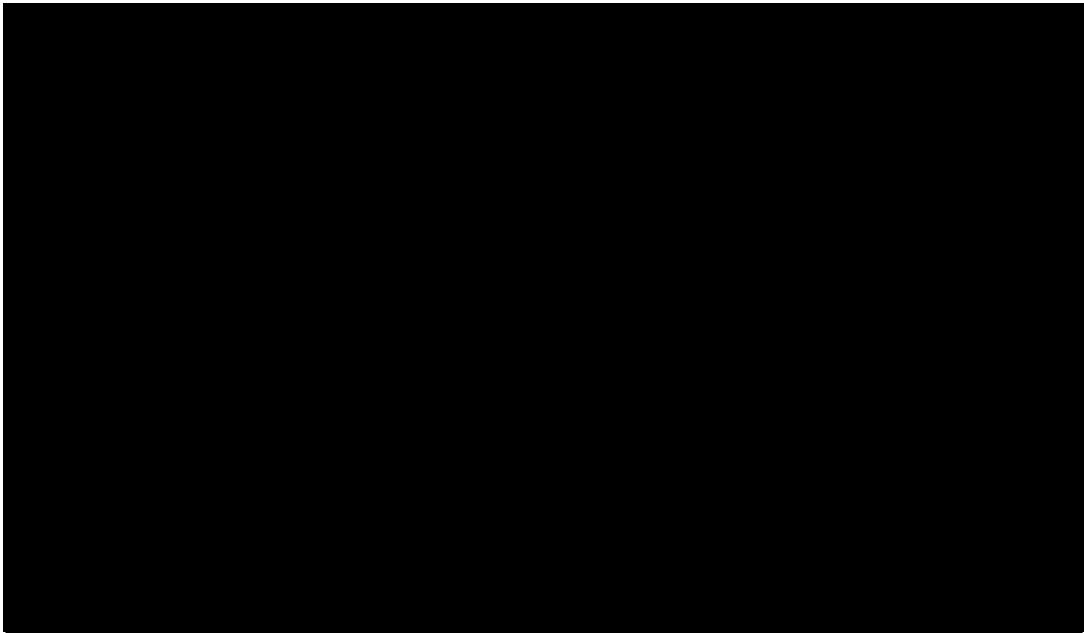
Wyndham Lewis, *A Battery Shelled*, 1919, 183 x 318cm, Imperial War Museum, London

The exhibition opened for two months in December 1919 and was a great popular and critical success.[69] As the title's pairing of 'war paintings' and 'other records' suggested, the governing justification of the exhibition was documentary. The Imperial War Museum had also collected artefacts and military paraphernalia, though these were excluded from the exhibition. While the exclusion may have been partly decorum regarding the gallery space of Burlington House, it is also suggestive of how the exhibition aimed beyond the documentary: its focus was less on the artefacts of the war than it was on the ways a narrative for the war might be shaped. It also implied an argument regarding the place of art in those processes. The scale of the ambition was reflected in the scale of the exhibition; the catalogue listed just under a thousand items.

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[69] James Fox, *British Art and the First World War, 1914-1924* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 135.

So much and such various art gathered together implied that the war had not destroyed creativity; English art was healthy, and it was unified, despite its variety.

Clutton-Brock seemed to accept the argument: the exhibition gave evidence of spiritual renewal, and a new world, built on the changed world of the war, wherein the rebel artists of the pre-war world were rehabilitated as productive citizens. The rapprochement staged between avant-garde and establishment tastes had political implications in the immediate aftermath of the war, with the threat of returning soldiers 'import[ing] the upheavals of the war directly on to the domestic scene', as strikes and civil disturbance took place across the country after soldiers returned to a labour market that had adapted to their absence.[70]

Ezra Pound, reviewing the exhibition in *The New Age* under the pseudonym B. H. Dias, was predictably against reconciliation, and expressed distrust of such a 'popular beanfest' where 'all tastes' were represented.[71] He rejected the gesture towards the democratic as disingenuous and, at any rate, misdirected. The scale of the exhibition was not a triumph, but merely added to the 'labour of picking the good from the rubbish.'[72] For Pound, the exhibition was one more battleground between the forces of good and rubbish, rather than a scene of convergent interests. With some exceptions, these categories mapped onto avant-garde and more stylistically conservative art respectively. As in his other criticism of the period, he apportioned particular praise to the work of Jacob Epstein, and expressed particular disdain for that

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[70] Corbett, *The Modernity of English Art: 1914-1930*, p. 61.
[71] B. H. Dias (Ezra Pound), 'Art Notes', *The New Age*, 1 January 1920, pp. 145–46 (p. 145); reproduced in Ezra Pound, *Ezra Pound and the Visual Arts*, ed. by Harriet Zinnes (New York: New Directions, 1980), pp. 129–31.
[72] Dias (Ezra Pound), p. 145.

of Henry Tonks and William Orpen, painters who had just enough connection to
avant-garde trends and circles to merit specific rejection rather than contemptuous
silence.

The review also made clear its distrust of the Royal Academy ('the Imperial
Papier-mâché Company, Inc') as hostile territory.[73] However, despite the typical
acerbity, the review quickly descends into a rather shapeless catalogue. It may be that
Pound was wrong-footed by the nature of the exhibition. Sue Malvern has noted that,
on the one hand, the British War Memorials scheme that had commissioned much of
the work in the exhibition 'was a private and personal project', with the newspaper
publisher Lord Beaverbrook acting 'as a modern aristocratic patron'. On the other
hand, 'it was a national state project, an extension of statesmanship assuming and
acting in the national interest'.[74] Rebecca Beasley has characterised Pound's art
criticism in the period as pursuing ways in which art could resist commodification and
turning unpersuasively to the personality of the artist as the grounds of that
resistance.[75] *The Nation's War Paintings* displayed an eccentric national collection, the
peculiar deviations of its development resulting in an exhibition that seemed to dodge
the categories of conservative and liberal, reactionary and avant-garde. It was not a
bazaar but a 'beanfest', a free dinner for the workers. As such, Pound's standard
narrative of the vitiating effects of the market did not fit what he found, and he had to
turn to reiterating his praise and condemnation of several artists.

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[73] Dias (Ezra Pound), p. 145.
[74] Malvern, p. 73.
[75] Rebecca Beasley, *Ezra Pound and the Visual Culture of Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge
University Press, 2007), p. 160.

Against Clutton-Brock's vision of reconciliation, Pound insisted on a renewed struggle against establishment art by the avant-garde. In both cases, the crux of the exhibition was the same: where Royal Academicians and the British avant-garde might previously have been kept away from each other, not only ideologically but geographically, they now shared the same space. Both reviewers presented this shift in terms of a victory for the young avant-garde, and Clutton-Brock as well as Pound sets the beautiful against the merely 'pretty', the authentic against the trivial and non-serious, in contexts that favour artists identified with the avant-garde.

I have begun with these two accounts of the exhibition because, while they oppose one another in several respects, they are both amenable to a narrative of the interwar period where, at least in visual art, the avant-garde was victorious, winning recognition beyond coterie circles by proving that its idiom was the suitable one for the age. Perhaps partly in response to this triumphal narrative, criticism since has been less generous, with the twenties seen as a lull before the more promising thirties.[76] David Peters Corbett's influential analysis acknowledged a reconciliation between avant-garde and institutional art but argued that it took place at the expense of the radicalism of the avant-garde. More recently, there have been attempts to qualify Corbett's assessment of the dissolution of the British avant-garde. In her discussion of the exhibition, Sue Malvern finds reviews by R. H. Wilenski and John Middleton Murry that show a 'discomfort and uncertainty' about the work on view.[77] These responses in turn allow her to suggest an exhibition where works were not equally reduced to

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[76] Harrison, for example, discusses the years 1919-1924 in terms of a 'hiatus': Charles Harrison, *English Art and Modernism, 1900-1939* (London; Bloomington: Allen Lane; Indiana University Press, 1981), pp. 145–66.

[77] Malvern, p. 93.

propaganda, but occupied a more ambiguous position – 'not quite art and not quite

politics, not quite acquiescence and not quite protest' – that was only awkwardly

accommodated within the British War Memorials Committee's project.[78]

Winsten's own account of the exhibition is strident, at times summary, and it

shows a willingness to refer the art to its social and institutional context that leads him

to a more thorough rejection of the exhibition than can be found in Clutton-Brock or

Pound. Winsten's position is closer to Corbett's than it is to Malvern's, but it lays the

ground for a modification of both. The versions of his review show a refusal of

complicity with the national project of rapprochement as it pertained to art, a refusal

consistent with his action during the war. Though they approach the issue from

different angles, both Corbett and Malvern recognise that complicity is the beginning

rather than the end of analysis, but their focus on English-language sources and British

artists means that they fail to see non-complicity as anything more than a dead end. If

we had only the review Winsten published in *Voices*, we might be inclined to agree.

The new community between public and artist constructed in the aftermath of the First

World War was successful only for a restricted idea of the public. The version of

Winsten's review published in *Renesans* marks Winsten's activity in an alternative,

overlapping community, which existed in Britain but outside a narrow history of

British art and with different strictures on what was sayable. The version in *Renesans*

could achieve a fuller critique of the exhibition's significance and a more compelling

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[78] Malvern, p. 107; it is worth noting that Corbett and Malvern differ on the definition and usefulness of key terms such as 'avant-garde'; see David Peters Corbett, 'Review of Sue Malvern, *Modern Art, Britain and the Great War: Witnessing, Testimony, and Remembrance* (2004)', *The Burlington Magazine*, 147.1230 (2005), 626.

sense of what might take its place. It shows that non-complicity, like complicity, might

be the beginning of analysis.

'A catholicity of taste': Winsten in *Voices*

Although Winsten described himself in 1974 as the last surviving member of 'the

"Voices" group' brought together by Moult after the war, he only began to be

published in the eleventh issue of the magazine, in November 1919.[79] His first

appearance in *Voices* was with poems about his experience as a conscientious objector

during the war. In his 1976 interview with Margaret Brooks, Winsten described how

the poems were composed over long periods of time in prison, before he wrote them

on toilet paper, which was smuggled out by a fellow-prisoner named Clarke.[80] The

poems were collected and published under the title of *Chains*, and several also

appeared in Yiddish in *Renesans*.

Although a conscientious objector rather than a soldier, Winsten's inclusion in

Voices did conform to some of Moult's priorities, since the editor's veneration of the

soldier-poet went in uneasy tandem with a loosely-conceived pacifism. D. H.

Lawrence's 'Rondeau of a Conscientious Objector' appeared in the magazine several

months before Winsten's first poems.[81] Many poems in *Voices* attacked an older

generation seen as responsible for inflicting the pointless suffering of the war on

younger men. The rejection of the hypocrisy that the magazine associated with the

older generation was reflected in its visual rhetoric: a simple, pared-down and

unillustrated cover. It can also be seen as part of the rhetoric surrounding the little

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[79] Stephen Winsten, 'Mr Thomas Moult'.
[80] Stephen Winsten, 'Winsten, Stephen Samuel (Oral History)', reel 9.
[81] D. H. Lawrence, 'Rondeau of a Conscientious Objector', *Voices*, 2.1 (1919), 1–2.

magazine more generally: too small and cheap to be corrupt; its contents catholic, to

some extent by virtue of necessity; typographic mistakes and mixed quality similarly

made part of a general impression of authenticity, where excessive professionalism

would have been suspect and soulless.

Winsten was able to find inclusion in *Voices* as one who had been made to

suffer physically and mentally at the hands of a warmongering government, identified

with a callous older generation. Winsten too could complain of old men that 'sniff the

air for more fresh blood'.[82] His poems in *Voices* also conformed to the general house-

style: they were not too disruptive formally; the poetic persona fitted reasonably neatly

onto the poet's biography; most importantly, they treated the war experience with

moral seriousness. Morrisson has credited Winsten for making *Voices* more progressive

in its art criticism than its poetry.[83] On the other hand, Winsten's poetry risked being

too unchallenging for Moult's tastes. The editor's review of *Chains* observed that some

might find the poems 'over-simple, and this because his personality is over-simple';

but '[a]ll we know […] is that they come of the very fire of that personality'.[84]

Winsten's review, 'The War Exhibition', appeared in *Voices* in March 1920 in the

section 'Notes on Present-Day Art', a month after the exhibition had closed.[85] The same

month, the article also appeared in Yiddish in *Renesans*, with substantial differences in

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[82] Stephen Winsten, *Chains*, p. 32. The line comes from the poem 'Slaughter', which Moult quotes in full in his review of the book.

[83] Morrisson, I: BRITAIN AND IRELAND, 1880-1955, p. 414.

[84] Thomas Moult, 'Poetry and Prison', *Voices*, 4.4 (1920), 154–56 (p. 156).

[85] Stephen Winsten, 'The War Exhibition', *Voices*, 3.2 (1920), 81–82. The delay between the exhibition and the review is curious and may be attributable, at least in part, to the decision to have a double-issue for December 1919 and no January 1920 issue. Fox also notes that the exhibition was extended by a week due to popular demand, so closed on 7 February 1920; see Fox, p. 135.

content and in the surrounding apparatus of the magazine. Both versions condemned

the exhibition and its contents for dishonesty and frivolity. The paintings, Winsten

wrote in *Voices*, only recycled the clichés of war:

> Clever sidelights of the conflict: with some of the symbols of tragedy – broken
>
> tree trunks, searchlights, machines and blood. But where is War?

That 'horrible fact called War' was not depicted.[86] Winsten's review itself recycled a

critique that had been raised against official British war art during the war. The

journalist and novelist Charles Edward Montague complained that '[p]erhaps it is

hinted that we are all in a league to hide from our friends at home some extreme,

mysterious horror which is "really" war, war "as it is," something which, if it leaked

out, would make the world lay down its arms on the spot, and the nations kiss and be

friends.'[87] Montague offered a caricature, but a just one in the case of Winsten. Years

later, Winsten would insist that, were he a historian, he would be able prove that just

such a 'great opportunity' had been narrowly missed; the war might have been

avoided entirely had young people 'only all said we won't have war'.[88]

Since the viewer was not given 'the conviction of War', the exhibition was 'a

failure', but Winsten was not blind to the mixture of styles on display and he remarked

on the government's 'catholicity of taste'.[89] In fact, the only real virtue of the exhibition

he identified was that it allowed one to observe 'the range of method in modern art'.[90]

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[86] Stephen Winsten, 'The War Exhibition', p. 81.
[87] Muirhead Bone and C. E. Montague, *The Western Front: Drawings*, 2 vols (London: War Office from offices of *Country Life*, 1917), II, p. 4.
[88] Stephen Winsten, 'Winsten, Stephen Samuel (Oral History)', reel 4.
[89] Stephen Winsten, 'The War Exhibition', pp. 81–82.
[90] Stephen Winsten, 'The War Exhibition', p. 82.

In the review, Winsten singled out *Gassed* (1919), the large painting by John Singer

Sargent, for criticism, writing that it gave one 'the feeling [that Sargent] painted it 'in
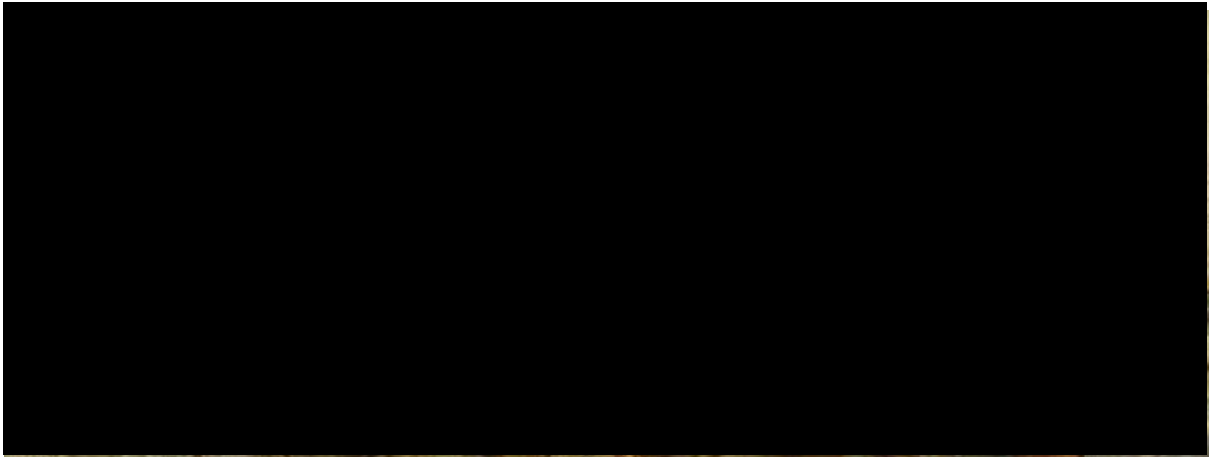
John Singer Sargent, *Gassed*, 1919, 231 x 611 cm, Imperial War Museum, London.

about the same mood as when he paints his silks and satins', before remarking that the

painting 'is itself one of the tragedies of the War'.[91]

However, it was formally experimental art whose failure was the more

significant outcome since the exhibition had

proved that Cubism is quite harmless: it can say as little as other schools, and

has the saving sense of humour…. For the jester dared not reveal the serious

side of War or he would lose his commission'.[92]

There was, then, in a sense, the reconciliation of conservative and avant-garde trends in

art as understood by Clutton-Brock, but it came at the expense of the latter's pretence

to radicalism and to seriousness.

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[91] Stephen Winsten, 'The War Exhibition', p. 81.
[92] Stephen Winsten, 'The War Exhibition', p. 81.

Winsten's comments on Cubism hint at an argument that is explicit in the *Renesans* version, where he wrote that, '[j]ust like the official journalists, [the artists] have not been in need of any censor.'[93] In both cases, there is a sense that the insincerity of the works on display was not incidental but a function of a larger system of suppression, a system in which the artists showed a conscious complicity. If Winsten's claim is inflated and conspiratorial, the critique that there were details that the British government would not allow to be painted was justified. British war art evolved with and alongside an evolving system of censorship: as well as rules on depicting

strategically significant objects and sites, artists had to be careful to depict soldiers heroically, only occasionally and under certain conditions portraying them as wounded; '[a]fter Passchendaele there was a complete embargo on corpses, British or German.'[94] The end of the war saw this censorship relaxed, and the exhibition included work that would not have passed the more stringent censors, such as C. R. W. Nevinson's *The Doctor* (1916). However, given that many of the
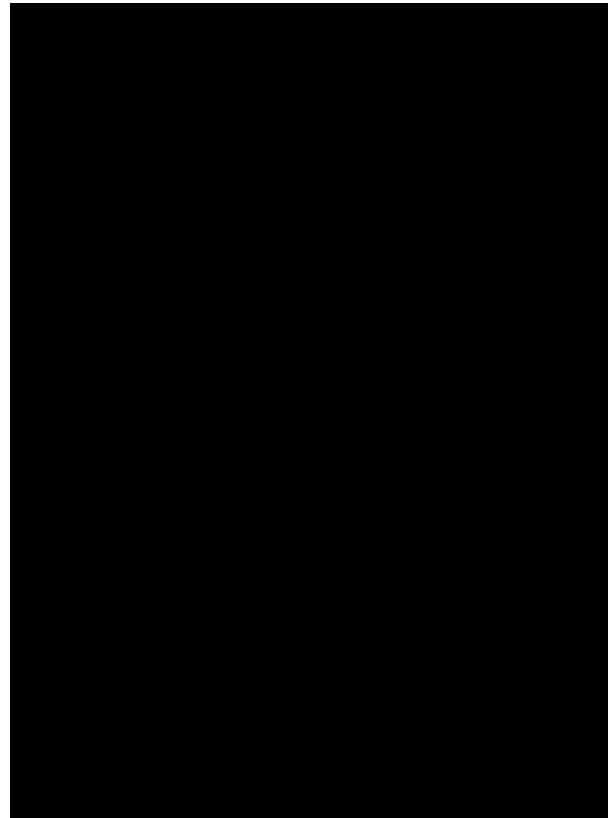
C. R. W. Nevinson, *The Doctor*, 1916, 57 x 41cm, Imperial War Museum, London

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[93] Stephen Winsten, 'Milkhome Bilder', *Renesans*, 1.3 (1920), 216–18 (p. 217) ['punkt vi di ofitsyele zshurnalisten hoben zey zikh nisht genoytigt in keyn tsenzur'].

[94] Meirion Harries and Susie Harries, *The War Artists: British Official War Art of the Twentieth Century* (London: Michael Joseph, 1983), p. 42.

works on display had been created with foreknowledge of the censor's demands, the question about what the exhibition made visible and what it occluded was pertinent.

It is Winsten's sense of a governing context of censorship and deceit that forms the backdrop to his refusal of a narrative of reconciliation. Winsten deployed the snarl-words of both aesthetic conservatives and the avant-garde, but where Pound used them to redraw lines that risked becoming blurred, Winsten did so in a general and indiscriminate way. He did not distinguish which work offered '[c]lever sidelights of the conflict', though 'clever' as pejorative was typically reserved for attacks on experimental work. It also explains why he refused the route taken by Pound, praising some, finding fault in others: the conditions of the presentation and, in many cases, production of the work, vitiated it all.

Winsten used both 'clever' and 'pretty' to support his central charge of superficiality. It was an attack that was not out of place in *Voices* with its editor's insistence on 'vital truth' over technical excellence. Morrisson compares Winsten's art criticism with the music criticism of Neville Cardus, also published in *Voices*, and sees both as rejecting 'what they saw as a kind of detached aestheticism'.[95] Winsten's insistence on the communicative role of art may at times seem to prejudice him against formally experimental work, as in his review of the 1920 Group X exhibition, but he was by no means against all forms of abstraction, as his perceptive criticism of Bomberg's 1919 exhibition at the Adelphi Galleries had shown.[96]

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[95] Morrisson, I: BRITAIN AND IRELAND, 1880-1955, p. 415.
[96] Stephen Winsten, 'European Art', *Voices*, 3.4 (1920), 165–66; Stephen Winsten, 'Dovid Bomberg: Tsu Zayn Oysshtelung in Di Adelfi Galeri's', *Renesans*, 1.1 (1920), 71–72; the piece bears a close resemblance to an article by Winsten that appeared in *Voices* some months later: Stephen Winsten, 'David Bomberg: A Force in Modern Art', *Voices*, 4.1 (1920), 38–39.

Winsten suggested two main reasons for the failure of the pieces on display to do more than skim the surface of the war, in addition to his hint that the artist's fear of 'los[ing] his commission' made him avoid the truth. Perhaps, Winsten proposed, the war was 'such a terrible thing that we must find relief in its lighthearted aspects: introducing only the melodramatic surface of the tragedy'. Alternatively,

> the heart of the artist [is] so benumbed after the continuous experience of slaughter that he takes it as a matter of course, using the new objects and subjects of War for his purposes, but never expressing War.[97]

The first explanation treats the war as inherently inexplicable; the second that its traumatic effect has made the artists unfit to depict it. While the question is left formally unresolved in the article, Winsten seems to incline towards the latter explanation. The article argues that '[t]he dread experience has only just bitten into our blood and senses. It will be expressed in some later day.'[98] If my metaphor of trauma implies a possible cure, Winsten's own language points elsewhere: the bite of the 'dread experience' suggests not gradual healing but spreading venom. Winsten concluded his review on a portentous imperative that trailed off in an ellipsis:

> Men say that the War is over. It is certainly not brought back to us at Burlington House…. Let it never be said again that War stimulates Art….[99]

The conclusion is characteristic of some of the stylistic peculiarities of the version of the article in *Voices*. Ellipses are scattered throughout the review, often bridging apparent

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[97] Stephen Winsten, 'The War Exhibition', p. 82.
[98] Stephen Winsten, 'The War Exhibition', p. 82.
[99] Stephen Winsten, 'The War Exhibition', p. 82.

non-sequiturs. The conclusion is not the only place where the reader encounters an argument that fails to cohere or a suggestion left hanging. Winsten's closing command served once again as a broad dismissal of the hundreds of works on show, and a rejection not only of the argument made by the scale of the exhibition, but by many of the reviewers that had written on it. However, it raised a problem in Winsten's own argument. If the war was not a stimulant to art, then why ought one to be disappointed that it had not yet found expression in art? Despite the final line, the real problem that Winsten described was less that the war had killed art, and more that it has not yet been properly efficacious. In art, as in politics, the war had had every appearance of being a crisis, and yet so little seemed to have changed.

We can identify a similar contradiction in the general orientation of *Voices*. The magazine sought a spiritual renaissance led by the young men broken by the war, whose destruction was understood to be the primary tragedy of the war. Furthermore, despite the pastoral idylls that appeared in the magazine's pages, at times *Voices* hinted at desiring something more complex than a pre-war Eden. After all, the pre-war world was one controlled by the older generation held responsible for the bloodshed. The wisdom that the young were meant to have acquired was born out of their suffering, implying the writers' tacit acceptance of that suffering's necessity.

With a theoretical position so involved and vulnerable, alongside the magazine's lionisation of the suffering soldier, *Voices* was perhaps always inclining towards a compromise with the dominant narrative of the war. Moult's 1921 editorial in *Voices* would look back at a poem by Golding in praise of Lenin with a defence of the magazine's openness to different political positions, but with a hint of

embarrassment.[100] Winsten's wholesale rejection of British war art marked a refusal of

that compromise, and his anticipation of an expression of the 'dread experience'

demanded a more radical shift in art than the exhibition had revealed. The meaning of

that shift can only be properly understood by referring to the version of the article that

appeared in *Renesans*.

'Di tragedye fun der milkhome': Winsten in *Renesans*

The appearance of Winsten's article in *Renesans* under the title 'Milkhome Bilder' [War

Paintings] implied a change in readership, and in what could be assumed both of their

knowledge and of their priorities.[101] The article that appeared in *Renesans* was different

in several respects: it was longer by about a quarter of the length of the *Voices* version;

it lacked the ellipses; its arguments were more developed; and it was sharper and more

specific in its criticisms. It was also followed in the next issue of the magazine by an

article by Winsten on 'Di Milkhome-Lider fun Zigfrid Sasun un Luis Golding' [The

War Poems of Siegfried Sassoon and Louis Golding].[102]

  With the impression that the *Renesans* article includes material cut out of the

version in *Voices*, it is, in turn, tempting to read 'Milkhome Bilder' as the more

authentic expression of Winsten's views. There are several reasons to be wary of doing

so. The most important one is simply a lack of evidence. It is not clear under what

conditions the article appeared in Yiddish or in English and, since they were published

in the same month, it is hard to establish priority. If Winsten really spoke no Yiddish,

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[100] Thomas Moult, 'Editorial'; see also Louis Golding, 'Lenin', *Voices*, 1.5 (1919), 234.

[101] Stephen Winsten, 'Milkhome Bilder'.

[102] Stephen Winsten, 'Di Milkhome-Lider Fun Zigfrid Sasun Un Luis Golding', *Renesans*, 2.1 (1920), 54–55.

as he claimed in 1976, it is likely Koenig or Leftwich would have translated from a

manuscript of the review, perhaps reshaping it to reflect the priorities of the magazine.

Two poems by Winsten published in *Renesans* in June 1920 were translated by Koenig,

making him the likelier translator. Even without this uncertainty, there would still be

the possibility of a cheerful opportunism on Winsten's part, looking to sell

substantially the same piece twice. While I refer the authorship of both versions to

Winsten, this is a critical expediency that should not dispel the questions around

attribution.

Winsten's review of *The Nation's War Paintings* in *Renesans* contained most of

the same arguments, and some of the same turns of phrase as the version in *Voices.*

Again, we might summarise the key charge against the exhibition being that: 'men zeht

do nisht di tragedye fun der milkhome' ('One does not see here the tragedy of the

war').[103] The differences in the *Renesans* version cluster around two areas: a greater

focus on Jewish artists; and a more direct interrogation of what the artists at the

exhibition had failed to achieve. The first is perhaps the less surprising. While Winsten

in *Voices* referred obliquely to Bernard Meninsky's paintings of soldiers in a train

station when he wrote that '[m]en talking at a railway station, dressed in khaki, are not

War', the article in *Renesans* was explicit in the target: 'Meninsky, for example,

represents several men at a train station; only since they go dressed up in "khaki" is it

called a war-picture.'[104] Further Jewish artists were then criticised along the same lines:

'Epstein puts a real helmet on a head; and so it becomes a war-sculpture [...]

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[103] Stephen Winsten, 'Milkhome Bilder', p. 217.

[104] Stephen Winsten, 'Milkhome Bilder', p. 217 ['meninski, lemoshl, shtelt for etlikhe menshen oyf a bahnhoyf, nor azoy vi zey gehn ongeton in "kaki", heyst es a milkhome-bild'].

Rothenstein paints portraits of officers; they are war-pictures.'[105] Even the discussion of

Sargent became more focussed on Jewishness, with the reference to the painter's 'silks

and satins' substituted for a reference to his portraits of the Wertheimer family.[106]

Bernard Meninsky, *Victoria Station, District Railway*, 1918, 51 x 77 cm,
Imperial War Museum, London
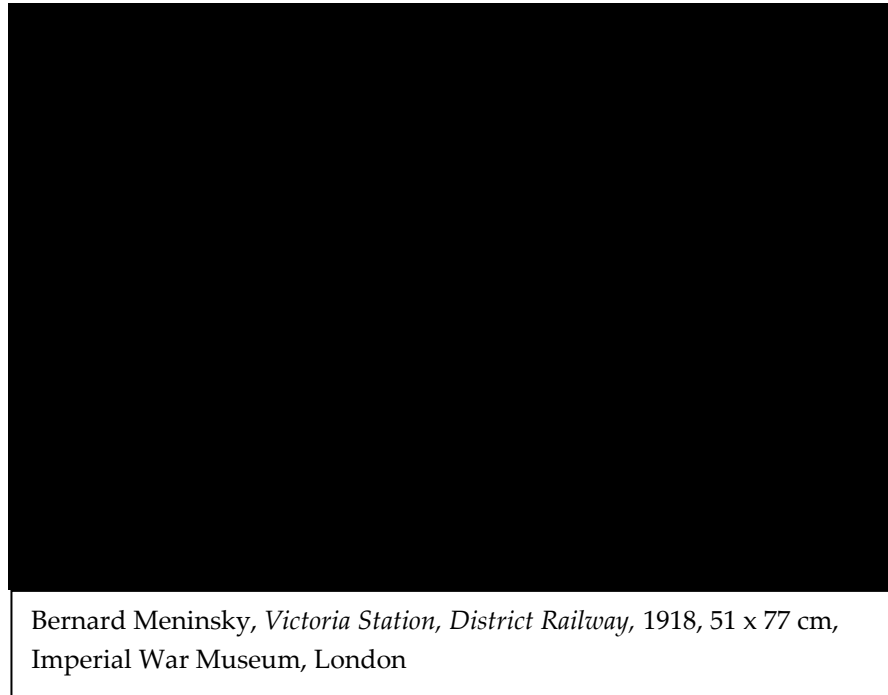
Winsten also criticised Bomberg, whose ink wash drawings at the Adelphi

Galleries he had praised for their 'truly intensive life' in the January issue of

Renesans.[107] Bomberg was represented in the exhibition by a preparatory piece for

Sappers at Work (1918-19), donated by Muirhead Bone. Winsten wrote that the piece

'shows several angles put together in the shape of a human figure; only because the

name has something to do with war does one understand that the picture does not

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[105] Stephen Winsten, 'Milkhome Bilder' ['epshtayn tut on an emesn helmet oyf a kop, vert es shoyn a milkhome-skulptur' […] rothenshtayn molt portretn fun ofitsirn, zenen zey milkhome-bilder'].
[106] Stephen Winsten, 'Milkhome Bilder', p. 218.
[107] Stephen Winsten, 'Dovid Bomberg: Tsu Zayn Oysshtelung in Di Adelfi Galeri's' ['an'emes intensiven leben'].

belong to his Japanese- or ship-drawings.'[108] The description of 'angles put together in the shape of a human figure' seems to play to Koenig's distrust of abstraction, although the displayed work was easily legible in figurative terms. However, Winsten's suggestion that Bomberg had used the Canadian War Memorials commission for another exploration of arranging figures in space was not unreasonable.
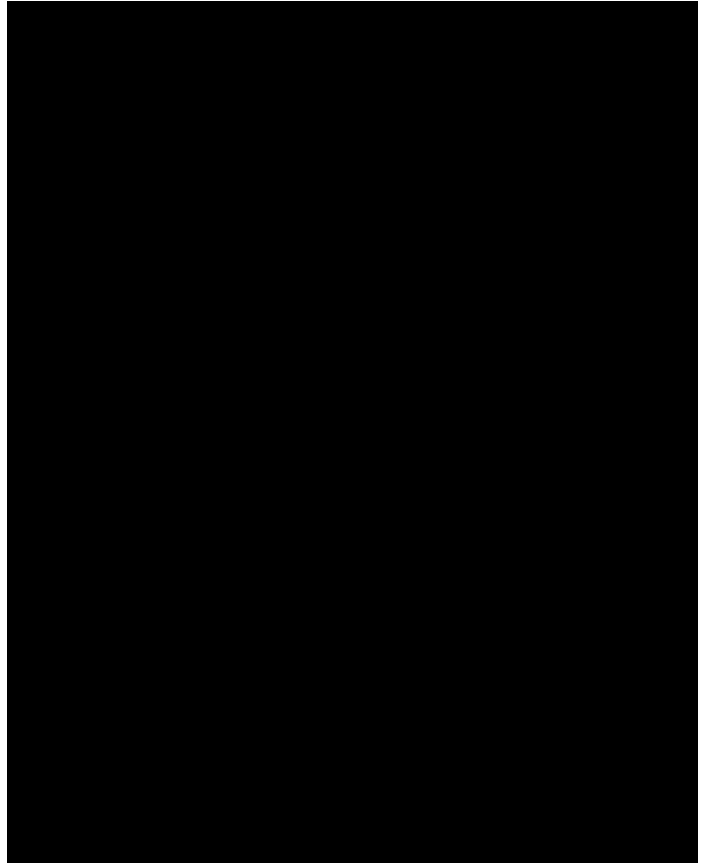
David Bomberg, *Study for Sappers at Work: Canadian Tunnelling Company, R14, St Eloi*, c.1918-19, 69 x 56cm, Imperial War Museum, London

Winsten's ambivalence on Bomberg's work points to his unsuitability to either of the two camps of dissent that Malvern identifies among reviewers of the exhibition who did not share the 'dominant mood of acclamation'.[109] The first, represented by Reginald Grundy and *The Graphic*, were conservative outsiders. The second were the Bloomsbury Group, represented by Clive Bell's 1920 article on Wilcoxism, which included *The Nation's War Paintings* in its attack. For Bell, the failure of the exhibition lay in the fact that the artists expressed something that had horrified them as men,

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[108] Stephen Winsten, 'Milkhome Bilder', p. 217 ['bomberg vayzt etlikhe eken tsuzamengeshtelt in a form fun a menshlikher figur, nor azoy vi der nomen hot epes tsu tun mit milkhome, farshteyt men az dos bild gehert nisht tsu zayne yapanishe oder shifen-tsaykhnungen'].
[109] Malvern, p. 106.

rather than moved them as artists.[110] While Winsten's review of the Adelphi Galleries

exhibition shows that he shared with Bell an appreciation for formalism as well

pacifism, his review of *The Nation's War Paintings* shows a similar logic driven to very

different ends. As Malvern points out, Bell's argument requires the exclusion of the

war alongside any other subject matter.[111] In his review of the Adelphi Galleries

exhibition, Winsten could insist that '[t]he form is for [Bomberg] the main thing and

not what it represents', and that this was part of the success of the work. [112] However,

the same could not be the case for *The Nation's War Paintings*, where the stakes were

different. For Winsten, war was not a topic, like theatre or ballet, that could serve as the

incidental vehicle for an exploration in pattern and it could certainly not be discarded:

it must be the decisive, driving factor, the centre from which the work organically

grew.

There is then a closer kinship with Clutton-Brock's reasoning: the novelty of the

war demanded a novelty of response. For Clutton-Brock, that novelty could be

expressed by tempered forms of Cubism and Futurism; for Winsten, that was not

enough. Indeed, what is more notable than the attention given to Jewish artists in itself

was Winsten's remark that they failed, and that their failures were particularly

disappointing because

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[110] Clive Bell, 'Wilcoxism', *Athenaeum*, 4688, 1920, 311–12 (p. 311).

[111] Malvern, p. 107.

[112] Stephen Winsten, 'Dovid Bomberg: Tsu Zayn Oysshtelung in Di Adelfi Galeri's', p. 72 ['di form is bay ihm der iker, un nit dos vos es shtelt for'].

we did expect something from our Jewish artists. We thought they would

perhaps submit pictures that the government would be afraid to show—

representations of war.[113]

It is worth noting that Winsten would have been unlikely to know if they had. In fact,

Bomberg's first oil painting for the Canadian War Memorials Fund had been rejected

by the curator P. G. Konody as a 'futurist abortion'.[114] The painting that was eventually

accepted, based on the exhibited study, was more representational in colour terms and

made its figures more obviously heroic. 'After all,' continued Winsten,

Jews are familiar with suffering. Their blood is soaked through with it and we

thought that in the stress [drang] from the war, it would find expression from

them. But sadly, the Jewish painters have not risen to it—at least not in

England.[115]

It is hard to know whether this last line merely shows Winsten hedging his argument,

or if it gives a genuine hint at Jewish artists elsewhere that Winsten considered to have

adequately captured the war-essence in art. The same issue of *Voices* that included his

review of *The Nation's War Paintings* also contained Winsten's appreciative article on

Epstein's exhibition at the Leicester Galleries.[116] A later article reserved high praise for

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[113] Stephen Winsten, 'Milkhome Bilder', p. 217 ['mir hoben yo ervart epes fun unzere idishe kinstler. mir hoben gemeynt zey velen efsher araynshiken bilder vos di regirung vet moyra hoben tsu vayzen—forshtelungen fun milkhome'].

[114] Alice Mayes, 'The Young Bomberg', 1972, p. 28, Tate Gallery Archives, 7312; for a revisionist account of the incident, see Malvern, pp. 115–22.

[115] Stephen Winsten, 'Milkhome Bilder', p. 217 ['iden zenen dokh bakant mit leyden. zeyer blut iz durkhgeveykt mit dem un mir hoben gemeynt az in dem drang fun der milkhome vet es gefinen bay zey an'oysdruk. ober layder, hoben zikh di idishe maler nisht derhoyben dertsu— venigstens nisht in england'].

[116] Stephen Winsten, 'Mr. Jacob Epstein at the Leicester Galleries', *Voices*, 3.2 (1920), 82–84.

Camille Pissarro, whose work showed 'a subtler strength […] than in the rude animalism of Epstein'.[117] Pissarro won out for Winsten because the artist's return to nature and youth represented a future and revival where Epstein's harshness could provide only criticism and retrospection. However, that harshness was not without value, and has its analogue in the sharp satire of Winsten's writing that emerges especially in the *Renesans* version of the review.

In *Renesans,* we can see Winsten using a line of argument also present in Koenig's writing – that of the particular capacities and obligations of Jewish art – and shaping it to a specific responsibility to challenge the British government's narrative of the war. For Winsten, Anglo-Jewish artists, caught between those two identities, achieved a conditional access to participate in the national war-narrative, but were sufficiently detached from Englishness that they had the capacity and obligation to challenge it. The liberal artistic taste of the government was shown to be an outgrowth of a more essential limitation: '[a]bove all, one needs today to support everything that is English!'[118] Like Pound, Winsten distrusted the exhibition's pretence to openness. Whereas Pound's distrust was rooted in the way that democracy compromised aristocracy, the rightful division of good from bad, Winsten's distrust seems to have sprung more from the nationalist underpinnings of the exhibition's liberal attitude.

Where *Voices* led a loose coalition of youth in opposition to an increasingly vague idea of abused power and the horror of war, the coalition of *Renesans* was Jews

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[117] Stephen Winsten, 'Camille Pissarro at the Leicester Galleries', *Voices*, 3.5–6 (1920), 245–46 (p. 246).

[118] Stephen Winsten, 'Milkhome Bilder', p. 217 ['iberhoypt broykh men haynt shitsen ales vos iz english!'].

across nations: as Leonard Prager has written, 'from the very outset the Yiddish press in Britain was meant for foreign as well as home consumption', though *Renesans* seems to have failed in its ambitions to take hold in America.[119] There are important respects in which *Renesans* was a London production, and one interested in the ways that Englishness might influence ideas of Jewishness. However, there was little sense, certainly in Koenig's editorials, of a discrete Anglo-Jewish identity. Winsten's article in *Renesans* put a particular demand on, and was thus particularly disappointed by, those at the intersection.[120] The position was askew from both magazines: it disappeared from the version in *Voices* and resolved itself into a vague gesture beyond British borders in *Renesans*.

The article in *Renesans* was also more open in its refusal to venerate either soldier or soldier-artist. This can be seen most clearly from two elements: Winsten's anecdote of a victim of mustard gas; and his discussion of the work of C. R. W. Nevinson. The first follows on from Winsten's comments on Sargent's *Gassed*. The charge was largely the same as that in *Voices*. Winsten wrote that the blinded figures of Sargent's paintings 'stand in such nice poses. And the theme is the worst which civilisation has created—young men broken and not dead.'[121] But in *Renesans* the remark was succeeded by an anecdote isolated in a paragraph of its own:

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[119] Prager, 'The Glory and Gloom of the Anglo-Yiddish Press', p. 10; Thomas Moult, 'A Survey of Contemporaries – The Month of March'.

[120] Born and raised in New York, Jacob Epstein, as usual, presents something of an anomaly. By the time Winsten's article was written, Epstein had been living in London for almost twenty years. His split position may explain his usefulness to Winsten both as problem and, elsewhere, as solution.

[121] Stephen Winsten, 'Milkhome Bilder', p. 218 ['di figuren shtehn in azelkhe shene fozen [sic]. un di tema iz di shreklikhste vos di tsivilizatsie hot geshafen—yunge mener tsubrokhen un nisht toyt'].

> I once saw 'a gassed' man. He walked in the street like Charlie Chaplin, and the
>
> crowd was entertained.[122]

The anecdote has no equivalent in the English version. The vignette is effective, vivid

and entirely without heroism, except perhaps for the miniature heroism of Chaplin's

Little Tramp. The veteran, that repository of truth and witness, is turned into a

spectacle. The gassed man does not match any of the standard war-art models: he is

neither the English soldier triumphant nor the heroic wounded. The injured of

Sargent's painting fail in realism because the realistic treatment of war demanded the

grotesque. Even Nevinson's *The Doctor*, which in certain respects seems to come close

to Winsten's demands in its sickly and cartoonish crudity, may still allow its subjects

too much sympathy.

What makes Winsten's anecdote stand out from the work in the exhibition and

in *Voices* is its refusal to express pity. As narrator of the scene, Winsten assumes a cold

exteriority: while there is no doubt indignation implicit in Winsten's article, it does not

have the hortative quality of certain of his poems, or of Moult's own writing; the

anecdote is rather an image of misanthropy. Its closest equivalent in painting may be

the work of the Berlin Dadaists, George Grosz and Otto Dix, where an appalled disgust

at the war-wounded was part of a reaction against the hypocrisy wherein the heroism

of veterans was effusively praised while the veterans themselves were left to shamble

about the streets lacking homes and missing limbs. Furthermore, Winsten finds the

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[122] Stephen Winsten, 'Milkhome Bilder', p. 218 ['ikh hob amol gezehn "a gegazten" man. er iz gegangen in gas vi tsharli tshaplin, un der oylem hot zikh amuzirt'].

crowd as a whole guilty of a failure of sympathy, rather than just the generals or the old.

The anecdote may also clarify the tragedy that Winsten found missing in the exhibition. Its essence was a loss of sympathetic connection. The same tragedy had made itself felt in the poems of *Chains*, where social breakdown and division was embodied in the imprisonment of the poet and especially in his separation from his daughter. The same loss of sympathy and acquisition of callousness, Winsten wrote, could be seen at the exhibition:

> The crowd goes from picture to picture, and is entertained. And as you come out into the street, you feel as if life is bubbling, the carriages are clattering and the people run by, and you understand that you have come out of a place of entertainment.[123]

The refrain on 'entertained' and 'entertainment' recognises the reduction of the war to a spectacle while the repetition gives a flatness that cuts against the ostensible variety of the exhibition works. Whereas poetry, read privately, might keep its integrity, the exhibition space and its facilitation of a patriotic public body anticipated and undercut any resistance that the paintings on display might have attempted.

On the question of resistance, Winsten's comments on Nevinson are instructive. From being one of the loudest supporters of F. T. Marinetti in England, Nevinson had achieved popular and critical acclaim during the war as an 'uncompromising and

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[123] Stephen Winsten, 'Milkhome Bilder', p. 218 ['der oylem geht fun bild tsu bild, un amuzirt zikh. un az men kumt aroys in gas, fihlt men vi dos leben kokht, di vegener royshen, un di menshen loyfen farbay, un men bagrayft az men iz ersht aroysgekumen fun a farvayluigs-ort (sic; I assume a mistake for "farvaylungs-ort")'].

somewhat difficult-to-harness truth teller.'[124] The extent of his success can be measured

by the praise he won from figures as diverse as Konody and Osbert Sitwell.[125] Pound

offered grudging praise for *The Harvest of Battle* (1919) when exhibited at Burlington

House, writing that Nevinson had 'at any rate painted mud that clings to the boots,

and corpses that are not mere bright spots of decorativity'.[126] If it remained to Pound's

mind 'bad painting', it gained from being realistic, authentic and serious: it was

'uncontestably a representation of reality and an excellent record of the war' and

'gain[ed] honour by much of the frivolity in the exhibit'. [127] Nevinson can be seen as

emblematic of the reconciliation of the avant-garde and public celebrated by Clutton-

Brock or the concessions to the status quo regretted by Corbett.

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[124] Michael J. K. Walsh, *Hanging A Rebel: The Life of C. R. W. Nevinson* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2008), p. 113.
[125] Osbert Sitwell, *C. R. W. Nevinson* (London: Ernest Benn, 1925), pp. 26–27; see also Corbett, *The Modernity of English Art: 1914-1930*, pp. 48–50.
[126] Dias (Ezra Pound), p. 145.
[127] Dias (Ezra Pound), p. 145.
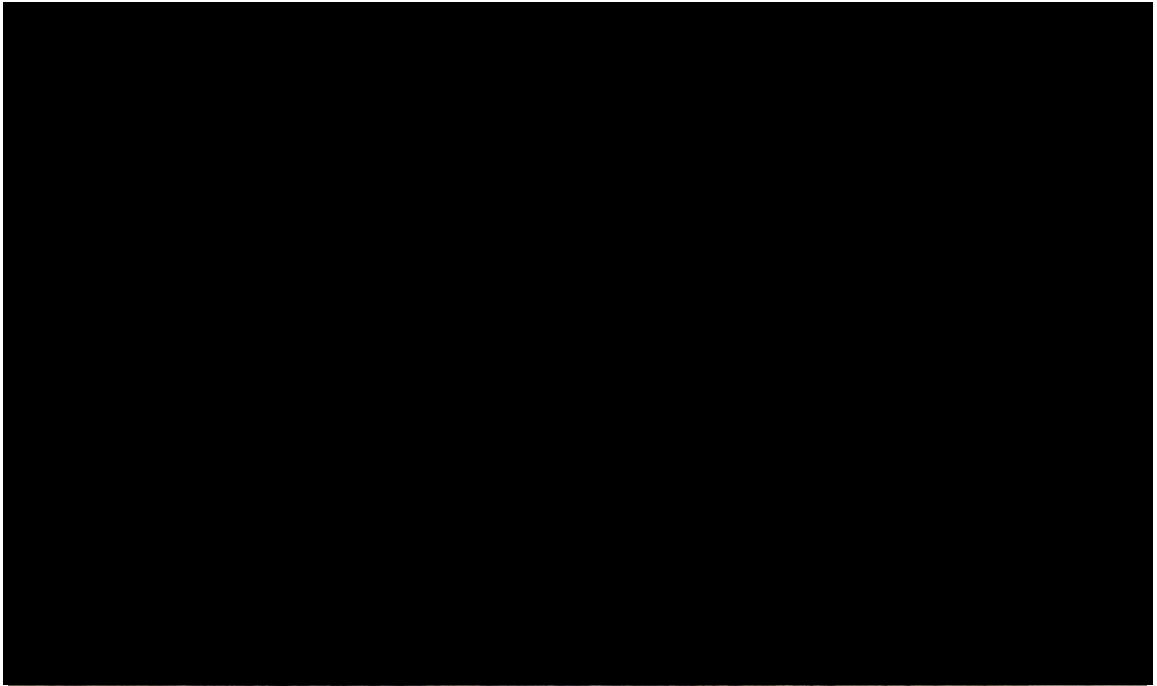
C. R. W. Nevinson, *The Harvest of Battle*, 1919, 183x318cm, Imperial War Museum, London

Nevinson did appear in Winsten's *Voices* review, but only in an apparently exculpatory footnote. His appearance followed Winsten's remark that artists had not dared to depict the serious side of war for fear of losing their commission, which itself seems a more subdued version of the accusation in *Renesans* that 'a battalion of artists has played a bit, got time on leave and painted pictures. Let's hope that they have been paid well in return.'[128] The footnote read as follows:

Mr. C. R. W. Nevinson states: — 'A bevy of majors at G.H.Q., took it upon themselves to set up an aesthetic censorship. They did not want dead men in

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[128] Stephen Winsten, 'Milkhome Bilder', p. 217 ['an artisten batalion hot zikh abisel geshpilt, gekrigen urloyb un gemolt bilder. lomir hofen az zey hoben gekrigen gut batsohlt derfar'].

the pictures—as if dead men were not part of war! They wanted pretty pictures and not facts.'[129]

As with other parts of the *Voices* version, the argument is not clearly developed. It seems to acknowledge the forces suppressing truth, but to make clear that the responsibility rests with the 'bevy of majors' rather than the artist himself. By quoting Nevinson, the footnote points to government censorship without taking responsibility for that claim, and it aligns with Winsten's sneer that melodramatic effects had been achieved 'very prettily'.[130]

In the *Renesans* piece, Winsten showed less restraint, or perhaps fewer restraints:

Nevinson is known for his war pictures. He became popular with them. And it was said that he'd found a dynamic for tragedy. He shows here 'Searchlights' in a beautiful blue sky – a kind of Whistler effect – only Whistler used to make these when he came home from a ball. There are also here pictures of the wounded— 'terrible!', people say, and nevertheless buy them. The truth is that Nevinson's pictures don't hurt. He uses simply the symbols of tragedy, and the methods of the salon and of the poster.[131]

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[129] Stephen Winsten, 'The War Exhibition', p. 81. I have so far been unable to find a source for the remarks attributed to Nevinson.

[130] Stephen Winsten, 'The War Exhibition', p. 81.

[131] Stephen Winsten, 'Milkhome Bilder' ['nevinson iz bavust far zayne milkhome-bilder. er iz gevoren populer mit zey. men hot gezogt az er hot gefunen a dinamik far tragedye. er vayzt do "sertshlayts" oyf a shenem bloyem himel—a min vhistler efekt—nor vhistler flegt zey makhen beys er iz aheymgekumen fun a bal. es senen oykh farhan bilder fun farvundete—"shreklikh", zogen menshen, un dokh koyfen zey. der emes iz az nevinson's bilder tuen nit veh. er banutst bloyz di simbolen fun tragedye, un di metoden fun salon un fun plakat']. It is worth noting that the catalogue does not include Nevinson's *Searchlights* (1916) or one of his other paintings with 'searchlights' in the name. Winsten may have had *Swooping Down on a Hostile Plane* (1917) in

Most of Winsten's critique is familiar by this point, but his emphasis on continuity and complicity is significant, particularly as it compares with Malvern's characterisation of Nevinson as a 'troublesome' presence in the exhibition, whose painting 'unsettled and disrupted the aspirations of the War Memorials' project.'[132] There is no doubt that Malvern's is the more subtle and attentive reading of *The Harvest of Battle* as a painting, but Winsten's cruder refusal highlights a truth around the reception of the work.

Despite their apparent differences, Nevinson and Sargent's large paintings gained the longest queues at the exhibition.[133] In 1928, when staff at the Imperial War Museum began selling postcards of their paintings, *The Harvest of Battle* and *Gassed* were among those that sold the best.[134] These details do not erase the possibility that they continued to trouble those who queued to see them and paid to have a postcard of them. It could even be argued that it was the troublesome quality that provided the impetus. However, if it is true that Nevinson 'refused to satisfy' the public he imagined for his painting, then we must either fault Nevinson's imagination, or understand satisfaction in the sense that the public could not get enough of it.[135]

For Winsten, complicity with commercialism condemned Nevinson's work just as inclusion in the exhibition condemned the artists displayed. Both Nevinson and Sargent receive the same criticism from Winsten: that they have not reformed their style to address the war; they offer a continuity of peacetime and wartime that refuses

mind, or perhaps one of exhibitions of Nevinson's work that had been staged in London during the war.

[132] Malvern, p. 104.

[133] Walsh, p. 157.

[134] Jennifer Wellington, *Exhibiting War: The Great War, Museums, and Memory in Britain, Canada, and Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. 296.

[135] Malvern, p. 107.

to learn from the war; they refuse to 'hurt' the viewer. The attack on Nevinson and the vignette of the gassed man inform Winsten's answer to the effect of the war on art, which the *Renesans* version addressed with greater definition:

> The war was so sudden that perhaps we cannot yet expect that it will express itself in art before it has ended in reality. It shows itself in the stunned old face of the young man, in the cold-blooded smile of the young girl, but it will take years before the character will be created which paints a tragic picture because he has to, because he himself is the tragedy.[136]

The crowd fails to recognise that the gassed man they observe is the grotesque image of the damage wrought by the war on them no less than on him. Poison rather than venom provides the metaphor for understanding how the war will come to shape art, by necessity, since Winsten's model of art drives to its limit the theory of art as authentic expression. Where the authentic truth is tragic – with Winsten's full sense of tragedy as the callous and obscene – then the expression has no choice but to be so as well. The art that will penetrate the minds of the crowd must be able to appal them in a way that a disfigured veteran cannot.

As with the appeal to Jewish artists in other countries, we might reasonably see Winsten's projection into the future as a gesture of despair rather than a meaningful vision of what real war art would look like. However, we get nearer to an alternative to *The Nation's War Paintings* than we do in *Voices*. Winsten's review does not open up a

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[136] Stephen Winsten, 'Milkhome Bilder', p. 218 ['di milkhome iz geven azoy plutsim, az mir kenen efsher nokh nisht ervarten az zi zol zikh oysdriken in der kunst eyder zi hot zikh gegendigt in der virklikhkeyt. zi bavayzt zikh in dem fargaften alten ponim fun'm yungen man, in'm kalt-blutigen shmeykhl fun'm yungen meydel, ober es vet doyern yahren eyder es vet geshafen veren der tip vos molt a tragish bild vayl er muz, vayl er aleyn iz di tragedye'].

line of unknown British art, but it does point to a line of refusal that looked beyond

British art. It is on this point that the differences in the two versions of the article

assumes greatest importance.

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

James Fox has interpreted the effect of the First World War on British art to be one in

which artists moved towards a closer alliance with a public than they had previously

enjoyed.[137] The shift of the avant-garde towards more realist techniques met a

corresponding popular belief that the methods associated with them communicated an

'essential and disturbing truth about the war' that traditional art techniques could

not.[138] The new alliance came at a cost to those who could not closely and rapidly align

themselves with that identity, or who refused to do so. The mismatched versions of

Winsten's article point to the pressures shaping the terms of that alignment. They also

hint at the ambit of what could be acceptably expressed in an English-language little

magazine, even one that aligned itself with a counter-narrative to the patriotic

interpretation of the war.

The critique that Winsten built in the *Renesans* article would have been out of

place in *Voices* because Winsten refused to attach hope to the idea of a new form of

national community growing out of the war. *Voices* protested against the British

government's role in the war, and that protest took in the government's treatment of

conscientious objectors as well as soldiers. However, it still saw the national

camaraderie of war-troops as holding promise for the future and put faith in a coalition

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[137] Fox, p. 161.
[138] Wellington, p. 143.

between those troops and younger civilians. Hence, it was still invested in certain aspects of the official version of the war that it set itself against: the sacred wisdom of the veteran; the seamless reintegration of the soldier into civic life. The exhibition saw the British government willing to accept a narrative of the war as tragic, but that tragedy bears little resemblance to Winsten's. Its limits were set by a model of the heroic soldier and patriotic camaraderie that excluded the ideas of the ignoble, contingent and messy.

It is hard to say what Winsten's critique meant in *Renesans*. Coupled with the article's attention to the category of Jewish artists and its dismissal of an English project of national unity or spiritual regeneration through the war, it was at least amenable to an argument of a specifically Jewish spiritual rebirth. This amenability operated negatively rather than through any positive assertion. In the same way that Winsten's movement into Yiddish was likely due to pressures of exclusion rather than enthusiasm, there is little reason to think that Winsten supported the argument, and some reason to think that he did not. *Renesans* offered an alternative national regeneration rather than a rejection of national regeneration itself. At the same time, by being published in the same city as *Voices*, but in a different language, the magazine allowed a freer critique of the national myths being built around Britain's role in the war. In a language more hidden from power, it could make visible what *The Nation's War Paintings* concealed. It could also show the exclusions operative in coalitions that drew on national myths for support.

Mark Gertler and the Garsington *Roman à Clef*

In the summer of 1913, Edward Marsh wrote to Rupert Brooke to tell him about a new discovery, 'a beautiful little Jew like a Lippo Lippi cherub'.[1] The man in question was the twenty-two year-old Mark Gertler, 'by birth an absolute East End Jew' but a painter possessed, in Marsh's eyes, of 'the *feu sacré*'.[2] Marsh's description blends condescension with delight in the freakish implausibility he perceived in Gertler: someone who, despite being an East End Jew, was beautiful, talented and angelic.

During the two years following the letter to Brooke, Marsh would be Gertler's most significant patron. He not only bought Gertler's paintings but also gave him the use of a spare room at his flat in Gray's Inn Place and later paid for the rent of a studio in Hampstead. Given Marsh's importance to Gertler's early career, it is worth analysing the appeal that the painter held for him. Part of it was evidently physical attraction. Gertler was one of several handsome young men, including Brooke and Ivor Novello, in whom Marsh would take an affectionate interest. In a letter to Dorothy Brett, Gertler said that he thought Marsh 'a very nice man' but was 'afraid that he likes *me* more than my work'.[3] It seems likelier that the two went together. Marsh's comment also had an element of the collector's joy in discovery, and Gertler himself led on to further discoveries: he would encourage Marsh in his shift from buying older work to contemporary British painting.[4] To find the '*feu sacré*' in an East End Jew was to chance upon a diamond in the rough, but that did not necessarily imply that Marsh

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[1] Hassall, p. 241.
[2] Hassall, p. 244.
[3] Gertler, p. 54.
[4] Hassall, p. 232.

wanted to polish the roughness away. In the same letter to Brooke, Marsh described

with excitement a plan to visit Gertler in Bishopsgate and 'be initiated into the Ghetto'.[5]

Marsh's choice of simile over metaphor – 'like a Lippo Lippi cherub' rather than a

Lippo Lippi cherub proper – suggests that the identification was consciously

incomplete, and that it was that doubleness of Gertler as both East End Jew and cherub

that appealed to Marsh.

Two years on, in October 1915, Gertler wrote to Marsh from the Hampstead

studio to sever contact. Marsh and he were 'too fundamentally different to continue to

be friends': while Marsh was secretary to Winston Churchill, the First Lord of the

Admiralty, Gertler was 'I believe what you call a "Passivist"', a less common form then

than 'pacifist', but one that seems only to have acquired its pejorative sense later.[6] The

break marked Gertler's increasing enmeshment in the variable group that collected

around the eccentric hostess and patron Ottoline Morrell, and is most associated with

Garsington Manor in Oxfordshire, which she and her husband moved into in 1915.

Occasionally referred to since as 'the Garsington set', regular visitors had some overlap

in members and ideology with the Bloomsbury set, as well as a certain rivalry.[7] They

included artists and writers whom Morrell sponsored and encouraged, among them D.

H. Lawrence, Aldous Huxley and Siegfried Sassoon. During the war the Morrells

hosted various notable conscientious objectors, and their increasingly dedicated

pacifism put them at odds with Marsh.

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[5] Hassall, p. 244.

[6] Gertler, p. 102; 'Passivist, Adj. and Noun', *OED Online* (Oxford University Press, 2018).

[7] For use of the term 'Garsington set', see, for example, Patrick Campbell, *Siegfried Sassoon: A Study of the War Poetry* (Jefferson; London: McFarland & Company, 1999), p. 122.

The writer Gilbert Cannan, who was for a while a close friend and confidant of Gertler, had been friendly with both Marsh and Morrell. Following Gertler's separation from Marsh, Cannan wrote to Morrell, reminding her that 'Gertler [had] to be kept going' now that he had 'thrown Marsh over and won his freedom back.'[8] That freedom did not come without its own strictures. By entering the Garsington coterie, Gertler entered a communal space that attempted to support itself artistically and intellectually. As an ideal, this meant fruitful cooperation. In practice, the symbiosis was more ambiguous, flavoured by an atmosphere of distrust and resentment towards Morrell, who could be a possessive and invasive overseer.[9]

In November 1916, *Mendel* was published. Written by Gilbert Cannan in two months, the novel followed the early life of Mendel Kühler, a young painter based closely on Gertler. Cannan's was the first *roman à clef* from a member of the Garsington set. The reviews were generally good and it was sufficiently successful to be republished four years later.[10] More striking, however, was *Mendel*'s local effect. As Sean Latham has observed, '[t]he intimacy of the salon had been breached, and there was an immediate rush to profit from insider knowledge.'[11] At the same time as Cannan's novel was attacked for vulgarity and mechanical imitation of life, its example

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[8] Diana Farr, *Gilbert Cannan: A Georgian Prodigy* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1978), p. 130.

[9] In a 1916 letter to Lytton Strachey, Dora Carrington complains about both Philip and Ottoline Morrell hectoring her at length on the subject of her virginity; Dora Carrington, *Carrington: Letters and Extracts from Her Diaries*, ed. by David Garnett (Oxford; Toronto; Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 33. More caricatured versions of the atmosphere at Garsington can be found, among other places, in Aldous Huxley's *Crome Yellow* (1921) and *Those Barren Leaves* (1925).

[10] Farr, p. 140; Gilbert Cannan, *Mendel: A Story of Youth* (London: Lloyds, 1920).

[11] Sean Latham, *The Art of Scandal: Modernism, Libel Law, and the Roman à Clef* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 142.

was being taken up by other members of the coterie who sought to follow in Cannan's footsteps.

Sarah MacDougall lists twelve instances of 'literary portraits' of Gertler, almost all of which draw on Gertler's time in Garsington or in connection with members of the coterie.[12] One way of understanding this proliferation of fictional Gertlers would be to see him as someone caught up in the larger fictionalisation of Garsington or in attacks aimed primarily at Morrell.[13] There may be something in this idea, but Marsh's comments on Gertler show that *Mendel* did not mark the beginning of attempts to invest the artist with symbolic significance, but rather the translation of those symbols into a particular generic form: the *roman à clef*.

It is outside the ambit of this chapter to analyse in detail the history of the *roman à clef* and its resurgence in early twentieth-century Britain. Latham links the resurgence particularly to the growth of a wider culture of celebrity-voyeurism, facilitated by the continued increase of mass media.[14] The *roman à clef* responded to this culture and profited from it. We might also see the genre, merging the edges of history and fiction, as gaining a new frisson in the climate of the First World War and the insistence on authentic voice that characterised the reception of war poetry. While Gertler may have gained a degree of economic and political protection from his membership in the Garsington set, he had become part of a small world that repeatedly and variously fictionalised itself.

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[12] MacDougall, *Mark Gertler*, pp. 377–78.

[13] Latham finds versions of Morrell in 'at least ten *romans à clef* in the 1920s'. See Latham, p. 132.

[14] Latham, p. 42.

In this chapter, I will attempt to unpick the ways in which Gertler's Garsington peers adapted portrayals of the artist to different uses, focussing on the versions of Gertler that appear in Cannan's *Mendel* (1916) and Lawrence's *Women in Love* (1920). The novels represent extremes in terms of the extent of that adaptation, with Gertler shaping the novel and being shaped by it. First, however, it is worth outlining the nature of Gertler's allure to Garsington's novelists, and what it was that made him so susceptible to use in the *roman à clef*.

Gertler's allure around the time of his integration in the Garsington set should be seen in light of his precocious artistic development. In *Mendel*, Cannan describes the reception of his novel's hero with characteristic cynicism:

> The critics, who, since Whistler, had been chary of denouncing new-comers, had swung to the opposite extravagance and were excessively eager to discover new masters. The youth of this [Mendel] Kühler made him fair game, for it supplied them with a proviso. They could hail his talent as that of a prodigy without committing themselves.[15]

As we shall see, Cannan himself took advantage of a similar proviso. It is worth spelling out its terms. The appellation of 'prodigy' invested the bearer with a certain prestige while also imposing a rigid set of expectations and patterns of reception. The prodigy is attributed exceptional ability, but not without a sense of the monstrous and freakish. The prodigy is often, and sometimes primarily, remarkable for their youth. The prodigy's work is impressive, but it need not be accepted on its own terms; rather, it serves as a promissory note for future work that will justify the earlier attention. The

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[15] Gilbert Cannan, *Mendel: A Story of Youth* (New York: George H. Doran, 1916), p. 149.

critics' hedged bets should be contrasted and connected to the commitment of the artists' parents discussed in the introduction to this thesis, who responded with surprise when their sons' quickly-won symbolic capital did not translate to capital proper.

The eagerness identified by Cannan implied the expiration date of the critics' interest in the 'new masters'. In fact, we can see the role of prodigy not only as protecting the critic from committing themselves in a way that could embarrass them later, but also as severely delimiting the potential achievement of the artist to whom it is applied. The critic might see each work as a step on the way to greatness, but, like Achilles and the tortoise, the ever-reducing distance from the goal remains insurmountable. In Gertler's case, this identification as prodigy had unusual tenacity, but we can see similar investment in several of the artist's East End contemporaries: David Bomberg, John Rodker and Isaac Rosenberg. The implication was of precocity that could not develop beyond a certain point, that was fixed at a stage of promise. In the cases of Bomberg and Rodker, the prodigy status, never as developed in any case, wore off as they entered middle age and obscurity; for Rosenberg, it was frozen at the point of his death, the sudden impossibility of achieving that potential ironically guaranteeing the survival of the belief in it.

There are two larger contexts for the application of 'prodigy' that deserve recognition: antisemitism and a wider culture of renaissance. The application of 'prodigy' was by no means restricted to Jewish writers and artists. Cannan's career

showed the same arc of early promise and subsequent neglect.[16] However, a description of an exhibition in *Mendel* suggests a way in which the idea of the 'prodigy' may have been especially vulnerable to antisemitic co-option. In the final third of the novel, Mendel hears about reactions to the joint exhibition he has put on with another artist:

> People laughed out loud at Kühler's *Ruth*, and I heard one man say it was only to be expected. He said the Jews can never produce art. They can only produce infant prodigies.[17]

Whether the claim was ever really made outside the novel is less important than the evidence it gives of an available association. The link being constructed between Jew and child prodigies is probably rooted in a sense of shared limitation. In the case of Jews, this belief was part of the widespread Christian conception of Jews as caught in 'a condition of pre-Christian stasis'.[18] The perceived 'incompatibility [of Judaism] with any conception of progress' had its extreme expression in the Protestant eschatological vision in which the return of Jews to Palestine and their conversion to Christianity heralded the Last Judgment.[19] The visitor to Mendel's exhibition gives a small-scale variation of the same idea: the Jew at an arrested state of development, gesturing towards a future but unable to participate in it while remaining Jewish.

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[16] Richard J. Buhr, 'Gilbert Cannan: An Annotated Bibliography of Writings About Him', *Literature in Transition, 1880-1920*, 20.2 (1977), 77–108 (p. 77).

[17] Cannan, *Mendel: A Story of Youth*, p. 331.

[18] Feldman, *Englishmen and Jews: Social Relations and Political Culture, 1840-1914*, p. 56.

[19] Feldman, *Englishmen and Jews: Social Relations and Political Culture, 1840-1914*, p. 57; Bar-Yosef and Valman, p. 20.

The second context to consider is that of the idea of renaissance that was developed in different ways in pre-war and post-war Britain, discussed in the introduction to this thesis. As well as the built-in expiry date of the status of 'prodigy', we might see a shift in the terms of renaissance after the war towards a more limited conception of community, one that continued to express the hostility towards Jews, immigrants and Germans that had built over the course of the First World War. New prodigies were found but, just as importantly, the combination of financial recession from 1920 and the renewed emphasis on social duty in art, narrowly conceived, meant that those who still pursued literary or artistic experimentation in Britain were more precariously placed. Consequently, they were more reliant on those that could offer them fiscal and cultural security. In the case of Gertler, the Garsington set provided him with that security, albeit in a conditional and imperfect way.

In following the use of Gertler in two of the *romans à clef* to come out of Garsington, we can trace the early stages of his reception. As important, however, is that by focussing on the uses to which Gertler's person was put, we can better understand the structures of the novels that used him for material. I have paired Cannan and Lawrence's novels with two paintings by Gertler in order to show that the process of adaptation and reuse was one in which the painter was participant as well as object.

Gertler's integration into Garsington and its fictions marks the extent of his removal from Whitechapel. However, as Rodker would also discover, removal from Whitechapel did not mean that others would cease to take Whitechapel as a lens through which to interpret him. The uses of Gertler were not restricted to his person,

ethnicity and art, but also drew on his cultural status as prodigy. Both Cannan and

Lawrence had been appraised by Henry James as representative of the newer

generation of novelists in 1914, though with the latter 'hang[ing] in the dusty rear'.[20] At

stake in their uses of Gertler was not only the construction of works of fiction, but the

assertion and negotiation of their own cultural status.

Gilbert Cannan at his Mill (1915-16) and *Mendel* (1916)

Mark Gertler's oil painting of April 1916, now known as *Gilbert Cannan at his Mill*, shows a man standing in front of a windmill, flanked by two dogs. One method of interpreting the painting is to see it as an exploration of the character of Cannan. This method allows us to compare Gertler's painting with written descriptions of Cannan that blend physical and psychological interpretation. Morrell's
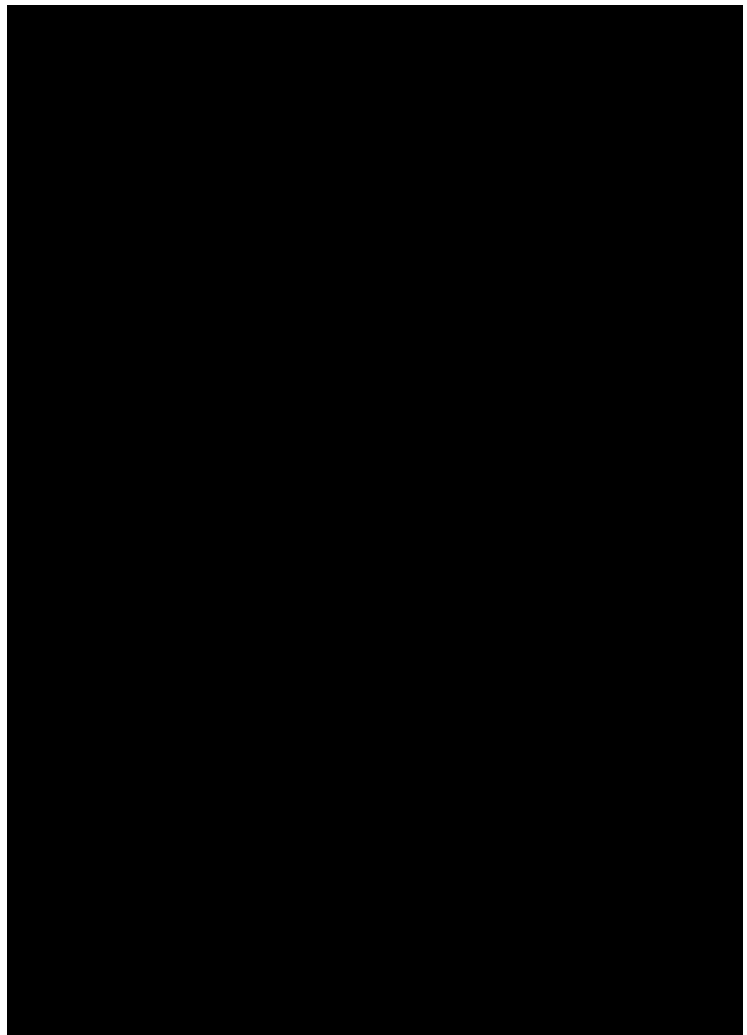
Mark Gertler, *Gilbert Cannan at his Mill*, 1915-16, oil on canvas, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.

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[20] Henry James, 'The Younger Generation', *Times Literary Supplement*, 19 March 1914, pp. 133–34 (p. 133).

description of Cannan as a 'rather vacant Sir Galahad' finds an echo in Gertler's figure, stood like an aristocrat in front of his property. Cannan's eccentric choice of home, a house with a converted mill in Cholesbury, Buckhinghamshire, does perhaps shift the comparison more towards Don Quixote than Galahad.[21] Lawrence's more critical description of the writer as 'very crude, very shockingly undisciplined' might similarly be seen in the harsh, deliberately childish elements of Gertler's portrait, and in the awkward angularity of the central figure and the world around him.[22]

Such interpretations are not without merit: they recognize a tradition of portraiture where the success of the painting is tied to the perception of the subject's character, or at least a persuasive interpretation of it. It is the tradition where, in the words of Walter Sickert, 'the best portrait is […] the canvas that would give the spectator the truest idea of the physique, and through the physique, of the character of the sitter.'[23] Sickert, like Gertler, was an alumnus of the Slade, though only briefly, and a member of the New English Art Club, but his rejection of Post-Impressionism sets him apart from the younger artist. Despite the division, Sickert's humanist interpretation of portraiture can draw some support from Gertler's own correspondence, where he despaired of portrait commissions because they involved intellectual engagement with the depiction of a subject with whom he was not in sympathy.[24]

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[21] Ottoline Morrell, *Ottoline: The Early Memoirs of Ottoline Morrell*, ed. by Robert Gathorne-Hardy (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), p. 245.

[22] D. H. Lawrence, *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, ed. by James T. Boulton and George J. Zytaruk, 8 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), II: JUNE 1913-OCTOBER 1916, p. 311.

[23] Sickert's statement is found in a 1910 essay on the painter Solomon J. Solomon, and reprinted in Walter Sickert, *The Complete Writings on Art*, ed. by Anna Gruetzner Robins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 203.

[24] Gertler, pp. 99–101.

A second method of interpreting the same painting would focus more on its formal structure and its relation to other paintings, not necessarily just other portraits. Such an interpretation might begin with the shape of the mill, that of a cone with a slight growth on its right side, and note the shape's repetition in the human figure before it, whose right arm stretches down, while the other disappears behind his back. The patches of green grass against orange recall Cézanne in colour, but in form owe more to the perspectival work of a painting like Piero della Francesca's *The Baptism of Christ* (c.1437).[25] Both paintings present the viewer with patches of grass which we interpret as roughly rectangular but which, taken flat, add to the general framework of interlocking triangles that drive the eye up the painting. The pattern of shape is connected to one of tone and colour. In Gertler's painting, light comes from the right, casting thin dark shadows from the legs of Cannan and his dogs. The lines continue at an obtuse angle, bouncing up in the thin yellow trunks of the trees, which look light against the dark green, then dark against the white and grey clouds. The trees thus correspond tonally to the white upright lines of the fence around the windmill and to the thin legs of Cannan, light on dark; then, higher up, both trees and the orange grid of the windmill's blades become dark lines on white-grey.

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[25] The painting was acquired by the National Gallery in 1861. Gertler was a frequent visitor and an unpublished 1912 letter to Carrington remarks especially on the 'National Gallery with all its Michael Angelo!!!! Botticelli!!! Francesca!!!'; *National Gallery: Descriptive and Historical Catalogue of the British And Foreign Pictures with Biographical Notices of the Painters, Indices, Etc.*, eighty-first (London, 1913), p. 265; Mark Gertler to Dora Carrington, 16 July 1912, Dora de Houghton Carrington Papers, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin, Box 2, Folder 8; in a 1912 interview, Gertler had singled out Francesca's *Nativity* for 'the music and rhythm of [its] colour'; 'A Triumph of Education Aid: Interview for the *Jewish Chronicle* with Mr. Mark Gertler', *Jewish Chronicle*, 9 February 1912, p. 22.

The complex interplay of colour, form and allusion is not at odds with the painting's assertive crudity. Up to a point, details are sacrificed to clarify form: Gertler strips the mill of its outer buildings, the weathered texture and mottled colour of its bricks, and so purifies its shape towards geometrical simplicity. However, he stops short of the more abstracted forms of Ferdinand Léger: we are not given a naked cone. Nor does Gertler abandon the visual information that points specifically to Cannan and Cholesbury: Cannan's red hair, the mill, the two dogs, the horse chestnut. The painting does not lose sight of the specific individual, though the context of the painting's presentation and the viewer's knowledge do something to determine this. Gertler's maintenance of specificity in the face of increased abstraction suggests a way of combining the two methods outlined. The artistic subject is held in focus, but within a formal pattern that is less static than procedural because we are invited to trace the choices of inclusion and exclusion. The extent to which that measurement can be conducted is not just the extent to which one is a connoisseur of painting or its history, but also the extent to which one is a member of the *cognoscenti* in a more intimate sense, or is able to achieve vicarious intimacy through other means.

We can draw an analogy between the ways of understanding this portrait and the *romans à clef* involving Gertler. The analogy is only partial, not least because the procedural apprehension of a painting outlined above is already built into the act of reading a novel. However, the analogy takes on particular significance in this instance because both Gertler's painting and Cannan's *Mendel* grew out of Gertler's extended visits to Cholesbury between 1914-16, when the artist worked during the day and

discussed his life with Cannan in the evening.[26] The analogy points to a way of reading the *roman à clef* that insists on the significance of its measurement against the historical referent, and that sees the *roman à clef* as especially engaged with methods of balancing formal shaping against resistant life-data. Rather than avoiding formal analysis, it attempts to use the historical referent as a yardstick against which we can measure how the data have been shaped.

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Mendel begins by revealing the protagonist and his family in a London train station, 'a little knot of strange-looking people in brilliant clothes who stared about them pathetically and helplessly'. They have arrived in London after a long journey from 'Austrian Poland'.[27] The novel follows Mendel through his childhood in Spitalfields, his study at the Detmold school of art and his early career as an artist. The Detmold is a lightly disguised version of the Slade School of Art where Gertler studied and where he met the painter Dora Carrington, who figures in the novel in the form of Greta Morrison. The relationship between Mendel and Morrison assumes greater importance in the latter two thirds of the novel, where it is set against the relationship between James Logan and Nelly Oliver, characters modelled on the painter John Currie and the model Dolly Henry. Currie's murder of Henry in 1914, followed by his suicide, becomes the crisis of the novel. C. R. W. Nevinson, Augustus John, William Rothenstein and Edward Marsh also appear in disguised and largely unsympathetic forms.

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[26] MacDougall, *Mark Gertler*, pp. 93–94, 116.
[27] Cannan, *Mendel: A Story of Youth*, pp. 11–12.

Lawrence, a friend of Cannan and Gertler at the time of the novel's composition, professed to see no evidence of narrative shaping:

> It is a bad book – statement without creation – really journalism. Gertler, Jew-like, has told every detail of his life to Gilbert – Gilbert has a lawyer's memory and has put it all down.[28]

Lawrence suggests that the material that makes up *Mendel* has been gathered indiscriminately and transcribed mechanically. Lawrence's account raises the possibility of seeing Gertler as a co-author of the text. Marjorie Kostenz, Gertler's widow, similarly asserted that Cannan 'reproduced [Gertler's oral account] word for word in his book'.[29]

There is some evidence to support the idea that the novel owes a direct debt to Gertler in terms of vocabulary as well as narrative incident. Mendel, writes Cannan, 'among the nice cultured folk, was always a startling dramatic figure.'[30] The phrase recalls a letter to Rothenstein, in which Gertler thanked the older painter for his support in gaining the approval of the Jewish Education Aid Society. Gertler remarked on how his new friends at the Slade were 'much nicer' than the rough boys of the East End.[31] But if the word is carried over, the spirit is not. Gertler used the word 'nice' with irony elsewhere, but in the letter to Rothenstein it has none of the deliberate acidity of Cannan's use. For Cannan, Mendel's value is in part that of a startling intrusion on the quiescence of 'nice cultured folk'. The reframed language is representative of how

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[28] D. H. Lawrence, *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, ed. by James T. Boulton and Andrew Robertson, 8 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), III: OCTOBER 1916-JUNE 1921, p. 44.
[29] Farr, p. 209n15.
[30] Cannan, *Mendel: A Story of Youth*, p. 105.
[31] Gertler, p. 33.

Cannan uses Gertler's story more generally: he picks up incident and discourse, but reworks them within a generic framework that changes their accent. Gertler's anecdotes are crystallised into a new form, one that is cognisant of the genres not only of the *roman à clef* but also the *Künstlerroman.* The latter would have been especially present in Cannan's mind, as he had spent the previous years translating Romain Rolland's *Jean-Christophe* (1904-1912) into English.[32]

While there is good reason to think that Gertler was a practised and effective narrator of his own life, Cannan's transformation of that narrative into a novel was not simply the transcription exercise Lawrence understood it to be. Latham distinguishes how an 'aesthetics of detail' works differently in the novel and the *roman à clef*: in the former it leads 'inwards towards an autonomous fictional space', whereas in the latter it leads 'beyond the diegesis to the historical world'.[33] We can also approach the question from the other end, by considering the movement from oral personal narrative to *roman à clef*. In this case, the use of detail becomes more rather than less centripetal. Galya Diment links Mendel's name to Menahem Mendel Beilis, the Russian Jew accused of ritual murder in an infamous 1913 trial.[34] We might also note an acquaintance of Cannan at school and university, Charles Mendel Kohan.[35] Both are possible sources for the name, but its primary significance probably lies in its status as a 'Tom-Dick-and-Harry sort of Jewish name'.[36] By changing Gertler's name to Mendel,

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[32] Richard Buhr observes the novel's debt to Rolland in Buhr, p. 78.

[33] Latham, p. 27.

[34] Galya Diment, *A Russian Jew of Bloomsbury: The Life and Times of Samuel Koteliansky* (Montreal; Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011), p. 83.

[35] Farr, p. 18.

[36] Dan Miron, *A Traveler Disguised: A Study in the Rise of Modern Yiddish Fiction in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Schocken Books, 1973), p. 180.

Cannan at once expands the biography of Gertler to a higher level of generality and inscribes his Jewishness in his name. The choice takes on particular interest in light of Gertler's own account of how he got the name 'Mark'. He attributes his name to an official at Deal Street School who failed to understand the accent of Gertler's mother when she gave his name as 'Max':

> 'Mux!' said the man. 'Never heard such a name – no such name in *this* country – we'll call him *Mark* Gertler.[37]

Neither the name given to Gertler by his mother or the official was specifically Jewish, though the latter is clearly driven by a desire to exclude the potentially foreign. Mendel *is* a specifically Jewish name, and Cannan chooses it is because he intends to put Gertler's Jewishness to dramatic effect. However faithful to Gertler's narrative in certain respects, Cannan plucks ownership of the narrative from Gertler's hands, refocussing and shaping it to a new narrative project.

Where *Jean-Christophe* begins with the protagonist as a newly-born child and Gertler's fragmentary memoirs with his first recollections from Galicia, *Mendel* begins at the moment of Mendel's arrival in London as an immigrant. It is with the meeting of London and Mendel that they both come into being. But it is Mendel who serves as the novel's organising centre while he makes incursions in the art world of London, with the result that the city's cultural centres submit to Mendel's gravitational control. As such, we understand that it is Mendel, and the quality of his genius, that will decide whether his art is worthwhile. The Detmold can have little effect on the outcome.

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[37] Gertler, p. 24.

The nature of Mendel's 'genius' is, however, in question. The word recurs throughout the novel, with different characters frequently heralding Mendel as a 'genius'. However, it is only ever applied by the narrator in the more general sense of 'cast of mind'. When Morrison asks Mitchell if he thinks Mendel is a genius, he replies that Mendel 'says he is a genius, and I suppose time will show whether it is true or no'.[38] The narrative similarly suspends judgment, waiting on decisive proof, allowing itself a proviso comparable to that used by the novel's art critics.

Cannan gives hints that Mendel's genius is not as autonomous as his centrality might imply. The Detmold's emphasis on the artist's 'expression of form' might be audible behind Mendel's own insistence on solidity, an insistence that is in turn explicitly undercut.[39] For, although '"[s]olid" was [Mendel's] great word' and '[i]t conveyed to his mind the quality of which he could most thoroughly approve', Mendel, the narrator tells us, 'was anything but solid'.[40] Mendel's insistence on solidity is further counteracted in the novel by the metaphors used by the narrator to describe him. Though Morrison sees in Mendel a figure who 'stood solidly on his feet while the waves of life broke upon him', we are told that ideas 'frothed in [Mendel's] mind like waves'.[41] Mendel dwells on 'the bubble of his London life, which he knew he must break with a touch'; he tries to control the love that threatens to 'spread like a flood of muddy water over life', but he is himself caught up in the same metaphors of flux and

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[38] Cannan, *Mendel: A Story of Youth*, p. 196.

[39] Ruth Hoberman suggests that 'solidity' is another word that Cannan takes from Gertler; Ruth Hoberman, 'Making Life into Art: The Three-Way Conversation of Gilbert Cannan, Mark Gertler, and D. H. Lawrence', in *Reading Texts, Reading Lives: Essays in the Tradition of Humanist Cultural Criticism in Honor of Daniel R. Schwarz*, ed. by Helen Maxson and Daniel Morris (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2012), pp. 31–50 (p. 40).

[40] Cannan, *Mendel: A Story of Youth*, pp. 321–22.

[41] Cannan, *Mendel: A Story of Youth*, pp. 401, 178.

froth.[42] One of the sources of solidity asserted by Mendel is his race: '[t]hat's what Jews are. They know what's solid […]. And because I'm a Jew I'm not to be caught with your pretty things.'[43] That solidity is set against the superficiality and unreliability of polite society, but the approbation is dubious, identifying Jews in the next sentence with filth. Though Mendel identifies himself as a Jew, he sticks to using the third-person plural and first-person singular rather than uniting with other Jews in 'we'.

Cannan later elaborates the metaphor further. Considering 'the society of his father and the old Jews', Mendel finds that 'their lives were like stale water, like unmoved puddles, from which every now and then their passions broke in bubbles, broke vainly, in bubbles.'[44] The metaphor presents a form of solidity that is merely an illusion born out of stasis: not an unmoveable rock, but mere stagnant water. While its object is the older Jews, it rebounds violently on Mendel, and condemns him in the same spirit as the exhibition visitor who deems the Jews capable only of producing 'infant prodigies' rather than artists.

Cannan's writings veered from a philosemitism that dwelt on single Jews' capacity to transform the world for good and a conspiratorial antisemitism that saw Jews as atavistic, malicious and manipulating European and global finance for their own ends. The former finds expression in Sembal, the revolutionary who appears in the trilogy beginning with *Pugs and Peacocks* (1921). The latter model can be seen in *The Anatomy of Society* (1921) and its characterisation of European antisemitism as 'an

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[42] Cannan, *Mendel: A Story of Youth*, pp. 438, 360.
[43] Cannan, *Mendel: A Story of Youth*, p. 144.
[44] Cannan, *Mendel: A Story of Youth*, p. 433.

instinctive revolt against the Jewish financial system'.[45] *Mendel* is closer to the former,

where the only good Jew is the Christ-like transformative one, but the transformation

he promises is subject to the same proviso, and compromised by his close connection

with Jews *en masse*. The metaphors by which Cannan binds Mendel to other Jews

suggests that the connection is not only one of familiarity, but a more profound

likeness.

Cannan toys with Gertler's allure as a prodigy and the possible promise that

status implies. Furthermore, as a *roman à clef*, *Mendel* seems to imply an endorsement of

that promise: if we are supposed to identify Mendel with Gertler, why should we be

interested in the former unless the latter were of some importance? Like a retrospective

exhibition for a living artist, *Mendel* struggles to divide evaluation from advocacy.

Cannan tries to resolve this problem by two main techniques, the discussion of which

will make up the rest of this section: firstly, a novelistic structure that suggests a

progression from primitive Jewishness to enlightened Christianity while threatening

collapse; secondly, a corrosive irony designed to dodge the question of advocacy.

As Lawrence's observation indicates, *Mendel* can feel like an accumulation of

events without direction, but part of that impression comes from a structure based on

repetition. The novel progresses through Mendel's relationships with women and men,

making an approximate movement from the fleshly and worldly through increasing

degrees of abstraction and aphysicality. Sara is Mendel's 'first love' with whom he

spends 'thrilling and sweet' hours 'lost in the miracle of desire' and whom he takes to

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[45] Gilbert Cannan, *The Anatomy of Society* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Company, 1921), p. 74.

drawing when the initial ecstasy has passed.[46] From the beginning, Mendel's practice

of art has the character of Freudian sublimation, a redirection of his erotic interest from

people into his paintings. Hetty succeeds Sara as Mendel's model and lover, but, less

purely physical, trades on her relationship with Mendel to achieve a footing in the art

world. She in turn is succeeded by another model, Jessie, but Jessie is dwarfed in

significance by Morrison and Nelly Oliver, whose influences compete in the latter two

thirds of the novel. Between Morrison and Oliver the increasing tension of the spiritual

and the fleshly is split in two. Morrison is repeatedly identified as 'the Christian girl'

by Mendel and his mother but her characterisation is a little more complicated, as she

rebels against 'her mother's cold, self-centred religion' on the one hand and her

brothers' brutish 'sacrilege' of beauty on the other.[47] Oliver, the lover of the painter

Logan, Mendel immediately deems 'soft and pulpy, not unlike an orange'.[48] As Logan's

caricature has it, Morrison is 'The Foolish Virgin' and Oliver 'The Woman who Did'.[49]

The split is complicated by the always important influence of Golda, Mendel's

mother. Golda represents the secure, uncomplicated and permanent, but also the

primitive, 'tied and bound to natural, instinctive, animal life'.[50] She is limited and, for

Mendel, limiting. Mendel must move beyond his mother as an object of affection to

mature properly without abandoning her completely, just as he must move on from

the pure mimeticism of his early art without going fully over to the 'abstraction and

cubing' Cannan shows being discussed with glibness in Paris.[51] Mendel's artistic

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[46] Cannan, *Mendel: A Story of Youth*, p. 61.
[47] Cannan, *Mendel: A Story of Youth*, pp. 436, 191.
[48] Cannan, *Mendel: A Story of Youth*, p. 227.
[49] Cannan, *Mendel: A Story of Youth*, p. 324.
[50] Cannan, *Mendel: A Story of Youth*, p. 366.
[51] Cannan, *Mendel: A Story of Youth*, p. 371.

development, which the genre of the *Künstlerroman* binds to growth as a character, is dependent on his navigation between these influences. Mendel is repulsed by Oliver and attracted to Logan but the two are locked in a mutually destructive relationship. Eventually, despairing of separating Logan from Oliver, Mendel rejects both. In doing so, he precipitates the crisis of the novel: Logan's murder of Oliver and botched suicide. Mendel sits by Logan's side in the hospital where Logan slowly dies. When he does die, it brings a return of the liquid metaphors that surround Mendel, but in more obviously erotic terms:

> [Logan's] hand closed more tightly on Mendel's, who surrendered himself to the force of the ebb in his friend, felt the cold, salt waves of death close about him and drag him out, out until Logan was lost, and with a frightful wrench all that was dead in himself was torn away, and he was left prostrate upon the fringes of his life.[52]

With Logan and Oliver dead, Mendel is renewed, 'all that was dead' torn out of him, but he is still left to oscillate between the extremes of the Jewish mother and the Christian virgin.

While Cannan hints throughout the novel at a trajectory for Mendel from the base, primitive Jewish world to the refined, Christian and sexless world by way of rejecting the distractions of bohemia, the narrative logic at work is more complicated than a simple conversion fantasy. For while Morrison is presented as a counterforce to Logan and Oliver, she is not allowed to stand as an idealised alternative. Logan and Oliver are driving towards death, but if Morrison is made to stand in for redemptive

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[52] Cannan, *Mendel: A Story of Youth*, p. 430.

Christianity, she does not thereby become a convincing symbol of eternal life. Not only

is her connection to Christianity only a partial one, but the threat of the ridiculous

hangs over every activity and interaction of Mendel. The final scene offers a

caricatured reduction of the back-and-forth of Mendel and Morrison's relationship. It

takes place on a train platform at the station near where Mendel has been visiting

Morrison. Mendel tries to force Morrison to join him on the train to London to see his

mother; Morrison refuses, but as the train pulls out of the station, she runs along the

platform, calling Mendel's name. The novel ends with Mendel on a train leaving for

London, caught in movement that is also a return to origins.

Cannan cannot embrace an idea of a Jewish artist coming into the Christian

fold, because Christianity is part of a larger cultural malaise that Mendel as an outsider

is needed to reform. More specifically, he is thinking of the 'cold and self-centred'

Christianity of Morrison's mother, the same attacked in Samuel Butler's *The Way of All

Flesh* (1903), a novel Cannan judged a 'masterpiece' in his book on the author.[53]

Cannan's antisemitic identification of Jewishness with the primitive affects not only the

depiction of Mendel's family, but also the idiot savant aspects of Mendel himself,

aspects which could be the stamp of genius or simply ridiculous. The tensions between

modern and primitive, Jewish and English, fleshly and abstract, are not resolved in the

novel; rather, the moment of resolution is projected beyond the novel's end, into the

world outside it.

The projection takes on a peculiarly injunctive character in a *roman à clef*, one

that is made explicit in the book's dedicatory poem to 'D.C.'. This is the novel's key,

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[53] Gilbert Cannan, *Samuel Butler: A Critical Study* (London: Martin Secker, 1915), pp. 129, 104.

taped onto the inside cover, the knowing wink that gives the clear correspondence between the fictional Morrison and the historical Dora Carrington. Even the reader unable to fit Carrington's name to the initials would recognise some correspondence between 'D.C.' and Morrison since, in fairly hackneyed metaphors, the poem encourages 'D.C' to lose her virginity and embrace monogamy. Should 'tears be shed because the blossoms fall', the poem asks, before answering in the negative:

> Nay, rather leap, O heart, to see fulfilled
>
> In certain joy th'uncertain promised glee,
>
> To have so many mountain torrents spilled
>
> For one fair river moving to the sea.[54]

The poem offers the resolution of the metaphors of flux around Mendel as raging torrents resolve into a sea of post-coital calm. Cannan's dedication turns the novel into a parable aimed at bringing to life the marriage and sexual-spiritual consummation that the novel's structural logic ties to a larger artistic and societal moment of fruition. More bathetically, the novel also joins with the Morrells' hectoring advice to Carrington that she lose her virginity.

The novel's logic, however, is challenged by a thread of irony that never quite endorses the pretensions of Mendel to genius or of Morrison to virtue. That irony enters into the substance of the poem too, for, while we can read it as Cannan's injunction to Carrington on behalf of Gertler, Cannan's own voice suggests itself as that

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[54] Cannan, *Mendel: A Story of Youth*, p. 5.

of suitor. Carrington would later describe Gertler's 'awful anger and sorrow' when he discovered that Cannan had kissed Carrington while at Cholesbury.[55]

The irony of *Mendel* is also cynicism, and is expressed in the novel both by its antisemitic circumscription of Mendel's ambitions, and by its distrust of relationships between men. Logan succeeds Mitchell and the childhood friend Artie Beech in a series of erotically charged male friendships that progress alongside Mendel's relationships with women. The relationships with men are represented as more essentially deficient than those with women. Mendel's relationship with Logan is a deviation from his love for Morrison: '[l]acking its true object, Mendel's love had concentrated upon his friend, with whom he longed to walk freely in the enchanted world of art, to be as David and Jonathan.'[56] The relationship between David and Jonathan was an extant model for the love between men, and had been cited during Oscar Wilde's trial as one example of the 'Love that dare not speak its name'.[57] Some of the same contempt Cannan brings to bear here is visible in his depiction of Tilney Tysoe, Cannan's caricature of Edward Marsh, as one of 'the kindly, emasculate fools of the world.'[58]

While Logan, as a man obsessed with talk, is a step towards abstraction from the loutish sensuality of Mitchell, Logan's death nonetheless frees Mendel from a distraction from his art. He is another factor tying him to the fleshly. Morrison, by contrast, in the role of the 'Foolish Virgin', is an agitating influence. Her refusal of

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[55] Carrington, p. 65; MacDougall, *Mark Gertler*, p. 130.

[56] Cannan, *Mendel: A Story of Youth*, p. 282.

[57] *The Trials of Oscar Wilde*, ed. by H. Montgomery Hyde (London; Edinburgh; Glasgow: William Hodge and Company, 1948), p. 236, where 'Love' is capitalised. However, the source of the phrase, Alfred Douglas's poem 'Two Loves', published in *The Chameleon* in 1894, does not capitalise this 'love'. As such, it is distinguished from 'true Love' in the poem; Alfred Douglas, 'Two Loves', *The Chameleon*, 1.1 (1894), 26–28.

[58] Cannan, *Mendel: A Story of Youth*, p. 389.

Mendel's advances becomes promising for Mendel's art, since it forces him towards the sublimation of his thwarted sexual impulses. Morrison occupies a portion of the place of influence that becomes vacant with Mendel's break from Logan, but she shares it with 'his new friend, Cézanne'.[59] Mendel's relationship with Cézanne is mediated through the latter's paintings, which he sees first at a fictionalised form of the 1910 exhibition of 'Manet and the Post-Impressionists'. Roger Fry has a minor role in *Mendel* in the form of the faddish and trivial Thompson. Mendel's relationship with Cézanne is vicarious but profound: before his paintings, Mendel is 'reduced to impotence and all the egoistic excitement oozed out of him'.[60] The language is transparently sexual, but it is also about the destruction of the sexual: as with his relationship with Morrison, we can see a Freudian sublimation at work. Yet, these metaphors have flown in and out of the text. Their return with Logan's death suggests that any transcendence achieved by Mendel will have to be constantly renewed.

Mendel locates a generative art between the fleshly and abstracted, with a generative though unresolved union posited if not wholeheartedly endorsed. Similarly, its own generic form, shaping the historical world into a formal structure while claiming continued interaction with that world, leaves it suspended in a way intended to be generative. By turning to subsequent works on Gertler, we can see that Cannan succeeded. Having traced the means by which the generative form was achieved, in particular its dependence on a reduced and stereotyped version of Jews and Judaism,

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[59] Cannan, *Mendel: A Story of Youth*, p. 375.
[60] Cannan, *Mendel: A Story of Youth*, p. 367.

we might be more concerned about the limits that Cannan's framing has put on subsequent understandings of Gertler.

The legacy of *Mendel* is visible not only in the fictional portraits that followed. Gertler's biographers have shown a similar tendency to let the novel serve as a guide. Sarah MacDougall announces in the preface to her biography of Gertler her intention to make use of *Mendel* for details of his early life, defending the decision on the grounds that it was 'derived directly from its subject' and 'though Gertler later repudiated it, his widow always maintained that it stood as a better monument to the artist than any official life.'[61] While we might quibble over 'directly', we can be grateful that the debt is communicated early and clearly. It is unusual in this respect. Woodeson, in his appendix on Gertler's evolution as a painter, remarks in passing that Lucas Cranach was 'one of Gertler's favourite painters'.[62] However, Cranach's name is not mentioned once in the *Selected Letters*, nor have I found it in unpublished letters. On the other hand, the names of Piero di Cosimo, Goya, Renoir and many other painters are. Cranach's name does, however, appear repeatedly in *Mendel*, asserted as an important influence by the narrator and by Mendel himself.[63] While not in itself decisive, it suggests a plausible instance of *Mendel* informing not only the interpretation of Gertler's life, but of his art too. More recently, David Boyd Haycock's *A Crisis of Brilliance* quietly integrates a quotation from *Mendel* in its account of

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[61] MacDougall, *Mark Gertler*, p. xii.

[62] John Woodeson, *Mark Gertler: Biography of a Painter, 1891-1939* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1972), p. 338.

[63] See, for example, Cannan, *Mendel: A Story of Youth*, p. 339.

Gertler's early life, identifying the source in an endnote, but making no effort at this point to distinguish biography from *roman à clef*.[64]

The influence of *Mendel* on understanding Gertler and his work meant that subsequent integrations of Gertler into *romans à clef* were, in some cases, already mediated. In turning to consider Lawrence's responses to Gertler's painting in a 1916 letter and in *Women in Love*, we can see another attempt to turn Gertler's artistic achievement to local narrative and symbolic purpose, but one that has implications that resonate beyond the confines of the novel. Latham has outlined some of the ways in which it might be helpful to treat *Women in Love* as a *roman à clef*, albeit one that seeks the 'imprimatur of an autonomous novel'.[65] That he would later alter parts of the text describing Hermione Roddice to avoid the charge of libel from Ottoline Morrell suggests that Lawrence's own characterisation of *Mendel* as 'statement without creation' was in part born out a sense of his exposure to the same charge. However, we can see a movement towards something more abstracted from the historical world than *Mendel*. Gertler's usefulness becomes less that of the specific historical data of his life than his capacity to stand in for Jews more generally.

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[64] David Boyd Haycock, *A Crisis of Brilliance: Five Young British Artists and the Great War* (London: Old Street Publishing, 2009), p. 26.
[65] Latham, p. 145.

Merry-Go-Round (1916) and *Women in Love* (1920)

Merry-Go-Round (1916) shows human figures riding a carousel on mechanical horses. The figures include soldiers in red, sailors in blue, and women in skirts and hats. A man on the right is in a collared uniform that could be khaki while behind him is a man in a suit that seems to belong more to a civilian. All the figures' mouths are open and the horses' teeth are exposed.
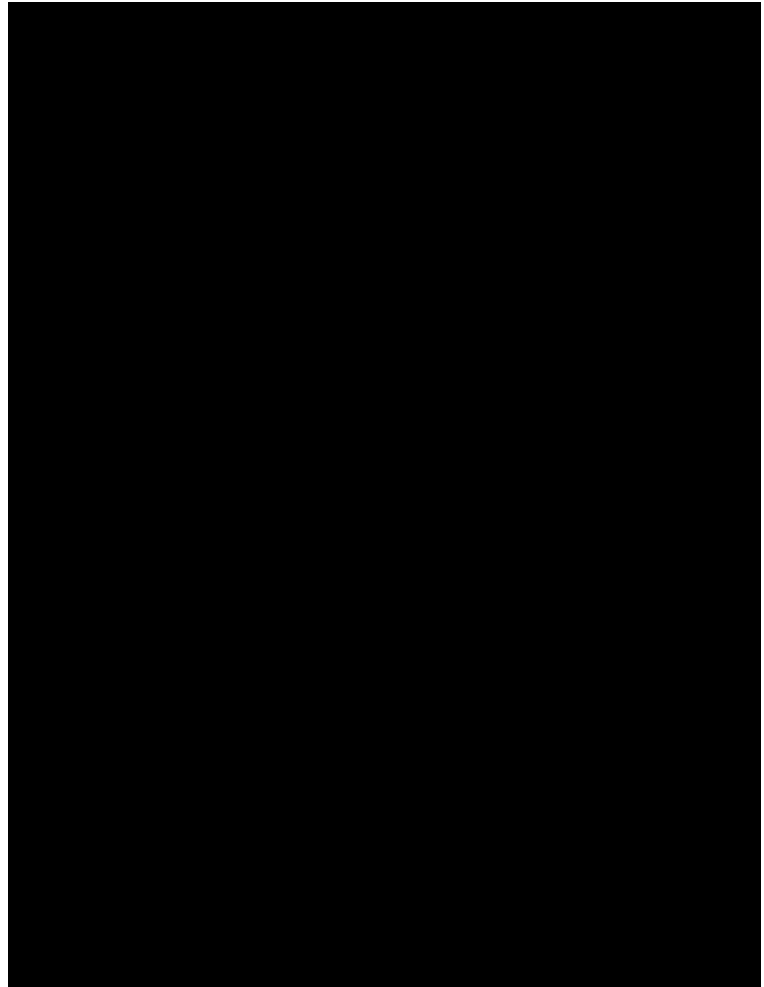
Mark Gertler, *Merry-Go-Round*, 1916, 189 x 142cm, oil on canvas, Tate

In terms of what it depicts, the painting is a simple one, but such a simple description risks obscuring the painting's peculiar absences. The merry-go-round lacks a central column and, while poles resembling those that would hold the mechanical horses in place descend, they appear only to run from the canopy of the structure to the rim of its base. In fact, the poles point to the physical impossibility of the scene depicted. The steely white and blue horses, which circle in rows of three, interlock with those behind them. The painting shows an almost pedantic attention to getting the right number of

legs, which layer up like a single corrugated surface. Yet, cutting out from the legs of a

woman whose mustard-yellow outfit blends into her face, a set of blue lines converge

in the buttocks of a sailor in front. The hind legs from a horse a row in front of that

sailor jut out, not towards the back of the painting as we might expect, but in such a

way that they blend into the hat of the woman nearest the viewer. Where, for the

nearest soldier, the line between neck and head seems part of a simplification of lines

in the service of simple shapes, the figures seen in profile on the distant side of the

carousel are stranger. An elongated, muscular neck bridges fabric and skin without

obvious differentiation, only to be capped by a small blue hat. Stretched lumps of

cloud in the background suggest the extreme to which the merged neck points.

War, the chaos of war and the terrible, endless regurgitation of war: these are

the terms in which Gertler's painting have most often been interpreted.[66] The key

initiator of this approach to the painting is D. H. Lawrence. He and Gertler shared

friends in the circle around both *Rhythm* and Ottoline Morrell's Garsington set.

Moreover, he was ready to appreciate *Merry-Go-Round.* He had told Edward Marsh in

1915 that, while the painting of flowers the latter had bought from Gertler was good, it

did not get to the heart of the painter's talent:

[w]hen Gertler does a good figure composition, like those angels in the

doorway – then, if it comes off, it should be very good – *much* better than the

flowers, which are not extraordinary. I think he may do something valuable –

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[66] See, for example, Haycock, p. 256. Haycock quotes Lawrence's response to the painting in the
following pages.

he's the only man whose work gives me that feeling. But it will be those semi-realistic pictures that get some *awe* in them.[67]

The artwork, probably *Abraham and the Angels* (1915), laid the groundwork for his response to *Merry-Go-Round*.[68] Lawrence's choice of 'awe' anticipates the mixture of dread and reverence that he would describe in response to the latter painting. When Lawrence saw a reproduction of *Merry-Go-Round* in 1916, the long letter he sent to Gertler was an essay in understanding the painting, patronising and didactic but also exploratory and apologetic for the limitations of his language. Years later in 1929, Lawrence would describe the attempt to 'develop one's visionary awareness by close contact with the vision itself: that is, by knowing pictures, real vision pictures, and by dwelling on them, and really, dwelling in them'.[69] We can see the 1916 letter as an early translation of that close contact into words or, perhaps better, the incidental by-product generated by that process of dwelling.

Rather than the usual 'delight' that Lawrence found in that process, Gertler's painting had inspired something closer to 'soul-lacerating despair.'[70] Lawrence began by telling Gertler that his

terrible and dreadful picture has just come. This is the first picture you have ever painted: it is the best *modern* picture I have seen: I think it is great, and true. But it is horrible and terrifying.[71]

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[67] Lawrence, II: JUNE 1913-OCTOBER 1916, p. 215.

[68] For the identification of the drawing in question, see Lawrence, II: JUNE 1913-OCTOBER 1916, p. 215n3.

[69] D. H. Lawrence, *Late Essays and Articles*, ed. by James T. Boulton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 230.

[70] Lawrence, II: JUNE 1913-OCTOBER 1916, p. 660.

[71] Lawrence, II: JUNE 1913-OCTOBER 1916, p. 660.

The terrible, dreadful, horrible and terrifying is interwoven with greatness, as is

appropriate for a painting that Lawrence would hail as a 'revelation', the word imbued

with its biblical sense. However, the immediate justification of the appraisal is

threefold: the work's modernity, its truth and its obscenity. The first two necessitated

the third, since the truth of modernity was obscene. Thus, 'if they tell you it is obscene,

they will say truly'. Lawrence added that he 'believe[d] there was something in

Pompeian art, of this terrible and soul-tearing obscenity.' The painting's obscenity was

part of its power, but it precipitated destruction, one that should be seen in the context

of the First World War.

Jeffrey Meyers has observed that Lawrence draws 'a direct relation between

Roman decadence, obscene art and the destruction of Pompeii by Vesuvius in ancient

times; and Jewish decadence, 'obscene' painting and the destruction of Europe by the

Great War in modern times.'[72] Meyers' remark begins to unpick a cluster of

associations that are central to Lawrence's thinking on this point and which help to

outline the role that Lawrence assigns Gertler and his painting. We must first turn to

Lawrence's understanding of Roman history, best seen in the school history book he

wrote, *Movements in European History* (1921). One of Lawrence's main sources on

Roman history for the book was Edward Gibbon's *History of the Decline and Fall of the*

Roman Empire (1776-1789).[73] Like Gibbon, Lawrence closely identified the material

collapse of empires with their spiritual decline.[74] In a 1918 letter to Edith Eder,

Lawrence suggested another likeness with the historian. He remarked that he was

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[72] Jeffrey Meyers, *Painting and the Novel* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1975), p. 74.
[73] D. H. Lawrence, *Movements in European History*, ed. by Philip Crumpton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. xxxviii–xlvi.
[74] Lawrence, *Movements in European History*, p. 257.

reading Gibbon, who called Jews 'the great *haters* of the human race'. Lawrence added lightly that the observation struck him as true, 'for the last 2,500 years at least', but that he felt 'such profound hatred [himself], of the human race' that he almost knew 'what it is to be a Jew'.[75] While it is hard to know how take Lawrence's bantering tone in a letter to a Jewish acquaintance, the suggestion of a shared misanthropy is consistent up to the point of Lawrence's sense of a need to overturn society and its value-system. His letter to Gertler anticipates some of the links that he would later make explicit and which would inform *Women in Love*. Gertler's painting reveals a rottenness in society but we also sense an agency in that process, as if the painting accelerates the rottenness to a point of destruction.

That destruction was necessary, but it was not in itself enough. While Lawrence might 'curse [his] age, and all the people in it', even his wish for 'an earth-quake that would swallow up everybody' still leaves 'some two dozen people' alive, like a biblical catastrophe.[76] The destruction of the old world was tied to the construction of a new one. Lawrence's most famous articulation of that new world was in a Hebrew word, the 'Rananim', whose name was taken from the first line of Psalm 33, as sung by Lawrence and Gertler's friend, the translator S. S. Koteliansky.[77] If this suggests that Lawrence saw in Jews the potential for regrowth as well as destruction, Judith Ruderman has shown the confusions inherent in Lawrence's engagement with Zionism, especially in his communications with David Eder.[78] As Ruderman observes,

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[75] Lawrence, III: OCTOBER 1916-JUNE 1921, pp. 242–43.
[76] Lawrence, II: JUNE 1913-OCTOBER 1916, p. 531.
[77] Diment, pp. 75–76.
[78] Judith Ruderman, *Race and Identity in D. H. Lawrence: Indians, Gypsies and Jews* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 70–88.

although he might at times identify himself with Jews, Lawrence's Zion was one that

would only work without them.

As in *Mendel*, we can observe in Lawrence's work a compound of various

strands of antisemitic discourse current at the time. In the case of Lawrence, two

strands are particularly striking. Firstly, there is a Nietzschean critique of Jews and, by

extension, Christians as slave-like in their morality.[79] This can be seen, for example, in

his account of 'the slave-trick of the Jews' in a 1917 letter to Koteliansky.[80] Secondly,

there is the more traditional Christian antisemitism that saw Jews as incomplete

because they had not accepted Christ as the fulfilment of their religion. The timeline of

the latter strand is, of course, somewhat challenged by the continued existence of Jews

and the desire to identify Jews with the ills of modernity. Furthermore, while

Nietzsche's antisemitic model owes something to the Christian, it is also at odds with

the attempt to present Christianity as a satisfactory answer to the problem posed by

Judaism.

The involutions and complications of Lawrence's syncretic antisemitism

express themselves in the letter to Gertler by affording the latter a key role in social

transformation, but one that is purely destructive and in which Gertler himself will be

consumed. 'At last your race is at an end' wrote Lawrence to Gertler, and 'these

pictures are its death-cry. And it will be left for the Jews to utter the final and great

death-cry of this epoch.' Lawrence praised *Merry-Go-Round* because he understood it to

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[79] This is to focus on one element of Nietzsche's extreme and paradoxical evaluations of Judaism. For a subtle analysis that ties the contradictions to Nietzsche's philosophical methodology, see Gillian Rose, *Judaism and Modernity: Philosophical Essays* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), pp. 89–110; for an overview of Nietzsche's influence on Lawrence, see Colin Milton, *Lawrence and Nietzsche: A Study in Influence* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1987).
[80] Lawrence, III: OCTOBER 1916-JUNE 1921, p. 137.

be the 'death-cry' of the Jewish race, and therefore a harbinger of the coming death-cry

of an epoch which stretched beyond the Jews, but in which they were implicated.[81]

Like the artists of Pompeii, Gertler had captured an empire in a state of

'decomposition'. Just as the eruption of Vesuvius expressed the empire's larger

disintegration, so Gertler's painting was able to express and embody a larger

disintegrative process. Gertler achieved this as a member of a race which was outdated

by Christianity, but which expressed in concentrated forms the ills of Christianity.

Lawrence saw Gertler as capable of depicting that decomposition with such 'articulate

extremity' because Gertler himself was decomposing:

> You are all absorbed in the violent and lurid processes of inner decomposition:
>
> the same thing that makes leaves go scarlet and copper-green at this time of
>
> year. It is a terrifying coloured flame of decomposition, your inner flame. –But
>
> dear God, it is a real flame enough, undeniable in heaven and earth. – It would
>
> take a Jew to paint this picture. It would need your national history to get you
>
> here, without disintegrating you first. You are of an older race than I, and in
>
> these ultimate processes, you are beyond me, older than I am. But I think I am
>
> sufficiently the same, to be able to understand.[82]

Whereas Lawrence's previous letters to Gertler had focussed on the importance of the

preservation of the flame of life against the demands of art, he now saw the

destructiveness of the painting as its triumph.[83] Lawrence still cautions that Gertler

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[81] Lawrence, II: JUNE 1913-OCTOBER 1916, p. 661.
[82] Lawrence, II: JUNE 1913-OCTOBER 1916, p. 660.
[83] See, for example, the advice in earlier letters to Gertler in 1916 in Lawrence, II: JUNE 1913-OCTOBER 1916, pp. 531, 562–63.

must 'take care, or you will burn your flame so fast, it will suddenly go out'.[84]

However, there is also a sense that such a sacrifice might be necessary: 'some of us

must fling ourselves in the fire of ultimate expression, like an immolation', although

one 'cannot assist at this auto-da-fé without suffering'.[85] The self-destruction that

creation involves is thus simultaneously a Christ-like 'sacrifice' – one that could have

only been made by a Jew – and the *auto-da-fé* where those the Catholic church

considered heretics during the Inquisition were publicly burnt.

The shift marks a change in Lawrence's conception of Gertler's usefulness, and

the clearest analogy is in his essay on Edgar Allan Poe (1919), where he reused the

metaphor of 'the strange decomposition' of 'a tree in autumn' to characterise the

'seething reduction back to elements' for those 'born at the end of a great era or

epoch'.[86] As Lawrence elaborated in the final version of the chapter on Poe, 'the rhythm

of American art-activity' had two sides, the disintegration of the old consciousness and

the forming of a new one. Poe represented only the first of these.[87] Similarly, rather

than seeing him as a force to preserve, Lawrence now consigned Gertler to the role of

sacrificial disintegrator.

The extended sacrifice of Gertler is, like Christ's sacrifice, understood as

manifesting in a single instance – here, the painting – but also extending endlessly

through time. However, the painting represents not only Gertler's sacrifice but his

'arrival', as though the assumption of the status of Artist comes at the expense of the

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[84] Lawrence, II: JUNE 1913-OCTOBER 1916, p. 661.
[85] Lawrence, II: JUNE 1913-OCTOBER 1916, p. 661.
[86] D. H. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature*, ed. by Ezra Greenspan, Lindeth Vasey, and John Worthen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 229.
[87] Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature*, p. 66.

destruction of his previous being. Through its 'combination of blaze, and violent

mechanical rotation and complex involution, and ghastly, utterly mindless human

intensity of sensual extremity, you have made a real and ultimate revelation.'[88] The

sacrifice yields the revelation, and Lawrence's apocalyptic reading of the painting allies

it with his interpretation of *Women in Love*. 'This book frightens me,' he wrote to

Catherine Carswell. '[I]t is so end-of-the-world. But it is, it must be, the beginning of a

new world too.' Meyers highlights this connection and suggests that Lawrence's

reverence for Gertler's painting is for an artwork which has destroyed an old world to

create a new one.[89]

There are good reasons for the interpretation: Lawrence advises Gertler to 'save

[himself]', to stay with the Lawrences, and enquires as to how others respond to the

painting. However, the general emphasis of Lawrence's letter seems to be, rather, on

the 'ultimate' quality of Gertler's achievement. While an apocalyptic reading may still

imply a future, there is little evidence that Lawrence sees Gertler as participating in

that future. When he affirms the obscenity of the painting, he defends it because

'obscenity is the truth of our passion today, it is the only stuff of art – or almost the

only stuff'. The final wavering is instructive. Lawrence hints at a limitation in both

Gertler and his painting: both may be destructive in a way that has the potential to be

healthful, but they are themselves still limited and destructive things. Gertler, six years

younger than Lawrence, is older than him because he is 'of an older race', and that

allows the possibility of Lawrence as successor. Lawrence would later object to St

John's 'Jewish-Jewy symbolism and *aim* of apocalypse – because the aim is moral

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[88] Lawrence, II: JUNE 1913-OCTOBER 1916, p. 660.
[89] Meyers, p. 75.

rather than re-vivifying, as in pagan mystery.'[90] Lawrence guards for himself the task

of getting the apocalypse right, and for seeing it through to a sequel and crafting 'the

beginning of a new world.' However, he was not certain of his powers. On another

occasion, connecting his novel with the war that would 'destroy the world here,

utterly', he saw *Women in Love* as 'purely destructive, not like the *Rainbow,* destructive-

consummating.'[91] If the potential for revivification through violent overhaul was

always doubtful, Gertler's martyrdom, as Lawrence saw it, at least prepared the

ground for more constructive work.

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[90] Lawrence, *Letters*, vol.vii, p.544. Qtd in Ruderman, p.36.
[91] Lawrence, III: OCTOBER 1916-JUNE 1921, p. 143.

Lawrence's account of the apocalyptic in *Merry-Go-Round* was self-serving, but it did respond to aspects of the painting that extended beyond an attack on contemporary militarism. In painting *Merry-Go-Round*, Gertler does seem to have been concerned with the apocalyptic, but his treatment of it is subtler than Lawrence's sense of 'soul-tearing obscenity' seems to allow. In fact, we may be able to see Gertler's painting as an attempt to condense and modernise Sandro Botticelli's *Mystic Nativity* (c.1500), held by the National Gallery.[92] In Botticelli's painting, the nativity takes place under a straw canopy with angels circling above, embracing men below, and men pointing towards the nativity from either side. Even without the inscription in Greek at the top of the painting, which identifies contemporary Italy with the 'eleventh of St John in the Second Woe of the Apocalypse', the painting would be a distinctly uneasy celebration of the nativity.[93]
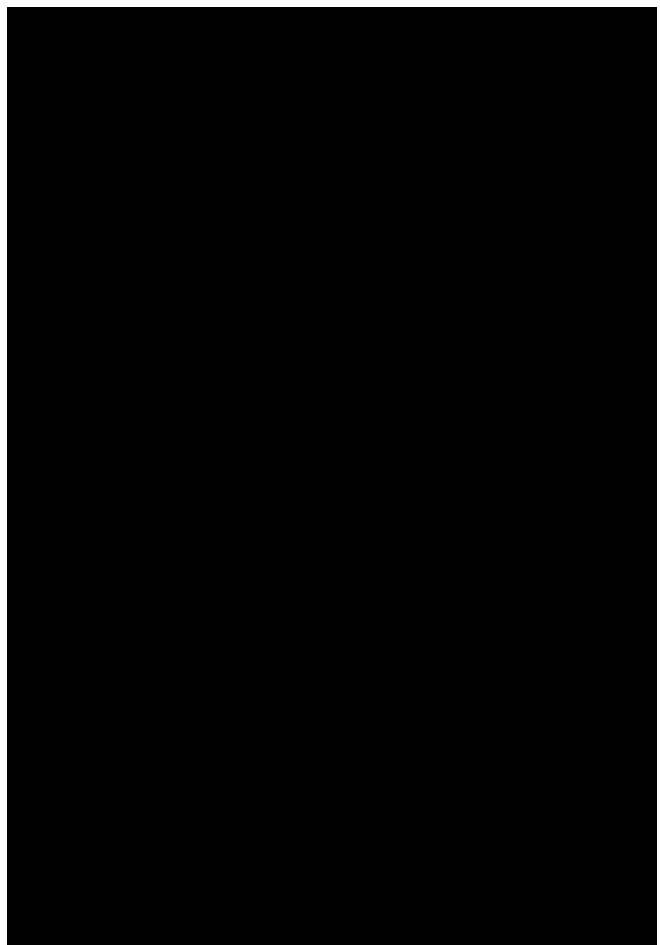
Sandro Botticelli, *Mystic Nativity*, 1500, 108.6 x 74.9, National Gallery, London

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[92] The painting was acquired by the National Gallery in 1878 so we can again be fairly sure that Gertler knew it well; *National Gallery: Descriptive and Historical Catalogue of the British And Foreign Pictures with Biographical Notices of the Painters, Indices, Etc.*, p. 84.

[93] For the translation and a discussion of Botticelli's debt to Savonarola, see Rab Hatfield, 'Botticelli's Mystic Nativity, Savonarola and the Millennium', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 58 (1995), 88–114.

Gertler's painting takes the roof of the manger for the canopy of the merry-go-round and excludes almost everything not beneath its cover. The cool colours of Botticelli's painting – reds, yellows, whites and blues – are driven to a point of garish intensity, and the green that grounds them exchanged for black. The vertiginous element is exaggerated: the canopy seen slightly tilted up rather than level, while the base of the merry-go-round is presented as almost a circle. Gertler experimented with such distortions of perspective alongside a massy and sculptural treatment of form and the effects of light on it. The work is not reduced to a flattened poster-design as it would be by Nevinson. Stanley Spencer is a closer comparison, in the transformation of facial features as well as the treatment of mass, but without Spencer's impulse towards the accumulation of detail. Finally, Botticelli's circling angels, in which the olive branches they hold seem to join in a vertical line despite their horizontal removal from one another, are reduced to Gertler's circling figures. Gertler has reformulated the circle, part of Botticelli's uneasy celebration of peace and order, into a symbol of unending war and ineluctable disorder.

That reformulation may have had a contemporary source. The war had seen the increasing deterioration of Cannan's mental health. As Cannan would later describe it: '[i]n the year 1916, at the very crisis of the war, its intense strain reduced or raised me to a condition in which I could think with an extraordinary clarity but without words'.[94] Eventually, the change expressed itself 'a symbol that burned itself into my brain in whirling fire'. Telling himself it was 'the Indian wheel of life' and that he was 'suffering from an attack of symbolism', the symbol stopped rotating and resolved into

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[94] Gilbert Cannan, *The Release of the Soul* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1920), p. 93.

a circle, twice bisected. However, it returned and began to become more complex, to project:

> an endless succession of elusive characters – all kinds of men, women and children, dogs, horses, houses, cats, trees, churches, all marching round and round the circle and along the diameters, in and out and round about, a regular inferno like Dante's, except that they were all jolly people, even the miserable and the suffering, and they were having tremendous fun, as I was too in watching them, though the whole thing became more and more unintelligible and exasperating because I could do nothing with it, since I could not connect it with the life going on around me in which I took less and less interest.[95]

Gertler would later describe seeing Cannan draw 'circular shapes and vortexes rather like those appearing in a life of Nijinsky […], and Van Gogh's vortex, suns and stars in his later landscapes.'[96] That Gertler described Cannan's circles by comparison with the drawings of Nijinsky and the paintings of Van Gogh suggests that he saw in them something rooted in mental disturbance but aesthetically useable. Cannan's rotating people, jolly even in their suffering,
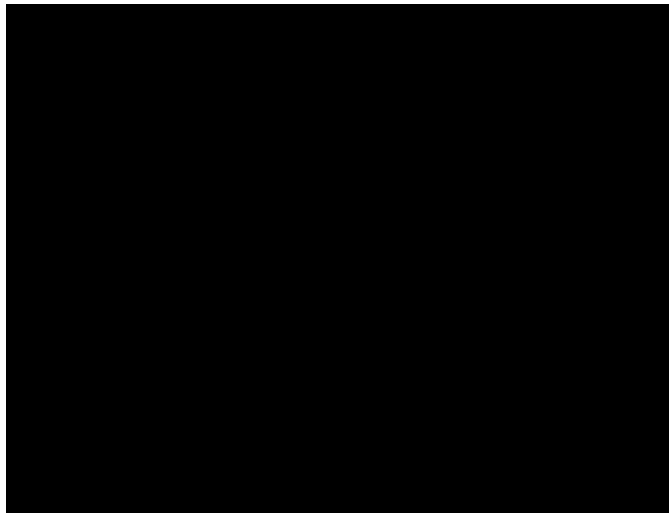
Vaslav Nijinsky, *Untitled (Arcs and Segments: Lines)*, 1918-19, crayon and pencil on paper, 28.5 x 37.5cm, Stiftung John Neumeier

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[95] Cannan, *The Release of the Soul*, p. 97.
[96] Farr, p. 148.

resemble Gertler's riders. Like *Gilbert Cannan and his Mill* (c.1916), we might then see *Merry-Go-Round* as part of Gertler's use of Cannan, a counterpoint to Cannan's use of Gertler for *Mendel*. For Cannan, the symbol of the rotating fiery circle was one which made everything comprehensible. Gertler's use of the symbol is comparable, in that it condenses diffuse chaos into a symbol of that chaos. We can draw a further analogy: in the same way that Cannan allowed a symbol to suggest a total perceptive grasp of the world in place of a more graduated understanding, so have interpretations of *Merry-Go-Round* followed Lawrence in seeing it as explosive obscenity, or Lytton Strachey in his comparison of it to a machine gun.[97] Lawrence's example was better than his account: by a more extended consideration of the painting and attention to its absences and allusiveness, we can more accurately delineate the apocalypse apprehended by Gertler's painting.

<div style="text-align:center">***</div>

Gertler's identity behind the figure of Loerke, the German sculptor who precipitates the final crisis of *Women in Love*, is no longer automatically accepted. In 1979, Keith Sagar began his introduction to *D. H. Lawrence, A Calendar of his Works* with an explanation of why such a calendar was needed. As evidence, he described his own error of having interpreted Loerke's name as 'a combination of "Loki", "lurker" and "Gertler"'.[98] His consultation of the manuscript of 'The Sisters', the earliest extant form of a draft including the Brangwen sisters, showed him that 'Loerke already existed,

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[97] MacDougall, *Mark Gertler*, p. 139.
[98] Keith Sagar, *D. H. Lawrence: A Calendar of His Works* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1979), p. vii.

with the same name [...] before Lawrence had ever heard of Mark Gertler.'[99] This is a slight overstatement: although Gertler is unmentioned in Lawrence's letters before 1914, a year after the draft of 'The Sisters', a familiarity before then with either Gertler or his work is not impossible. In 1913, Gertler was the new discovery of Edward Marsh, and Lawrence's acquaintance with Marsh had begun with the latter's request to print his poem 'The Snapdragon' in the first volume of *Georgian Poetry* in 1912. Lawrence may have heard of Gertler but not discussed him in letters, or discussed him in letters that have not survived.[100]

Despite these caveats, Sagar's comment has been useful. It has opened up the character of Loerke not only to more formalist readings, but also to other potential sources among Lawrence's contemporaries who may have contributed to the development of Loerke's character.[101] J. B. Bullen's chapter on Josef Moest and his sculpture *Godiva* as a source for Loerke's statuette is one of the more persuasive.[102] What there is of Gertler in Loerke must be approached with caution. The least disputable instance of a debt to Gertler emerges from a letter Lawrence wrote to him in December 1916. Lawrence explained that he had used the painter's *Merry-Go-Round* as

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[99] Sagar, p. vii.
[100] Stuart Sillars discusses the chronology of Lawrence's familiarity with Gertler in an attempt to link Gertler's *The Creation of Eve* to Will Brangwen's carving in *The Rainbow*; Stuart Sillars, '"Terrible and Dreadful": Lawrence, Gertler and the Visual Imagination', in *D. H. Lawrence in Italy and England*, ed. by George Donaldson and Mara Kalnins (Basingstoke; New York: Macmillan Press; St Martin's Press, 1999), pp. 193–210 (pp. 195–96).
[101] Sydney Janet Kaplan suggests Francis Carco as well as Gertler in Sydney Janet Kaplan, *Circulating Genius: John Middleton Murry, Katherine Mansfield and D. H. Lawrence* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), pp. 52–53; David Bradshaw suggests Walter Gropius might have been in Lawrence's mind when 'describing Loerke's work as an artist and industrial designer'; D. H. Lawrence, *Women in Love*, ed. by David Bradshaw (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 512n439.
[102] J. B. Bullen, 'Loerke's Statuette', in *D. H. Lawrence's* Women in Love*: A Casebook*, ed. by David Ellis (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 273–78.

the source for part of Loerke's frieze on the factory in Cologne, while disavowing any

resemblance between character and artist:

> In my novel there is a man – not you, I reassure you – who does a great granite
>
> frieze for the top of a factory, and the frieze is a fair, of which your whirligig,
>
> for example, is part.[103]

The translation from painting to frieze is significant. In his letter to Gertler about

Merry-Go-Round, Lawrence had discouraged Gertler from sculpture as 'going *too far* –

over the edge of endurance into a form of incoherent, less poignant shouting' than

painting.[104] He did so on the basis of trying to imagine *Merry-Go-Round* as a sculpture.

He returned to the point in the December letter, suggesting that painting was 'much

subtler than sculpture' and a 'finer medium', but 'one wants the unsubtle, the obvious,

like sculpture, as well as the subtle.'[105] From Will Brangwen's carving to Gudrun's

models and Loerke's frieze, sculpture is the key medium of *The Rainbow* and *Women in*

Love. It is a fitting one for the novels' characters. Crude to a point of incoherency, they

push and are pushed beyond endurance. The lack of refinement also connects to their

inability to abstract themselves from the art with which they work, unable to achieve

the hygienic distance that Loerke and Gudrun champion. They are driving, reworking

the coarse material of themselves as they go through 'the passionate struggle into

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[103] Lawrence, III: OCTOBER 1916-JUNE 1921, p. 46.
[104] Lawrence, II: JUNE 1913-OCTOBER 1916, p. 661.
[105] Lawrence, III: OCTOBER 1916-JUNE 1921, p. 46.

conscious being' within a text where the syntax is itself in a similar process of 'continual, slightly modified repetition'.[106]

The introduction of the merry-go-round into Loerke's frieze was done after the initial draft that Lawrence was working on in 1916. It replaced 'a village attacked by wolves, great naked men, ten feet high, fighting with a horde of wolves and women running, falling, and a rush of wolves sweeping all like a storm driving in a shaggy whirl across the whole frieze'.[107] The change goes in hand with a transformation of Loerke that takes place from the early fragments of 'The Sisters', through the manuscript and into the published form in *Women in Love*. As I will show, some of Loerke's uncanniness as a character is the result of a shift in intention and characterisation between Lawrence's manuscript draft and his reworking for the published form.

Before comparing the manuscript of *Women in Love* to its initial published form, it is worth briefly addressing the character of Loerke in 'The Sisters.' The relevant fragment apparently takes place after the return to England from Tyrol: Gerald looks for Gudrun in order to propose to her. When he finds her in a schoolroom, 'the German', later identified as a sculptor Loerke, is already present. Gudrun has summoned Loerke from Germany to ask him to marry her. She is pregnant with Gerald's child and ultimately chooses Gerald over Loerke, despite her accusation that

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[106] The phrases are from Lawrence's 1919 foreword to the novel, reprinted in D. H. Lawrence, *Women in Love*, ed. by David Farmer, John Worthen, and Lindeth Vasey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 485–86.
[107] D. H. Lawrence, 'Holograph Notebook 8 for *Women in Love*', 1916, p. 289, D. H. Lawrence Papers, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin, Box 24, Folder 9.

Gerald has treated her 'like the cheapest thing'.[108] Although Loerke initially protests

against Gerald's assumed supremacy and his gradual recognition of Gudrun's

preference, he leaves without physical violence, albeit with a face so distorted in agony

that it seems to Gerald 'like a face from hell'.[109] Before he leaves, however, Loerke is

allowed a judgment on Gerald in response to the latter's threat to strangle him. It has

the ring of an authorial judgment: '[y]ou trust to your position to play with her, you

trust to your muscles to threaten me, just as you would threaten an unarmed man with

your loaded gun and shoot him righteously – that is what you would do.'[110] Loerke

shows his teeth 'like an animal, with suffering and passion,' and without the

degenerate characteristics that the comparisons to animals will later bring him. In

response, Gerald crumples: '[s]omehow he felt the old shame of his murdered brother,

of his miserable father[,] of his own falsity'.

The Loerke of the fragment works as a mirror to Gerald. From the evidence of

the other fragments, it seems that Ben Templeton, possibly a prototype of Skrebensky,

would have returned to force a choice for Ursula (at this point named Winifred). Thus,

there would have been a structure based around the two sisters and four rivals. The

patterning remains in *The Rainbow* (1915) and *Women in Love* taken together, but the

effect is diminished by the split into two novels. Consultation of the fragments makes

the similarities between the Loerke of 'The Sisters' and the later Rupert Birkin more

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[108] D. H. Lawrence, 'Holograph Fragment of "The Sisters"', 1913, p. 292, D. H. Lawrence Papers, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin, Box 23, Folder 5.
[109] Lawrence, 'Holograph Fragment of "The Sisters"', p. 293.
[110] Lawrence, 'Holograph Fragment of "The Sisters"', p. 293.

striking: the mindless English physical supremacy of Gerald is set against something slighter, more rarefied and admirable.

In Lawrence's manuscript for *Women in Love*, written in successive copies of identical school exercise books, Loerke's role in reflecting elements of Rupert, Gerald and Gudrun is seen again. The key element of Loerke's character in the manuscript is now that of an isolated, iron, and stable will. He shares that strength of will with Gerald and, like Gerald, he is one who can submit material to his will. However, to an extent unallowed to Gerald, Loerke also understands the human material that makes him up. Loerke's frieze initially showed a battle between wolves and giants symbolising 'the fight with hunger – the first element of all work', as well as loosely suggesting Ragnarok.[111] After Lawrence had reworked the description of the frieze to integrate Gertler's merry-go-round, the emphasis shifted. It became primarily something more like a critique of the culture industry, in which the worker's leisure is merely a time when 'the machine works him, instead of he the machine.'[112] While both might seem in keeping with Lawrence's assessment of Gertler's painting as something obscene but true, the change is significant. Whereas the first suggested a prophetic vision that reduces the modern world to an atavistic core that maintains elements of heroism, the fairground vision is one in which struggle has been exchanged for totalising mechanisation. If it retains some of the apocalyptic character that Lawrence identified in Gertler's painting, that element has been reduced. In this shift from a vision of struggle to one of control, Loerke's frieze has changed from a vision with

[111] Lawrence, 'Holograph Notebook 8 for *Women in Love*', p. 292.
[112] Lawrence, *Women in Love*, p. 424.

potential for the regeneration that comes from cutting a society back to its roots for one that is firmly locked into a death-spiral.

In the manuscript, Loerke is defined by the power of his will; in the published form of the novel, the will remains significant, but its character has changed. Loerke in the manuscript has a will unflinching enough to challenge Gerald's own. Furthermore, that will is allied with an intellectual subtlety that is responsive to Gudrun. In the published form, 'the fine, insinuating blade of Loerke's will' has become the blade of an 'insect-like comprehension'.[113] Loerke becomes loaded with comparisons to insects and vermin in the rewriting, and the emphasis on a subterfuge which is contemptible, albeit effective. At times, this shift creates oddities of style. In the manuscript, Gudrun represents a will sufficiently powerful to interest and attract Loerke. The narrator describes how Loerke

> was uneasy all the while, wanting to talk with her, wanting to be near her. Her presence filled him with force and inspiration, he gravitated involuntarily towards her.[114]

In the published form, there are several changes:

> [Loerke] was uneasy all the while, waiting to talk with her, subtly contriving to be near her. Her presence filled him with keeness and excitement, he gravitated cunningly towards her.[115]

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[113] D. H. Lawrence, 'Holograph Notebook 9 for *Women in Love*', 1916, p. 360, D. H. Lawrence Papers, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin, Box 24, Folder 10; Lawrence, *Women in Love*, p. 452.

[114] Lawrence, 'Holograph Notebook 9 for *Women in Love*', p. 356.

[115] Lawrence, *Women in Love*, p. 450.

Lawrence's desire to emphasise Loerke's subtle contrivances results in the ugly and illogical metaphor of cunning gravitation. A partial defence can be mounted by observing that the Loerke of the published form is focalised increasingly through the hostile Rupert and Gerald, and the narrative increasingly echoes their own imperfect and clumsy attempts to reach the truth. But it is hard to escape the sense that as the narrative gathers into the ultimate location of the icy mountains, Lawrence chooses to gather depravity into a single character, whose survival is a judgment on the fictional world of the novel and, by extension, the world beyond.

Lawrence's rewriting after the manuscript also shifted the character of Gerald substantially, driving him towards becoming the mythic representation of the northern races, 'pure as an arctic thing'.[116] Gerald is deathly, bringing death to others and himself doomed, and part of Loerke's threat is that he might have the subtlety to outlast that death. There is an appeal to Gerald's offer of total death, which Loerke as 'wizard rat' risks marring.[117] We are back, then, with Lawrence's letter to Gertler: the Jew whose extenuated racial decomposition allows an insight into the cycles of destruction in races. What looks final to Gerald might not be: in the recognition of this there is hope as well as despair. Rupert's explanation of Loerke's appeal is again reminiscent of Lawrence's letter. Rupert describes Loerke as an 'obscene little monster of the darkness', whose achievement is to give the satisfaction of repulsion and a sense of the ultimate, a journey through the 'ghastly tunnel of darkness'.[118] The description in turn brings to mind Ursula's celebration of 'the floods of ineffable darkness' taken from

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[116] Lawrence, *Women in Love*, p. 14; see also Charles L. Ross, Women in Love: *A Novel of Mythic Realism* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991), p. 110.

[117] Lawrence, *Women in Love*, p. 428.

[118] Lawrence, *Women in Love*, p. 428.

a source in Rupert 'deeper than the phallic', a celebration whose much-remarked anal

connotations have further parallel in Loerke's relationship with his companion,

Leitner, the 'well-built, soft youth', with whom he shares a room.[119]

> Loerke is able to give this sense of the ultimate because
>
> [h]e's further on than we are. He hates the ideal more acutely. He *hates* the ideal
>
> utterly, yet it still dominates him. I expect he is a Jew—or part Jewish.[120]

As with Gertler's painting, Loerke is linked with obscenity and a further stage of

decomposition. Lawrence's remark to Gertler that he realises '*how* superficial your

human relationships must be' for 'the outer life means nothing to you, really' is echoed

in Loerke's pretence towards artistic autonomy, although that pretence is undermined

by Ursula.[121] As in Lawrence's letter to Edith Eder, Jewishness is identified with

rejection as well as misanthropy and 'social hatred'.[122] What is significant here is not so

much that it sets up an identification between Gertler and Loerke. Rather, it shows the

way in which Lawrence used Gertler's art as a way of thinking through elements of a

racial theory that he would then use to set Gerald as a representative of northern races

against the Jewish Loerke.

At this point, again, an objection might be raised that Rupert's assertion that

Loerke is Jewish does not reliably fix the latter's race for a reader. However, even

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[119] Lawrence, *Women in Love*, pp. 314, 411; for an example of relevant critical discussion of Ursula's celebration, see Christopher Craft, *Another Kind of Love: Male Homosexual Desire in English Discourse, 1850-1920* (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 148–51. Craft also draws on readings by John Middleton Murry and G. Wilson Knight.
[120] Lawrence, *Women in Love*, p. 428.
[121] Lawrence, II: JUNE 1913-OCTOBER 1916, p. 660.
[122] Lawrence, *Women in Love*, p. 428.

without appeal to the 'catalogue of the anti-Jewish commonplaces' that Lawrence

brings to descriptions of Loerke, we can say that Loerke's Jewishness is likelier diegetic

than it is a figment of Rupert's antisemitism.[123] We can do so because Loerke describes

his family, like Gertler's, as coming from a 'garrison town' in 'Polish Austria', a detail

already present in the manuscript.[124] Also known as Galicia, Polish Austria was a

historical centre of East European Jewry and, while the connection to Gertler is

suggestive, its function in *Women in Love* is more likely to provide a plausible template

for a Jewish character than it is any specific reference. In fact, vagueness is a significant

part of how Loerke's racial character is shaped by Lawrence. Zygmunt Bauman has

described the challenge to established categories that Jews were understood to present,

one of the most significant of those categories being the nation-state. As an ethnicity

unfixed from a single homeland, Jews were seen to contravene the popular elision of

race, land and nation.[125] Loerke is the prophetic extension of Lawrence's ideas of what

Jewishness means – an ultimate nullity the more perverse because a futural Jewishness

outside Christian revelation is denied in the latter's dogma.

The world of Galicia has already been summoned in the Brangwen saga by

Lydia Lensky's stories of Poland in *The Rainbow*, including anecdotes of pogroms: 'of

Jews running down the street shouting in Yiddish, "Don't do it, don't do it," and being

cut down by demented peasants—she called them "cattle".'[126] Writing about the

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[123] Anne Fernihough, *D. H. Lawrence: Aesthetics and Ideology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 27.

[124] Lawrence, *Women in Love*, p. 425; Lawrence, 'Holograph Notebook 8 for *Women in Love*', p. 294.

[125] Bauman, p. 219.

[126] D. H. Lawrence, *The Rainbow*, ed. by Mark Kinkead-Weekes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 59.

passage, Ruderman observes that Koteliansky's uncle was killed by Cossacks.[127] The

use of the phrase 'plainly beaten' helps us to fix Lawrence's source more securely, since

it was one of Koteliansky's set phrases, and one picked up and parroted by those who

knew him in London.[128] 'Tu es nisht' is what the Yiddish phrase would be, and it is

quite possible Koteliansky would have quoted it in the Yiddish in telling the anecdote

– he and Lawrence later collaborated on a translation from Yiddish of a story told by

Koteliansky's mother.[129] The point is significant because the phrase is almost identical

to the German that Lawrence considered having Loerke say to Gerald as the latter

strangles Gudrun. The notebook reads:

> 'Nein,' he said in a warning, abstract voice. '~~Nein, thu's nicht, thu's nicht~~. No,
>
> don't do it – don't do it, it's not worth it. ~~Thu's nicht.~~ – don't do it, don't do it,'
>
> re-echoed in Gerald's brain, as if it [were] his own soul speaking ~~sadly~~
>
> disillusioned, his own will sadly, subduedly disavowing him. 'It's not worth
>
> it.'[130]

This link is lost in the published version, though it would only ever have been oblique.

However, its substitution for the French 'Monsieur [...] Quand vous aurez fini!' is

another instructive example in the shift that occurs in Loerke's character through

Lawrence's reworking.[131] The first version has Loerke's demand blending with

Gerald's conscience to stop him. It is a proof of the close nature of their wills as well as

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[127] Ruderman, p. 37.
[128] Diment, p. 59.
[129] Diment, pp. 207–8.
[130] D. H. Lawrence, 'Holograph Notebook 10 for *Women in Love*', 1916, pp. 418–19, D. H. Lawrence Papers, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin, Box 24, Folder 11.
[131] Lawrence, *Women in Love*, p. 472.

a triumph of the Decalogue's injunction against murder. It also uses Loerke's re-echoing voice to set up a textual echo: that of Gudrun's ancestors killing the weaker. As Gudrun is strangled, the punishment returns on her, but the previously powerless call of the murdered Jews returns to keep her alive. In the final version, Loerke's German order yields to a French sneer, and its effect is achieved by inspiring not identification in Gerald, but repulsion at being observed. Loerke's use of the future perfect makes clear that what Gerald is treating as the ultimate climax is in fact no such thing; time will continue after the murder, and so will Loerke. 'Quand vous aurez fini' reduces a moral crisis to just another action, after which more will have to be done, and suggests that the murder of Gudrun would be as much a solecism as a sin.

In both the manuscript and published forms, it is Loerke's subordinate, secondary nature that allows him to dissuade Gerald from murder, though in very different ways. Prompting self-recognition either by the suggestion of a conscience or a voyeur, Loerke's voice is able to deter Gerald, who, by killing his own brother as a boy, had deprived himself of the complement against which he could be shaped. In the space between manuscript and revision, we get a shift of emphasis in Lawrence's articulation of Jewishness, from one of a restricted but effective moral code to a vestige of misanthropic, implacable and depraved external critique. There is a case to be made that the latter is still preferable, if less handsome, than Gerald's pure destructiveness, but the way in which Gerald's corpse assumes more importance than the living Loerke in the final pages of the novel keeps the emphasis on the tragedy of the northern races, against whom the Jews are a threat.

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Lawrence's use of Gertler and his painting is far more contingent than Cannan's. Thus, while elements of character reminiscent of accounts of Gertler can be found in Loerke – mimicry, playfulness, combined with a seriousness and intensity about art – his function as mirror and counterpart to the central four characters of the novel keeps the burden of those references internal. Compared to *Mendel*, they do not point outward to a historical referent. This emphasis does not make the debts to Gertler irrelevant, but those debts must be seen within a scheme where they take on meaning as much in relation to other characters as to Loerke. By contrast, Mendel, at the heart of Cannan's novel, retains more centripetal force on the biographical details that amass around him. While both Mendel and Loerke hover on the edges of a mutually destructive couple and serve to catalyse the deaths that follow, the role assigned by Cannan and Lawrence is different. Cannan puts Mendel at the centre of the novel's world, and it is his separation from Logan and Oliver that leads to their deaths, as they are cut off from the central thread of the narrative. In *Women in Love*, the arrangement is reversed, and Loerke flits in and out of the novel, leaving his mark.

The difference maps onto a larger one involving Gertler as prodigy. Both Cannan and Lawrence use characters indebted to Gertler as material in sketching the possibilities of cultural regeneration. Mendel's prodigious qualities allow Cannan to suggest him as a possible source of that regeneration, though a similar over-investment will later allow him to put Jews at the centre of perceived threats to European culture. For Lawrence, Gertler's usefulness as prodigy is funnelled down into a purely disintegrative role, one which may destroy everything or allow a levelling where a more creative dynamic may take over. In neither case is the metaphor of catalyst

entirely just, since there is the sense that something *has* been used up. Gertler's legacy

has been shaped by *Mendel*. The general framing of that legacy resembles Lawrence's

use of him: reduced to a single work of art and turned into a secondary character, a

satellite of Bloomsbury. Gertler's artwork stands in counterpoint to this vision, leaving

open a potential for continued reactions, and capable of altering our understanding of

the composition of his own work and of others. A conscious rebuttal of unsympathetic

constructions can be seen in the work of John Rodker, the subject of the following

chapter.

John Rodker: The Scourge as Safety-Valve

> I am very fond of Jimmy. Yet I am afraid there is something unhealthy in
>
> Jimmy. There is a sickly pallor in his face, and I am afraid in his mind too. He is
>
> somewhat morbidly inclined. He has been taking a great delight in telling us of
>
> his dissection experiences. And he has several times mentioned the word
>
> 'macabre'.[1]

John Rodker, named Simon Solomon on his birth certificate and known as 'Jimmy' to

his friends, was born in 1894 in Manchester. He was brought to London aged six.[2] The

Rodker described in Leftwich's 1911 diary combines an attentive, clinical interest in

mechanism and physiology with a good amount of pretension: some older Socialists

complain to Leftwich that they could not mention 'coal' in Rodker's presence without

him asking if they knew its scientific formula.[3] On various occasions, Leftwich

complained about Rodker's morbidity, objecting particularly to Rodker taking cuttings

of plants on a walk in Epping Forest. Leftwich asked himself how his friend could

'work simultaneously towards becoming a creative writer and dissecting scientist?'[4]

Like Leftwich, Rodker left school at fourteen. He began to attend evening classes in

French, German and science. In her obituary for Rodker, Marie Bonaparte dated his

interest in printing from this point, while his 'literary bent began to assert itself' when

he took up work as a Civil Service clerk.[5] His interest in psychoanalysis also likely

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[1] Leftwich, 'Facsimile of Diary', entry for 12 February 1911.

[2] Marie Bonaparte, 'John Rodker 1894-1955', *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 37 (1956), 199–201 (p. 200).

[3] Leftwich, 'Facsimile of Diary', entry for 2 January.

[4] Leftwich, 'Facsimile of Diary', entry for 21 March.

[5] Bonaparte, p. 200; William Baker.

began to develop in the early 1910s.[6] With Sonia Cohen, he attended meetings held at

Chandos Hall on Maiden Lane by the circle around Dora Marsden's journal *The*

Freewoman. Barbara Low, who would later analyse Rodker, was another attendee.[7]

Psychoanalysis had an immediate relevance for him. His mother, whom he did not

know, 'was always spoken of as "mad"' and was at one point said to be in a 'lunatic

asylum'.[8] Rodker's daughter Joan believed that both John and his younger brother,

Peter, feared that they might have inherited her madness. Peter was in fact

institutionalised for the majority of his adult life.[9]

The most sustained outcome of Rodker's fascination with psychoanalysis was

probably his foundation of and subsequent work on the Imago Publishing Company.

Its purpose on foundation in 1939 was to publish Freud's collected works in German,

though the project was eclipsed by the increasing supremacy of English as the

language of psychoanalysis.[10] An effort to analyse the processes of his mind would also

come to characterise much of Rodker's writing, though he changed his means of doing

so. The year 1925 serves in some ways as a useful turning-point in looking at Rodker's

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[6] Several possible avenues by which Rodker's interest in psychoanalysis may have developed are discussed in Ian Patterson, 'Cultural Critique and Canon Formation, 1910-1937: A Study in Modernism and Cultural Memory' (unpublished doctoral thesis, King's College, Cambridge, 1996), p. 46. Patterson puts particular emphasis on the influence of David Eder.

[7] Rodker (née Cohen), pp. 142–43.

[8] Joan Rodker, 'Peter Roker', 1973, Joan Rodker Papers, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin, Box 4, Folder 2; Leftwich, 'Facsimile of Diary', entry for 5 July 1911.

[9] Joan Rodker, 'Peter Roker'; Joan's suspicion is confirmed, at least in the case of her father, by a comment in his diary that '[t]he wing of insanity has not yet touched me but it touched my mother & I am afraid of it'. John Rodker, 'Diary 1921-1927', Joan Rodker Papers, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin, Box 5, Folder 2, entry for 28 January 1924.

[10] For an account of the project, including its 'tragic and even absurd' elements, see Rémy Amouroux, '"A Serious Venture": John Rodker (1894-1955) and the Imago Publishing Company (1939-60)', *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 92.6 (2011), 1437–54.

career. In the prefatory note to the edition of his *Collected Poems* published in 1930 by

Nancy Cunard's Hours Press, Rodker asked himself the question of why 'after 1925 I

wrote no verse'. His answer was twofold: firstly, that the impulse which drove him to

write poetry 'found relief in the writing of prose'; secondly, that 'the particular

concentration, the state of feeling which conceived this kind of poem, came more rarely

with maturity, possibly because at all times it was a difficult world to live in, and I was

no longer prepared to live in it'.[11] That it also coincided with the collapse of his affair

with Cunard he tactfully declined to mention. The prefatory note gives one way of

reading Rodker's career, the diversion of the poetic impulse into prose or, as others

saw it, into translation and publishing.[12] The narrative is persuasive up to a point and

has the questionable advantage of singling out *Adolphe 1920* among Rodker's prose.

Serialised by Pound in his magazine *The Exile* before its publication by the Aquila Press

in 1929, it marks, with the Ovid Press, the high point of Rodker's involvement with the

Pound circle.

   This chapter puts less emphasis on *Adolphe 1920*, partly because it has received

a good amount of attention already, at least by the standards of criticism around

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[11] John Rodker, *Collected Poems: 1912-1925* (Paris: Hours Press, 1930), p. vii; the note is reprinted in full in John Rodker, *Poems & Adolphe 1920*, p. 179.

[12] See for example, Isaacs, 'Mr. John Rodker'. Isaacs expressed his regrets that Rodker 'gave to publishing what should have been given to literature'; see also David Bomberg to John Rodker, 1 March, John Rodker Papers, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin, Box 39, Folder 4. The letter was written from Ronda and encouraged him to leave the literary agency for which he was working since it was 'about time [he] produced a great book'. The letter is dated 1 March without a year, but must coincide with both the Bombergs' stay in Ronda between 1934-5 and Rodker's work for PresLit between 1934-40; for an excellent discussion of this work, see Ian Patterson, 'The Translation of Soviet Literature: John Rodker and PresLit', in *Russia in Britain 1880-1940: From Melodrama to Modernism*, ed. by Rebecca Beasley and Philip Bullock (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 188–208.

Rodker's work.[13] An exclusive attention to it also risks reinscribing Poundian priorities on a writer who came to be increasingly at odds with Pound. In a series of letters sent to Rodker from St Elizabeth's, Pound complained of Rodker's continued investment in 'Freud and co/ sewage', writing that it had yielded 'NO art work worth a catpiss/ paralysis of the will of the victims'.[14] Pound's formulation suggests a break-off in the worth of Rodker's work after *Adolphe 1920*, though Rodker's investment in psychoanalysis predated the novella. Rodker's preface risks inviting a similar interpretation. However, in its description of an impulse redirected from poetry to prose, there is also a suggestion of continuity that requires our attention.

A script Rodker wrote for a lecture, probably around 1938, suggests a model for reading that continuity. Titled 'Liberating Forces: Remarks on a Few French Writers', Rodker traces a 'very personal, very arbitrary' history of French literature, focussing on those who embody 'the diabolical element, the sacred fire'.[15] Names such as Balzac, Gide, Laforgue and Proust were left out of the discussion because to read them was 'not a mystical, nor somehow a purging experience.' Rodker's canon begins with Rousseau, then Sade and Restif de la Bretonne, the eighteenth-century printer and confessional writer whose memoirs Rodker had published in translation between 1930-

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[13] See, for example: Laura Marcus, *The Tenth Muse: Writing About Cinema in the Modernist Period* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 67–68, 87–90; Elizabeth Pender, 'Mawkishness, or Literary Art: John Rodker's *Adolphe 1920* in Modernism', *Modernism/Modernity*, 21.2 (2014), 467–85; David Trotter, *Cinema and Modernism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), pp. 152–53.

[14] Ezra Pound to John Rodker, aerogramme, 29 December 1952, John Rodker Papers, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin, Box 39, Folder 9.

[15] John Rodker, 'Liberating Forces: Remarks on a Few French Writers', 1938, p. 10, John Rodker Papers, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin, Box 35, Folder 10. My suggested year is based on Rodker's reference to and quotation from W. C. Allee's *The Social Life of Animals* (1938) and that Rodker shows no awareness of the more openly antisemitic and fascist writings of Céline that were beginning to be published but, instead, '[looks] forward to what he will do next' (p.8).

31.[16] Next come Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Mallarmé, Lautréamont and he reaches the

present with the work of Louis-Ferdinand Céline and Pierre Jean Jouve. Initially, it

seems to be a straightforward account of the heroism of the confessional writer. Rodker

praises

> the surgical ruthlessness with which they revealed themselves, & 'thus man'.
>
> What they said in effect was, that there was nothing common to humanity that
>
> could not be said. Obviously, somewhere & at some time, all this had been said
>
> before, but not so clearly, nor in a way we could all understand. And their
>
> value to us is that of whatever the cost to themselves, they showed the rest of
>
> humanity that we could dispense with the taboos, the dark places of the soul:
>
> they opened them to the light & the air.[17]

However, Rodker's narrative changes when he comes to Baudelaire. Up to that point,

we might have understood the military metaphor of 'liberating forces' in terms of the

writer liberating a public besieged by taboo and convention. What Rodker proceeds to

describe, however, is a liberation more limited and compromised:

> The living through of these emotions of revolt, this blasphemy, these profound
>
> emotions, by that much lessens their drive & permits it to discharge itself
>
> harmlessly. And so you might say that though originally these poets appeared
>
> as apostles of revolt, today we see that they have functioned as safety-valves, &

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[16] Restif de la Bretonne, *Monsieur Nicolas; or, the Human Heart Unveiled*, 6 vols (London: John Rodker, 1930–1931).

[17] John Rodker, 'Liberating Forces: Remarks on a Few French Writers', p. 3.

in so doing, function in fact, as the conservators of tradition, since they permit

accumulated revolts to be thus harmlessly discharged.[18]

The discharge does not mean that no progress is made, since the environment and

challenges change, and 'fecundating influences' continue to be felt, but the new ideas

are 'watered down', their 'virtue […] drained from them.'[19] The lecture is useful for

contextualising the physiological account of creating poetry that appears in Rodker's

1930 preface: if the release of poetry is a way to keep pressure at safe levels inside the

poet's system, that release is part of a larger self-regulation in society. Implicit in this

formulation is that, while the significant poets might be those who set themselves

against society, that opposition obscures their function within society more generally.

The compromises forced on the individual by society were no new revelation for

Rodker in the 1930s: there are precedents for most of the lecture's key ideas in his

earlier work and even the metaphor of the 'safety-valve' had already appeared in a

slightly different context within a short story published in 1921.[20] However, in two

works he authored in the thirties, *Memoirs of Other Fronts* (1932) and *An Ape of Genius*

(c.1932-3), we can see Rodker developing, though not resolving, a form of writing that

would allow analysis of figures who are both scourge and safety-valve.

This chapter focusses on three texts from Rodker's career. The first, *Hymns*, was

published by the Ovid Press in 1920, and shows Rodker testing the limits of the

diabolical poet. While the Ovid Press has been seen as part of a doomed attempt to

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[18] John Rodker, 'Liberating Forces: Remarks on a Few French Writers', p. 5.

[19] John Rodker, 'Liberating Forces: Remarks on a Few French Writers', pp. 10, 4.

[20] John Rodker, 'Mr. Segando in the Fifth Cataclysm', *The Tyro: A Review of the Arts of Painting, Sculpture and Design*, 1 (1921), 8. The story is discussed below.

revive the pre-war avant-garde after the First World War, Rodker's work as publisher-poet shows a more complicated attitude towards the avant-garde than that formulation allows, and one that puts him variously at odds with several of the other writers he published. Looking at *Hymns* also makes clearer the development that took place in the thirties, as Rodker moved from an engagement and internal critique of the 'diabolical element' in poetry to the analysis of that diabolism within a system, an effort that Rodker seems to have found better suited to prose. The early thirties saw the collapse of Rodker's third publishing company, the 'John Rodker' imprint, and the publication of Wyndham Lewis's *The Apes of God* (1926), with its hostile caricature of Rodker. It also saw the publication of Rodker's *Other Fronts*, a tripartite memoir incorporating Rodker's account of his imprisonment as a conscientious objector, and the incomplete draft of *An Ape of Genius*, Rodker's answer to Lewis's attack in *The Apes of God*. Both *Other Fronts* and *An Ape of Genius* are concerned with the place of an individual in society, and the ways in which the individual fails to meaningfully extricate themselves from the context in which they operate. By studying how these two texts adapt the concerns of Rodker's earlier work, we can arrive at a better understanding of his intellectual trajectory. Rodker's later work stands as the development and critique of his early experiments and the milieu in which they were produced. His legacy is to be understood not only as that of an actor in the history of early twentieth-century culture and cultural production, but as that of a valuable analyst of its achievements and limitations.

Hymns (1920) and the Ovid Press

Rodker's diary entry for April 4th, 1919, recorded the difficulties he and his wife, the author Mary Butts, had in getting the printing press they had bought into their Hampstead flat. The weight of the Columbian hand press broke the Ford's axle. They eventually got it into the flat with help from others, but Rodker was already doubtful of the enterprise: 'This new house sh[oul]d be a delight – Very despondent about press but who knows –'.[21] By early May he was musing on the reasons for his failure to complete the writing he had in mind: 'a poem called "The Pale Hysterical Ecstasy" & an essay on Bottles'.[22] On the one hand, he blamed printing for being 'too absorbing to leave one time for creation'; on the other, he found himself 'continually sidetracked into fucking M[ary]'.[23] These conflicting drives apparently resolved themselves into *Hymns*, a book of poetry notable for its play with ideas of mess and obscenity, which are explored in the technique both of its written and printed composition. I will trace some of the ways in which Rodker's work as poet and publisher complicates the idea of the Ovid Press as a revival of the pre-war avant-garde, before briefly setting Rodker's project against Lewis's comparable efforts at revival in *The Tyro*.

In June 1919, Butts and Rodker produced *Twenty Drawings from the Notebooks of H. Gaudier-Brzeska*, the first in an impressive series of publications, which included reproductions of work by Edward Wadsworth and Roald Kristian, and poetry by Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot and Rodker's own *Hymns*.[24] Lisa Otty argues that we should

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[21] John Rodker, 'Diary 1919-1921', entry for 4 April 1919.
[22] John Rodker, 'Diary 1919-1921', entry for 2 May 1919.
[23] John Rodker, 'Diary 1919-1921', entries for 2 and 5 May 1919.
[24] The best overview of the history and bibliography of the Ovid Press is given in Gerald W. Cloud, *John Rodker's Ovid Press: A Bibliographical History* (New Castle, Delaware: Oak Knoll

understand the output of the Ovid Press in terms of the attempt to reform the British

avant-garde in the wake of the First World War:

> Reassembling the so-called 'men of 1914' and mobilising a vorticist idiom in the
>
> design of the colophon and initials, the press seems to have been an
>
> undisguised attempt to re-establish a pre-war dynamic, and to position
>
> Rodker's own work – the books of the press, as well as his writing – within that
>
> context.[25]

In the case of Gaudier-Brzeska, the reassembly amounted to a resurrection, for the

sculptor had died at Neuville St. Vaast in 1915. His death, to quote Pound, had been

'part of the war waste'.[26] The Ovid Press's first publication was therefore memorial

and, like other post-war productions, it could be justified as growing out of the war-

waste. The memorialisation of Gaudier-Brzeska could be understood both as a gesture

of piety not out of place in the national project of mourning the war dead and as a

rallying-point for a dispersed avant-garde. Most of the artists and writers published by

the Ovid Press had previously been gathered in *Blast*: only Kristian and Rodker had

not appeared in either issue. Andrew Crozier notes that 'Wyndham Lewis had offered

to take numbers 9 and 12 [of Rodker's poem series "The Dutch Dolls"] for *Blast*, but

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Press, 2010); for a persuasive challenge to some of Cloud's criteria for inclusion, see Evi Heinz, 'John Rodker (1894-1955) and Modernist Material Culture: Theatre, Translation, Publishing' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Birkbeck, 2018), p. 185n2. This chapter focusses almost exclusively on Rodker's contribution as publisher. While this is partly because the extent of Butts's involvement is less clear (Cloud, p.15n19), further research into her role may complicate some of the analysis given here.

[25] Lisa Otty, 'Small Press Modernists: Collaboration, Experimentation and the Limited Edition Book', in *The Aesthetics of Matter: Modernism, the Avant-Garde and Material Exchange*, ed. by Sarah Posman and others (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), pp. 128–43 (p. 133).

[26] Ezra Pound, *Gaudier-Brzeska: A Memoir* (London : John Lane; New York, John Lane Company, 1916), p. 3.

[Rodker] wanted the series published as a whole'.[27] Kristian, also known as Edgar de

Bergen, was the husband of Nina Hamnett and worked with the Omega Workshops

until his imprisonment and subsequent deportation as an unregistered alien in 1917.[28]

With Kristian now abroad, the publication of his work might, like that of Gaudier-

Brzeska, be understood in part as an effort to defy the incursions of the war on creative

production.

The colophon and initials designed by Edward Wadsworth are the most

striking visual feature of the Ovid Press's output, and they appeared for the first time

in Pound's *Fourth Canto*.[29] Monochrome and angular, the patterning of the initials at

times risks obscuring the letters themselves. Responding to a request for a design,

Wadsworth sent Rodker the woodcut with the 'little Lion and Unicorn design' that would become the distinctive colophon of the Ovid Press.[30] Though the subject might be seen as suggestively heraldic and patriotic, its power as a 'decorative trademark' seems to have been more important than any symbolic meaning.[31]

The Ovid Press colophon designed by
Edward Wadsworth, as reproduced
on p.40 of Rodker's *Hymns* (1920)

[27] John Rodker, *Poems & Adolphe 1920*, p. 186.

[28] Denise Hooker, 'Hamnett, Nina (1890–1956)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/57344> [accessed 4 September 2019].

[29] Cloud, p. 62.

[30] Edward Wadsworth to John Rodker, 20 April 1919, John Rodker Papers, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin, Box 40, Folder 6.

[31] Edward Wadsworth to John Rodker, 13 April 1919, John Rodker Papers, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin, Box 40, Folder 6.

When the initials reach representational legibility, it is in the form of figures from

drama, 'elements of the theatre and stage'.[32] As they appeared within a single book,

they suggested an internal coherence, but that coherence could work in different ways.

In the case of *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* (1920), where the narrative and the character of

Mauberley tie the poems together, the initials for each section suggest new chapters,

appropriate for a poem that sought to 'condense the James novel'.[33] They also

contribute to the pomposity that Mauberley encounters and himself evinces. Eliot's *Ara*

Vus Prec contained substantially the same contents as his *Poems*, published the same

year by Alfred A. Knopf, but Heather Bryant Jordan has observed that formal

properties play a greater role in determining the arrangement of the poems of *Ara Vus*

Prec, compared to the more thematic arrangement of *Poems*.[34] Arguably, such thematic

devices continue to influence the organisation of Eliot's poems in the Ovid Press

edition. The volume begins with 'Gerontion' and 'Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleistein

with a Cigar', poems which use Jews to suggest a decadent and decaying older world

on the one hand, and originary 'protozoic slime' on the other.[35] It ends with the 'La

Figlia Che Piange' and its woman who stands, like Dante's Beatrice, at the apex, 'the

highest pavement of the stair'.[36] By having 'Sweeney Erect' directly follow on from

'Sweeney Among the Nightingales', Eliot strengthens a sense of coherence across

separate poems. However, we can also argue that this sort of subtlety of arrangement

by Eliot recedes into the background when the Wadsworth initials come into view: the

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[32] Otty, p. 134.

[33] Pound, *The Letters of Ezra Pound, 1907-1941*, p. 248.

[34] Heather Bryant Jordan, '*Ara Vos Prec*: A Rescued Volume', *Text*, 7 (1994), 349–64 (p. 353). Jordan also discusses 'Ode', included in the Ovid Press volume but excised from the Knopf (pp. 355-358).

[35] T. S. Eliot, *Ara Vus Prec* (London: Ovid Press, 1920), p. 14.

[36] Eliot, *Ara Vus Prec*, p. 54.

initials link the poems in a more pronounced way, while also marking them as discrete

units.

There is reason to think that the poems of *Hymns* were not arranged by

chronology but it is hard to determine what organisational principle is at work, apart

from the grouping of the poems with 'hymn' in the title at the beginning.[37] These

poems, with the exception of 'Hymn to Himself : Atlas Twentieth Century' are

formally characterised by greater length and recurring invocations, as well as by a

poetic voice that speaks with more confidence and authority than those in the volume's

other poems. Sean Pryor has discussed some of their precedents as well as their

preoccupations; the latter he usefully summarises as 'confronting the problems of

congregation and of praise'.[38] For the rest, it is as though Rodker was driven by a desire

not to put two poems next to each other which had too similar a subject: so 'Gas Fire'

and 'Lamps' are separated from one another, as are 'The Dancer Dancing' and

'Dancer'. Against *Ara Vus Prec* and *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*, the overall effect of the

arrangement suggests, not a progression, but activity and alteration with the same

subjects and preoccupations resurfacing.

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[37] The reason is found by looking in Rodker's *Collected Poems* (1930), where the poems were
arranged chronologically, with the year of composition indicated on the contents page.
[38] Sean Pryor, 'Satyriast's Beatitudes: John Rodker's Hymns', *Texas Studies in Literature and
Language*, 55.4 (2013), 473–92 (p. 486).

Rodker's push away from a progressive organisation of the poems alters the function of the initials. What communicated

HYMN TO HEAT
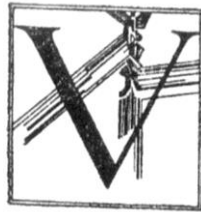
VISCOUS atom crawls and creeps from atom ¶ And like a snake un-coiling ¶ they hump themselves in ridges, ¶ O eternally insatiate.¶ O yearning ones.

The beginning of Rodker's 'Hymn to Heat' on p.12 of *Hymns*, with examples of an initial and pilcrows.

discrete units and workable coherence in *Ara Vus Prec* and *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*, serves more as a disruption of the poem's layout and so an interruption of the reader's experience. The disruption is exacerbated by the catchwords and pilcrows that Rodker uses in his own work. The initial function of catchwords was as a guide for binders, but they had at least some currency in 1919. They appear, for example, in contemporary issues of *Voices* when poems cross from recto to verso; they do not appear either in fiction or in critical prose. In *Hymns*, catchwords appear when the 'hymn' poems cross pages, both verso to recto and recto to verso. We can infer that in both cases, the catchwords are linked to reading the poems aloud: the catchword allows the reader to have the coming word ready in their mouth while the eye seeks the next line. For Rodker, their use marks a continuation of his experiments in the bodily aspects of poetry which had led Pound to write that he had been unable to 'make much of the cadence' of Rodker's poetry until he saw how Hester Sainsbury and Kathleen Dillon 'danced out their poems'.[39] *Hymns* announces itself for public consumption – even public performance – while its erotic and aggressive contents suggest impulses

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[39] Ezra Pound, 'Foreword to the Choric School', *Others*, 1.4 (1915), C-D.

typically suppressed from explicitly entering the public sphere. The play on the

borders of public and private means a more attenuated form of obscenity than some of

the writers discussed in 'Liberating Forces'. The coterie element of the press and its

high prices funnelled the intervention into narrower channels.[40]

At the same time, the appearance of catchwords when no turn of the page is

required in *Hymns* suggests that they had a function beyond the practical.[41] They may

also ironically evoke the sacred. Rodker's familiarity with Pound and *The Freewoman*

makes it likely that he read *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* as it was published in

The Egoist between 1914-15 and, at death, his library contained the Egoist Press 1917

edition of the novel.[42] In 1919, he had an essay on Joyce's *Exiles* published in *The Little*

Review where he had taken over from Pound as foreign editor.[43] He later authored one

of the essays in *Our Exagmination Round His Factification for Incamination of Work in*

Progress (1929).[44] In *Portrait*, the young Stephen observes how Uncle Charles 'knelt on

his red handkerchief and read above his breath from a thumb blackened prayer book

wherein catchwords were printed at the foot of every page'.[45] Joyce desacralizes the

scene by having Stephen wonder 'what his grand-uncle prayed for so seriously',

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[40] The volumes by Eliot and Rodker were priced at 15s, signed copies at 25s. *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* was priced at 16s and 25s (signed). Books of artwork by Wyndham Lewis and Edward Wadsworth were substantially more expensive. See Cloud, pp. 65, 70, 82, 89, 106.

[41] The absence of catchwords from Eliot, *Ara Vus Prec*, published the year before, suggests that neither did Rodker consider them a necessary guide to binding.

[42] A typescript annotated bibliography of Rodker's personal library is held by the Harry Ransom Center but not listed in its catalogue.

[43] John Rodker, '"Exiles": A Discussion of James Joyce's Plays', *The Little Review*, 5.9 (1919), 20–22.

[44] John Rodker, 'Joyce and His Dynamic', in *Our Exagmination Round His Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress*, by Samuel Beckett and others (London: Faber and Faber, 1972), pp. 139–46.

[45] James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, ed. by Jeri Johnson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 51.

whether 'for the souls in purgatory or for the grace of a happy death or perhaps he

prayed that God might send him back a part of the big fortune he had squandered in

Cork'. Rodker's touch is not as light as Joyce's but the effect is similar. Joyce shows the

supposedly sacred penetrated with the material, both the blackening of thumbs and

prayers for 'a part of the big fortune'. So, Rodker's 'Hymn of Hymns' begins:

> God damn Cosmoses –
>
> Eternities, infinities
>
> and all that galley.[46]

On the one hand, the catchwords, like the title 'hymn' play up the blasphemous

contents. On the other hand, through the pseudo-idiom of 'all that galley', Rodker

makes eternity not just another ship for the condemned, but also something less final

and more immediately material: a printer's proof.[47] With the foregrounding of the

printing process in text and paratext, *Hymns* advertises its author in the role of printer-

poet. However, if this formulation suggests the holistic unity of a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, that

unity is undermined by a tendency towards disintegration in the poems, and the

gestures of carelessness that emerge both in the poems and the production of the Ovid

Press books. The poet's words are rooted in the material context of their articulation,

but those roots signify entanglement more than they do stability.

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[46] John Rodker, *Hymns* (London: Ovid Press, 1920), p. 20.

[47] Carol Rumens describes the third line as 'the professional publisher's bright revision of the cliché "all that jazz"', which is suggestive, though it is worth noting that the first citation of the cliché in the OED is from 1929. Carol Rumens, 'Poem of the Week: Hymn of Hymns by John Rodker', *The Guardian*, 29 April 2013 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/apr/29/poem-week-hymn-of-hymns-john-rodker> [accessed 5 September 2019]; 'Jazz, n. and Adj.', *OED Online* (Oxford University Press, 2019).

An example of the tendency towards disintegration can be seen in Rodker's poem 'Under the Trees', published in *Hymns*. The title suggests a response to a Romantic tradition and may be intended specifically as a counter to the Georgian poets' responses to that tradition. We might expect the poet's community with Nature to solve the problem of solitude brought on by exclusion from society, but this is not what takes place. The poem reads in full:

I sit,

a stone.

Empty, black, diffuse;

one with this spongy mould

and quiet.

I sit,

bleak and friable,

and a wind whistles itself quietly

into distance.

And the trees clink the gold,

which is so thin, so cold, so immeasurably remote.

All is become metallic –

Salt   bitter   very still.

Inert

> I sit. And all the débris of ten thousand years
>
> snows me under.
>
> Godlike,
>
> inert,
>
> bleak and friable,
>
> porous like black earth,
>
> I sit –
>
> where quietly
>
> pitters the ruin of ten thousand years.[48]

The central conceit is that to unify with nature might be to unify, not with something vital and restorative, but with a land that has been emptied of life. In the line '[a]ll is become metallic' there is likely a reference to the First World War's transformation of landscape and culture, but the preceding reference to the trees that 'clink the gold' complicates the reference. It is in part an evocation of autumn leaves, but it also suggests money and the marketplace. Nature does not offer an escape from the world of mercantile relations but seems to be implicated in the same system. The inertia of the speaker is reflected in the poem's repetitions, and the title of the poem was also one that Rodker would use repeatedly. However, the stasis does not preclude decomposition within and invasion from without. The initial identification with a stone seems to give way to 'spongy mould' and the 'bleak and friable'. Crumbling and

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[48] John Rodker, *Hymns*, p. 33.

porous, the self is not something that can be kept secure against its surroundings, despite its speaker's insistence on the 'I'.

The poem implies a rejection of the Stirnerean egoism that Dora Marsden was developing. The Godlike pretensions of the speaker are undercut not only by the matter of the poem, where the opening lines 'I sit | a stone' suggest a god of stocks and stones, but by the book in which it is found, where 'God' is the same 'God' reduced to a cuss in 'Hymn of Hymns' and paired with a gasometer in 'Gas Fire'.[49] The arbitrarily large 'ten thousand years' becomes subject to the same disintegration and diminution: it 'quietly | pitters', the strange choice of verb remarkable in part for its approximate echo of 'bitter' earlier in the poem, in part by its suggestion of something between a childish 'pitter-patter' and an exhausted 'petering out'. The inevitability of contamination Rodker depicts, and the calm resignation to that contamination, groups him more with the outlook of Joseph Conrad's novels of the Malay archipelago than it does with the work of Eliot, Pound or Lewis.

The comparison to these three takes on particular importance when we turn to the qualities of mess and carelessness that characterise Rodker's poetry and the production of the Ovid Press more generally. For the Wadsworth initials and colophon suggested coherence across the books as well as within them. They implied that the material was sufficiently of a kind to appear with shared aesthetic coordinates. That commensurability extended then between poets and artists. The cover-design of the Ovid Press books was fairly uniform, adopting a single plain colour and label. In particular, the editions of *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* and *Hymns*, published two months

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[49] John Rodker, *Hymns*, p. 22.

apart, were strikingly similar visually, the main difference being that where the former was wrapped in brown buckram, Rodker chose warm yellow for his own work. By contrast, both Rodker's *Poems* (1914) and his *Collected Poems* (1930) had busier covers, the first with a design of a dancer by David Bomberg, the latter a photograph of a construction by Len Lye.

Despite this outward austerity, mess played a significant role not just in Rodker's poems, but more generally in the Ovid Press. As Otty puts it:

> Rodker's production […] indicates an ambivalent stance with regard to conventional ideas of quality and craftsmanship. For in fact the actual printing and construction of these books is quite poor. There are numerous type-setting errors that have not been corrected in proof. Signatures are haphazardly folded so that pages are of irregular sizes, margins are wildly variant from page to page, and the lettering is heavily embossed.[50]

Such errors might be expected in someone who had just started up a press, but Rodker's correspondence with Harold Monro regarding the press in 1920 suggests that messiness, if not intentional, was not the disaster it would mean for some. Rodker explained: '[m]y printing & publishing are very bad as you say – no doubt I shall improve; in any case they will chiefly go to [bibliophiles] who will condone their deficiencies; may even like them'.[51] He added in the same letter: 'I prefer that the contents should be interesting rather than the form good.' Before he had begun

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[50] Otty, pp. 133–34.

[51] Rodker, John to Harold Monro, 5 April 1920, Harold Monro Papers, UCLA Library, Box 3, Folder 'John Rodker'; see also Heinz, 'John Rodker (1894-1955) and Modernist Material Culture: Theatre, Translation, Publishing', p. 201.

working on the esoteric limited editions that form one of the more curious elements of his legacy as a publisher, Rodker was thinking of texts in terms of curiosities, items remarkable not for their transformation of the public sphere, but as achieving a different sort of accommodation. Rodker's comments on the interesting and the good support Pryor's argument that the poems reject certain available models of success such as 'Eliot's cool control of competing judgments or Pound's evasive play with personae' for a method more open to productive failure.[52] The books seek an alternative from the mass market, not through its overhaul or even by forceful opposition, but by fitting an available niche.

The carelessness of production was combined with an editorial approach that gave a good amount of freedom to the writers. The guiding role that Rodker gave to Eliot and Pound in their own volumes, and the looseness and irregularity of the Ovid Press style meant that the uniformity its style brought to the texts was never so restricted as to constrain. Rather, it was an influential paratext which could be to some extent re-motivated in separate books. On the one hand, the Ovid Press presented a repeating set of aesthetic coordinates inviting comparison of its writers. On the other hand, those coordinates were themselves approximate and openly experimental.

Just as the structuring that is suggested over the contents of *Hymns* gives way, so too does an outward likeness to inward difference. There are moments when the tone of Rodker's poetry resembles Eliot's ironic twists. In comparison with Pound, while the 'pickled foetuses and bottled bones' of *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* would not be out of place in *Hymns*, the curtness and display of formal control would be. The closest

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[52] Pryor, p. 482.

tonal comparison is probably with the French poems of *Ara Vus Prec*, but these are still

too well-ordered by their rhyme-pattern to serve as a close analogue. Yet the

comparison to Rodker's poetry suggested by the shared publication by the Ovid Press

does maintain force, in part because Eliot and Pound, as much as Rodker, were

'influenced […] by the French Poetry of 1850-1910.'[53] Rodker's poetry shows more of an

effort than his contemporaries to carry over the attendant mythology of the *poète*

maudit, rejected and cursed by society. While Pound and Eliot draw from the

mythology, the poet's inability to join in society in *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* is arguably a

virtue: Mauberley is one 'born | In a half savage country, out of date', and if his

stringency is to some extent an affectation, there is still some kinship between him and

the betrayed soldier who comes back to 'usury age-old and age-thick | and liars in

public places'. Similarly, while Eliot's Prufrock is vacillating and ineffectual, there are

worse sins on display in *Ara Vus Prec*. The division between poet and society is central

to Eliot and Pound's volumes, but the poet-speakers often seem able to move through

that society with ease, laughing at it behind their hands. Furthermore, the collections

are structured by their opposition to that society, in both cases identified with

corruptive Jewishness. Eliot's Bleistein and Pound's Brennbaum are representative of a

degenerate society, and both volumes suggest an opposition to that society, even as

they explore the possibility of fixing it.

By contrast, Rodker's *Hymns* rejects the possibility of fixing because they reject

the possibility of separation: the 'I' crumbles into a crumbling earth. While Pound and

Eliot's sense of separation from society is mobilised in part around an opposition to

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[53] John Rodker, *Collected Poems: 1912-1925*, p. vii.

Jewishness, it is worth noting that Rodker's refusal of the supportability of that

opposition is one of the reasons that he is not interested, as Leftwich and arguably

Rosenberg are, in the articulation of a specifically Jewish literary identity in his

writing.[54] Instead, Rodker situates speaker and society in a shared web of corruption.

Rodker's speakers resemble Tristan Corbière's toad more than Baudelaire's albatross,

less the royal and beautiful creature dragged to the earth than a 'wingless, |

Nightingale of the mud' inspiring more disgust than horror.[55] If Rodker's speakers live

within a hateful world, they are no less hateful themselves and the potential for a

meaningful opposition is compromised. The speaker of 'The Scourged', bleeding from

'every pore' under 'the whips of men' may suffer like Christ, but he makes 'a

slobbering noise | like a child', unable to take on the role of sacred martyr with

dignity.[56]

In *Hymns*, there are brief moments of respite from such general corruption, as at

the end of 'From a Biography', where the speaker 'thought of himself, and his

bitterness faded'. However, even these are compromised. In context, the line reads:

The sky darkened: a strong wind blew:

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[54] In his doctoral thesis on Rodker, Dominic Williams looks at the role Rodker occupied in the Pound circle as a Jew. It also attempts to trace Rodker's identification with Jewishness. Williams sees this as being expressed primarily by non-identification with Englishness. As such, it is comparable with the approach taken in Lawson's chapter on Rodker in his monograph on Anglo-Jewish poetry. See Dominic Williams, 'Modernism, Antisemitism and Jewish Identity in the Writing and Publishing of John Rodker' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Leeds, 2004); Peter Lawson, *Anglo-Jewish Poetry from Isaac Rosenberg to Elaine Feinstein* (London; Portland: Vallentine Mitchell, 2006). Williams in particular introduces some suggestive readings, but both works suffer from a tendency to over-motivate readings of Rodker's work and various forms of oppositionality in terms of Jewishness.
[55] Tristan Corbière, *The Centenary Corbière: Poems and Prose of Tristan Corbière*, trans. by Val Warner (Cheadle Hulme: Carcanet New Press, 1974), p. 19.
[56] John Rodker, *Hymns*, p. 26.

fanned the smouldering dung heap.

It burst into flame, flared and flapped proudly:

he thought of himself, and his bitterness faded.

Against Walter Pater's injunction to 'burn always with this hard, gem-like flame, to maintain this ecstasy', Rodker locates ecstasy in brief spasmodic moments flanked by inertia.[57] The flame is to be won from immolation of waste. The image serves as a neat summary of the poetics informing *Hymns*. Such momentary excrescences are all the poems allow to be available, and it determines why the poems do not reach towards an overarching organisational structure. It may also explain their brevity. If 'the particular concentration, the state of feeling' Rodker described as generating the poems may suggest an analogy to Wordsworth's spontaneous overflow of powerful emotions, then that overflow is stripped of wonder: Rodker observed that '[t]he substitution of paroxysm for inspiration is an index of the time.'[58] As a model for the composition of poetry, a paroxysm is distinctly resistant to long forms, and it is striking that the two longer poems in Rodker's 1914 volume, 'London Night' and 'Descent into Hell', suggest sequential impressions in time and space rather than sustained argument or narrative. Whereas Eliot and Pound are engaged in imposing form on fragments, in Rodker there is a sense of a grotesque biological flux, poems like beings, struggling towards life, many failing to reach existence, as his 'Inventory of Abortive Poems'

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[57] Walter Pater, *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, ed. by Matthew Beaumont (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 120.
[58] John Rodker, 'Books', *The Little Review*, 5.5 (1918), 47–50 (p. 48).

attests. Those that do reach it enjoy only a short, frenzied existence before collapsing on themselves and yielding to the next short-lived successor.

Across the poets, the Ovid Press asserts a coherence, but because of the element of mess both in the printing of the books, and in Rodker's poetry, that coherence becomes something that works against the assertions of control that we can take to characterise the projects of Eliot and Pound. It can even be seen as bringing the corruptive proximity that Eliot and Pound feared, overflowing the boundaries they sought to shore up. If the Ovid Press was then a short-lived regrouping of the Men of 1914, it was one that challenged some of its key terms and which pointedly did not pursue the officious and overbearing editorial agenda that characterised Wyndham Lewis's comparable efforts to revive the pre-war avant-garde in *The Tyro*. Lewis's editorship of *The Tyro* makes a useful comparison to the Ovid Press because it shows that the collaborations between Lewis and Rodker already held the seeds of the satires they would mount against each other the following decade. Lewis had requested a portrait of a 'perfect civilization'; when he received Rodker's submission, he wrote back, objecting that he had not requested 'a satire on Perfectibility'. Implicit in the letter, and in Lewis's heavy-handed editing of the story, which he retitled 'Mr. Segando in the Fifth Cataclysm', is that Rodker's text amounted to a critique of Lewis's project and that Lewis recognised it as such. At the same time, Rodker's satire on individuation is perhaps more compelling than that on perfectibility when we consider its publication context – a magazine attempting to revive aspects of the pre-war avant-garde while submitting them to a tighter order.

Dismissed by Paul Edwards as a 'Wellsian squib', the short story is a curious

piece with the apparent aim of criticising those writers of science fiction in which large

superficial changes in technology and living arrangements mask an essential lack of

imagination about the alterations possible in individuals and in society.[59] Most of that

criticism was focussed on H. G. Wells, though Lewis's substitution of the name of

Wells for one of his Tyros, Mr Segando, dilutes the force of its satire somewhat, making

it operate inside the world of the magazine rather than engaging directly with the

world outside. Rodker depicts a world in which '[i]nitiative was punished first by a

fine, and then by a long period of banishment. It was found that solitude so destroyed

the virus of public-feeling and emulation that thereafter the outlaw became the most

model and reactionary of citizens.'[60] The Vorticist manifesto had operated on the idea

that a collection of sharply individual members, predominantly young men, would

come together to fix the public sphere, banish its archaisms and make it judiciously

modern without giving in to Futurist extravagance.

The Tyro represented a renewal of that effort. The model for social

transformation was not in itself new: there is a close precedent, for example, in

Friedrich Schiller's 1801 account of the artist removed from his mother and

'[nourished] with the milk of a better age', who returns to purify his own age, 'terrible

like Agamemnon's son'.[61] However, the model received a new inflection in the

aftermath of the First World War. Now, a band of young men, under Lewis's

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[59] Paul Edwards, 'Cultural Criticism at the Margins', in *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines*, ed. by Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker, 3 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), I: BRITAIN AND IRELAND, 1880-1955, 552–69 (p. 557).
[60] John Rodker, 'Mr. Segando in the Fifth Cataclysm'.
[61] Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man in a Series of Letters*, ed. by Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L. A. Willoughby (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), p. 57.

leadership, returned to peacetime to reassert the demands of the new movement.

Rodker's story shows dissension in the ranks: its future depicts a counteraction, where

higher powers use ostracism from the public sphere as a means of achieving

assimilation. The heroic narrative of exile and return that animates *The Tyro* does not

bring the capacity for the transformation of society, but acts instead as 'a safety valve

for a possible "village Hampden"'. For all the noise made by Lewis, then, his function

is not the overhaul of society, but its maintenance, the harmless discharge of rebellious

post-war feeling. He avoids even the severely delimited threat of Thomas Gray's

'village Hampden', who might pose a real, if minor, challenge to the social order.

Alasdair Menmuir has linked Rodker's social critique in the story to his experiences as

a conscientious objector.[62] The extent to which its critique of an impersonal state also

works as a critique of the limitations of the resistance posed by the avant-garde lays the

foundation for Rodker's paired prose works of the thirties.

John Rodker in No Man's Land: *Memoirs of Other Fronts* and *An Ape of Genius*

In a letter to Ezra Pound dated March 6th, 1930, John Rodker observed with chagrin

that 'Nancy's edition of the collected works of well known [sic] London publisher has

sold just eight copies'.[63] The London publisher referred to in the third person was

Rodker himself. Nancy was Nancy Cunard, the poet and publisher who had left

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[62] Alasdair Menmuir, 'The Socially Real Edge of Modernism: Political Agency in British Literature 1914-1939' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Sheffield), p. 32. Menmuir discusses Rodker's short story and several of his other works in the context of 'marginal modernist writers' negotiations of counter-currents in political thought' (p.3).

[63] John Rodker to Ezra Pound (6 March 1930), qtd. Patterson, 'Cultural Critique and Canon Formation, 1910-1937: A Study in Modernism and Cultural Memory', p. 100n58.

Rodker for Louis Aragon in 1926 and whose Hours Press had published Rodker's

Collected Poems: 1912-1925 earlier that year. As the gap between the end-date of the

poems and the year of publication suggests, the collection looked back on the work as

belonging to a coherent historical period. Rodker's prefatory note adopted the tone of a

cool onlooker on his past self. He commented on the poems' influences and aims, their

failures and achievements, as well as using them as evidence for the psyche of their

creator. The poems no longer served their initial purpose. As 'efforts to establish

contact', they were less useful now than they had been when he was 'hanging in the

void'.[64] Rodker's letter to Pound jokingly assumes a comparable distance of tone,

alongside a characteristic blend of self-pity and irony. While acknowledging the failure

of his poems to sell, the detail that he is 'well known' points to Rodker's renewed sense

of his importance as a publisher, something also reflected in his establishment of an

impress in his own name in 1927.[65]

The publication of the *Collected Poems* suggests that in 1930 Rodker was taking

stock of his achievement and setting out the terms in which it was to be understood.

However, his efforts were to be eclipsed. June of the same year saw the publication of

The Apes of God, Wyndham Lewis's satire on the literary and artistic culture of London

in 1926. The book included a detailed and hostile caricature of Rodker in the form of

the 'Split-Man', Julius Ratner, 'highbrow-sub-sheik of the slum'.[66] The work that

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[64] John Rodker, *Collected Poems: 1912-1925*, p. vii.

[65] Heinz, 'John Rodker (1894-1955) and Modernist Material Culture: Theatre, Translation, Publishing', p. 223.

[66] Wyndham Lewis, *The Apes of God* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), p. 153.

followed shows the continuation of Rodker's impulse towards self-analysis, but with
more 'surgical ruthlessness' than before.

In *Memoirs of Other Fronts*, Rodker not only looked at his past, but drew on his
past writing, integrating some material at least as old as 1923, when part of the middle
section had been translated into French and serialised in *La Revue Européenne* under the
title *Dartmoor*.[67] *Other Fronts* was published anonymously, and it is tempting to see in
the decision a reaction against Lewis's depiction of him as a 'self-appointed, self-
advertised, self-published, self-loved, almost self-made Star', though Rodker gave
other reasons for the decision.[68] A clearer response to Lewis's attack can be seen in
Rodker's work on a novel in which Lewis rather than Rodker would be the subject of
dissection. However, since Rodker understood Lewis's attack on him to be motivated
by 'how close to him he'd thought me', Rodker's own analysis of Lewis was informed
by the recognition of their likeness and like condition. A mixture of memoir and of a
more directed satire on Lewis, the work was titled *An Ape of Genius or A Hero of our
Times* in an early draft, a title later crossed out.

While the exact chronology of Rodker's literary output during this period is
problematic, it is helpful to tie together *Other Fronts* and *An Ape of Genius* because they
show an attitude of retrospection and analysis developing that of the preface to his
Collected Poems. They also show Rodker analysing threats to his autonomy: in *Other
Fronts*, his incarceration is only one among several instances where the limits of his

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[67] The first instalment was published as John Rodker, 'Dartmoor (I)', trans. by Ludmila Savitzky,
La Revue Européenne, 1.8 (1923), 25–34.
[68] Wyndham Lewis, *The Apes of God*, p. 160; John Rodker, 'Why This Book Is Anonymous', 1932,
John Rodker Papers, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin,
Box 36, Folder 4.

selfhood are brought into question. In *An Ape of Genius*, Rodker attempts to formulate a response to Lewis's satire, in which the terms of Rodker's significance had been delineated with malice. What stops these from being merely reactive works is that, while they acknowledge the assault on his person and autonomy, they are also attentive to the limitations and contradictions always implicit in autonomy and the idea of the hermetically sealed self.

The self is not able to enforce its borders; neither is it able to escape involvement and entanglement with others. In both *Other Fronts* and *An Ape of Genius*, characters are caught between pursuing connection and running from it. Whether fighting for their autonomy or seeking mastery of others, his protagonists find themselves anticipated and compromised. Alongside this process of implication is a push towards making explicit the unflattering bonds by which we are tied to one another. As such, these works can be seen as the maturation of Rodker's early experimentation with the personae of the *poète maudit* and the child of the ghetto that are apparent in his early poetry and which still, at times, peer through. Rodker continued to exploit the conceit of the hero as an object of disgust and contempt, but that disgust was now designed less to repel and fascinate the reader than it was to explore the ways in which that hero had been created by society.

When Rodker's trajectory is understood in this way, its almost polar opposition to that of David Bomberg becomes particularly striking. In the interwar period, though to different extents, both men became less involved in the London avant-garde. Both continued to struggle for money and recognition. Bomberg responded to his neglect by a more insistent self-heroisation. His introduction to a 1928 exhibition of his paintings

of Petra constructed the artist as an adventurer-painter that could almost have been taken from a Rider Haggard novel.[69] As he later turned to teaching, he cultivated a persona that was inflected by mysticism and messianic self-figuration.[70] Neglect drove Bomberg to build a narrative of his heroic outsider status; Rodker did the opposite. Rather than showing himself to be superior to the forces that rejected him, Rodker gave, in *Other Fronts* and *An Ape of Genius*, an analysis of the process of that rejection, and the ways in which it defined both the figure it expelled and the system that remained.

Memoirs of Other Fronts (1932)

The peculiar achievement of *Other Fronts* can perhaps be best seen by comparison with *Chains* (1920), written by Stephen Winsten and consisting, for the most part, of poems written while in prison as a conscientious objector. Like Rodker, Winsten had attended meetings of the Young Socialist League. Rodker attributed his ability to articulate a counterpoint to pro-war propaganda to the organisation.[71] While *Chains* itself came to over a hundred pages, most of the poems in it were short, frequently structured around repetition and a simple rhyme scheme.

The form was a product of the conditions of their creation. Winsten would later describe how rhyme allowed him to memorise poems as he worked on them for weeks without the materials to write them down. Winsten also encountered the difficulty

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[69] David Bomberg, 'Manuscript and Typescript on the Exhibition of "The Rock Facade N E Wall Petra at the Canadian National Exhibition, Toronto"', 1928, Tate Gallery Archives, 878/4/5.

[70] Roy Oxlade, 'Bomberg's Papers: The Spirit in the Mass; a Commentary, Together with a Transcription of Various Previously Unpublished Notes' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Royal College of Art, 1980), Blue 6.

[71] John Rodker, 'Twenty Years After', *We Did Not Fight: 1914-18, Experiences of War Resisters*, ed. by Julian Bell (London: Cobden-Sanderson, 1935), 283-291 (p.283).

to be articulate: you're stunned most of the time, your poetry arises from the fact that you can talk and you can read, and so it's a carrying on of a familiar language. But when you can't talk and you can't read, poetry is like suddenly being transplanted into a new planet with a different kind of sound.[72]

The simplicity of form was matched for the most part by an assumption of its own moral simplicity and clarity, alongside a clear statement of the moral unclarity at work in the execution of the war.[73] 'Companions in Guard Room' reads in its entirety:

A stranger sleeps here by my side :

We strangers sleep in a strange place.

We shared in food and laughter too,

And did not speak of our disgrace.

To-morrow I to prison go

Because I would not kill a thing :

To-morrow he to his trial goes,

He goes to trial for murdering.[74]

No clause stretches past a line-break. Repetition overlays the alternating rhyme-scheme to push the poem towards an extreme of compression and simplicity, and sets up a

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[72] Stephen Winsten, 'Winsten, Stephen Samuel (Oral History)', reel 9.

[73] James Campbell comments briefly on 'the rather naive epistemological assumption that because a text is less overtly literary it must therefore lie closer to the truth' in his discussion of the ideology of First World War poetry criticism. James Campbell, p. 208.

[74] Stephen Winsten, *Chains*, p. 11.

parallelism that underlines the unnatural yoking of conscientious objector and

murderer. Given the prevalence of biblical allusions elsewhere in the poems, including

from the New Testament, it may not be unreasonable to hear the second stanza as

recalling the humiliation of Christ, crucified between thieves, while Barabbas goes free.

Such an allusion would also be in keeping with the idea of the conscientious objector as

a martyr that can be found elsewhere in pacifist literature, and in which they are

represented as the true imitators of Christ in their passive suffering.[75] The substitution

of intimately homosocial for heterosexual partnership is a motif of writing from the

trenches, but receives a different inflection in the prison poem, whose primary

precedent was still Oscar Wilde's *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* (1897).[76] The meaning of

that substitution becomes less that of a rite of passage than the irony by which prison

enforces transgressions of the laws that they are supposed to uphold.

Where Winsten's poems grow out from a kernel of certainty regarding

righteous action, Rodker's *Other Fronts* depicts a world in which characters struggle to

articulate a system or even a justification for arriving at decisive action. In Dartmoor,

writes Rodker:

All, all, waited for the sign. Our irrelevant incidence on the moor was so

mysterious that, though each of us had reasons in plenty for our consciences,

we felt those reasons superficial, somehow indefinably specious, and behind

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[75] See, for example, Bertrand Russell, 'Some Psychological Difficulties of Pacifism in Wartime', in *We Did Not Fight: 1914-1918, Experiences of War Resisters*, ed. by Julian Bell (London: Cobden-Sanderson, 1935), pp. 327–35 (p. 334).

[76] Winsten discusses Wilde more than once in his 1976 interview, feeling a particular kinship to him because they had the same prison-warden. Stephen Winsten, 'Winsten, Stephen Samuel (Oral History)', reel 12; for a study of the evolution and contradictions of describing male friendship in the First World War, see Sarah Cole, *Modernism, Male Friendship, and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

them instincts too deep for definition. When I tried to justify myself I was lost in

mazes of definition which made me doubt my own sincerity and that of my

comrades.[77]

Against the repeated closure of Winsten's verses, a reflection of a sealed purpose and

the literal ensealment of the prisoner, Rodker's sentences can become exploratory to

the point of unravelling. At some points, especially in the middle section, there are

moments of greater syntactic simplicity, but never sustained nor carried to Winsten's

extreme.[78] While biblical and liturgical allusions recur throughout *Other Fronts*, they

never assume authority. The words 'I will repay', scrawled in blood by a prisoner on a

cell door, announce a righting of wrongs that will not take place within either the

fictionalised autobiography or its projected future.[79] The power attributed to 'instincts

too deep for definition' is a clear inheritance from psychoanalytical literature as well as

Rodker's own experience of psychoanalysis. *Other Fronts* can be grouped with H.D.'s

series of autobiographical novels as part of the first generation of literary works written

by analysands. In Rodker's work, the insistence on unseen causes undercuts the

possibility of a lucidly progressive structure for the narrative. Although the title's

'other fronts' foreground an account of the First World War, the war only emerges as

an explicit subject in the book's middle part. In the first of the three sections, 'Limbo

1923–1925', the narrator, Basil Markham, describes an affair in Paris with a woman

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[77] John Rodker, *Memoirs of Other Fronts* (London: Putnam, 1932), p. 164.
[78] In a letter to Rodker, the writer Ethel Mannin, who had reviewed *Other Fronts*, commented that parts of the first book had 'passages of a Wyndham Lewis style' while the second book at times resembled the stylistic naïveté of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*. Ethel Mannin to John Rodker, 13 June 1932, John Rodker Papers, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin, Box 36, Folder 4.
[79] John Rodker, *Memoirs of Other Fronts*, p. 164.

called Olivia, based on Cunard. The second section, 'A C.O.'s war 1914–1925', moves back in time to describe Markham's evasions and imprisonment during the war, before dealing with some of its after-effects, including the collapse of his relationship with Muriel, based on Mary Butts. In the final section, 'Issues 1928', Markham attempts to take custody of his and Muriel's estranged child, Marie, who is living at a boarding school in Paris. He takes Marie to London, but when Muriel follows, he gives up and sends the daughter back.

Taking his lead from the book's dust-jacket, Ian Patterson has characterised *Other Fronts* in terms of 'the war of a personality against itself and against society's invasion of that self' and seen its structure as corresponding to wars on a social, national and domestic level.[80] Equally significant throughout is a war on an aesthetic-creative level, as the terms of what the writer can create are shaped by the incursions on his body and psyche. Indeed, we can see *Other Fronts* in some respects as behaving like a psychoanalytic case-study, albeit an unorthodox one: it begins with the problem of 'Limbo', the affair with Olivia/Cunard. The endpoint of the affair in 1925 assumes significance not only as the endpoint Rodker put on his poetic capacity, but also in the extent to which 'Limbo' seems a repetition of *Adolphe 1920*. In both, we have at the core the inconclusive vacillation of two lovers. While 'Limbo' does more to embed the lovers in a coherent social milieu, and *Adolphe 1920* sets them against the lurid jumble of carnival and jazz-bar, there is still a sense of a writer returning obsessively to a theme. The statement of the case is followed by the discovery of its root cause, that is, the trauma of the war, which forces Markham at once into isolation from society and

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[80] Patterson, 'Cultural Critique and Canon Formation, 1910-1937: A Study in Modernism and Cultural Memory', p. 101.

nation, and into a position of increasing dependency on a single woman, Muriel. The peculiar conditions fostering that close reliance collapse with the end of the war, but its effects live on. The collapse of Markham and Muriel's marriage is one, and the unsatisfactory mutual reliance that characterises his affair with Olivia is another.

The final section of *Other Fronts* looks further at the 'Issues' of the trauma, but also seeks a therapeutic solution. While the reclamation of his daughter suggests another attempt to make himself 'whole', the impulse is connected with Markham's debilitating constipation, 'hanging on hard, oh wanting to let go'.[81] The answer is ultimately purgative. There is 'no way out but to sacrifice the caught limb': Markham lets Marie be returned to the boarding school and Markham finds himself able to defecate. He is left 'emptied and scoured like a flowing river, copious, inexhaustible'.[82] Rodker and Markham cannot escape entanglement; therefore they cannot escape mess. It is mess that defines the war for the narrator: '[t]he word "Mess" resumed all my ideas on the subject [of the war], a passion of fear, terror of being involved, and anger with it.'[83] In this, the narrator sounds close to the strand of 'paranoid Modernism' outlined by David Trotter.[84] However, *Other Fronts* is not simply a refusal or an alternative to this strand of modernism, but an intricate portrait of the failure of the refusal of mess, one that incorporates vacillations and uncertainties, the struggles around perception, self-justification and judgment, and the reflection of those struggles

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[81] John Rodker, *Memoirs of Other Fronts*, p. 236.
[82] John Rodker, *Memoirs of Other Fronts*, p. 256.
[83] John Rodker, *Memoirs of Other Fronts*, p. 193.
[84] David Trotter, *Paranoid Modernism: Literary Experiment, Psychosis, and the Professionalization of English Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

in the form of *Other Fronts*, a combination of works written at different periods, whose parts only loosely cohere.

If *Other Fronts* is a mess, it is no less an achievement for that. We can understand this achievement in several ways. Firstly, in its scale it serves as a monument, of the kind that Rodker identified with the phallic canonical achievements of Eliot and Pound.[85] Since it was published anonymously, it could not be a monument to Rodker himself, but it instead allowed the text to assume a significance beyond the individual, despite its intensely personal focus. Indeed, Rodker's reasons for the anonymous publication emphasised that the author was 'of less importance as a name than as a social unit'.[86] Secondly, the book is an expurgation of excrement, comparable to Rodker's characterisation of his poetic composition: an artistic impulse issued along new channels and finding eventual release.

There is a final metaphoric strand that Rodker suggests for his work: drawing on Patterson's discussion of *Adolphe 1920*, I would suggest that we can see the text of *Other Fronts* as behaving like a skin, a permeable membrane that, in passivity, is still able to receive and exude, registering its environment with acute sensitivity.[87] That permeability can be seen most immediately in the text's genre, an anonymous memoir where people flit between being readable as markers of historical-world analogues and being contained figures within a sealed narrative. That this is one of the pleasures associated with the *roman à clef* will assume significance in the discussion of *An Ape of*

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[85] Heinz, p.248.

[86] John Rodker, 'Why This Book Is Anonymous'.

[87] Patterson, 'Cultural Critique and Canon Formation, 1910-1937: A Study in Modernism and Cultural Memory', p. 85.

Genius. While Rodker makes a text unusually open to influence from without, he also establishes a framework in which the observations drawn from self-analysis can spread out into a critique that takes a wider view. Often, the direction of influence between self and other is less clear. Rodker writes that the war 'was the bloody mess I knew it would be and still is, and my instincts are a bloody mess too' – the second 'and' allowing the possibility of causality without committing to it.[88]

The permeability is also at work on the boundaries between the book's different sections. The limbo of post-war Paris carries over some of war-time's distinctive features. Dancing in a bar, men are 'put through their paces' like soldiers; a bed in 'unnatural light' becomes a 'fearful slaughtered object'; and, travelling back to Paris from a holiday, Olivia and Markham see 'glow-worms in the bushes' and hear 'on the wireless the Aldershot tattoo'.[89] Later in *Other Fronts*, but earlier in time, the narrator is arrested as a deserter and taken, by train, to 'Aldershot, I think, a hilltop'.[90] When the reader first encounters the tattoo, there is little to suggest that Markham registers the call from a location that has already played its part in transforming him into a 'pariah'.[91] The return of the tattoo, which for the reader is as yet no return, is transmitted across the Channel, drawing attention both to Markham's disconnection from English militarism, and his inescapable connection to it. The tattoo as military drumbeat implies strictly ordered time and the organisation of bodies in a group. It intrudes in the middle of a limbo that seems divorced from time or any pattern except vacillation, as again the distance between two states becomes a marker of their

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[88] John Rodker, *Memoirs of Other Fronts*, p. 197.
[89] John Rodker, *Memoirs of Other Fronts*, pp. 12, 19, 64.
[90] John Rodker, *Memoirs of Other Fronts*, p. 113.
[91] John Rodker, *Memoirs of Other Fronts*, p. 114.

interconnection. The lasting inscription of war's trauma on Markham is brought out further by the secondary but audible meaning of 'tattoo' as indelible markings on the skin, a meaning brought into focus by the 'mark' in his name.

The lingering tattoo implies on one level the permeation of war in post-war society. Rodker's source is apparently the French Communist novelist Henri Barbusse, with his recognition that the 'blood and mess' of the war was an eruption of 'the intense dynamic repercussions of the family'.[92] Rodker discusses Barbusse in a passage that takes on an uncharacteristically rhetorical note, but the influences go into the text's shape: the procreative family unit is the site of trauma that will itself amount to a creative act, as Markham's second abandonment of Marie 'graft[s] an effigy of [himself] upon her that no other man could ever supplant.'[93] The text itself, growing out of and around a trauma, becomes uneasy evidence for such trauma's potential for creation.

Rodker compares the war period to 'a man "gelded"', but one who 'carried on, aware its most essential member lacked it, all its virility segregated, cut off, projected somewhere else where innocuous as far as we were concerned it was launched in immense conflict upon itself.'[94] Anticipating the 'lost member' of Marie, the male population is sent out of society to destroy itself. By refusing to participate in the war, Markham and others have become 'eunuchs', half- or split-men who have rejected a rite of manhood. The image of the 'eunuch' symbolises both the man forcibly feminised

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[92] John Rodker, *Memoirs of Other Fronts*, p. 195; Patterson gives Edward Glover as the primary influence on Rodker's psychoanalytic account in this section, with particular reference to Glover's *War, Sadism and Pacifism*, although this book was published the year after *Other Fronts*. Patterson, 'Cultural Critique and Canon Formation, 1910-1937: A Study in Modernism and Cultural Memory', p. 102n62.

[93] John Rodker, *Memoirs of Other Fronts*, p. 262.

[94] John Rodker, *Memoirs of Other Fronts*, p. 77.

and the man stripped of productive capacities. Their resistance to war was rendered

meaningless as the metaphor rendered them impotent, pacifism made equivalent to

passivity, and both equivalent to femininity.[95] Yet, by refusing to fight and to claim

manhood, the objectors also increased their chances of survival, and their continued

powers of creation.

One answer to the charge of unmanliness was simply to reverse it. This is what

Bertrand Russell attempted in his contribution to *We Did Not Fight* (1935). The book,

edited by Julian Bell, collected statements by a range of conscientious objectors to the

First World War that included Clifford Allen, Siegfried Sassoon and Rodker. Where

Rodker's contribution mused equivocally on the value of objection and the question of

how avoidable or desirable war was, Russell expressed no such qualms. He described

the pacifist as a man who 'must have within himself some passion so strong and so

indestructible that mass hysteria cannot touch it'.[96] Implicit in Russell's diagnosis is the

traditional association of passivity with femininity, but with the charge thrown back at

the belligerent masses. Russell's pacifist stands stonily resistant.

In *Other Fronts*, however, even while Rodker does dwell on the pressure to

conform, he inscribes it with ambivalence: 'it is painful, almost impossible to pitch

your will against a crowd's when you – and all your instincts – fear it will, and want it

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[95] The question of physical impotence seems also to have been identified with the conditions of imprisonment. In the interview he gave in 1976, Stephen Winsten recounted how a fellow teacher could not understand why Winsten refused the exemption from war service allowed to teachers. As well as calling Winsten 'a mug', the colleague, Bracewell Smith, later Lord Mayor of London, also told Winsten that in prison he would lose everything, turn impotent, and people would turn their backs on him. Stephen Winsten, 'Winsten, Stephen Samuel (Oral History)', reel 5.

[96] Russell, p. 334.

to fall on you, trample you into nothing'.[97] If there is a 'hysterical violence of fighting',

it is not restricted to soldiers.[98] As Evi Heinz has suggested, Rodker's refusal to recreate

the figure of the Stoic pacifist was probably one reason why the publisher Bernard

Noël Langdon-Davies refused the manuscript, though he had himself been a

conscientious objector.[99] Langdon-Davies found the work 'a remarkable piece of self

analysis', but deemed the author-narrator 'exactly the type of Conscientious Objector

for whom one could do nothing during the War', 'egoistic' and with 'no idea of self

sacrifice'.[100] There was also the 'dragging in of quite unnecessary excremental

description which really at times is somewhat revolting'. In Dartmoor, Rodker

describes a 'hysterical wave of prayer' that took over the prison, in which the

prisoners, including large numbers of religious dissenters, became frantic with the

belief that the world was coming to an imminent end.[101] Rodker shifts between

describing the belief in terms of 'obsession' and 'hysteria', the latter typically but not

invariably associated with female subjects. Rather than dividing pacifists and

combatants cleanly along gendered lines, the text maps onto the narrator's own

uncertain and permeable state, as he is caught in the 'mazes of definitions'.[102] Indeed,

we are invited to consider the author as himself hysterical, caught on reminiscences

from the past, pursuing the narrative in exhaustive and intimate detail to achieve the

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[97] Rodker, *Memoirs of Other Fronts*, p.117.

[98] Rodker, *Memoirs of Other Fronts*, p.195.

[99] Evi Heinz, 'A Cell of One's Own: Conscientious Objection and John Rodker's Narratives of Resistance', *The War Poetry Review*, 2014, 45–51 (p. 49).

[100] Bernard Noël Langdon-Davies to A. M. Heath, 'Typescript Copy of Letter Forwarded to John Rodker', 20 March 1931, John Rodker Papers, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin, Box 36, Folder 4.

[101] John Rodker, *Memoirs of Other Fronts*, p. 171.

[102] John Rodker, *Memoirs of Other Fronts*, pp. 170, 164.

therapeutic effect.[103] Markham identifies the masculine with both expulsion and negation: 'if I had more truly been exercising what was masculine in me, I mean dealing out war, death and destruction'.[104] Markham's refusal of masculinity becomes a 'form of the survival of the fittest'. Markham observes that 'because I have always wanted to make more than to destroy, or that is how I see myself, I preferred for then to be turned into a woman'.[105] That transformation is understood both as gain and as loss. Similarly, Markham's abandonment of his daughter is a refusal to take on the role of father, even while as a gesture of expulsion and negation, it seems to correspond to masculine behaviour. The solution is to some extent supplied by the turn to the anal: expulsion without masculinity.

The turn implies a reversion to childhood, which implies incompleteness, another aspect of Markham's identification with the 'eunuch' and one that guides and disrupts his relationships with Olivia and Marie. Before the narrator and Olivia met, they

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[103] I have in mind Breuer and Freud's comments that '[h]ysterics suffer mainly from reminiscences' and Freud's comment that 'an incomplete story under hypnosis produces no therapeutic effect', though I acknowledge that some elision is involved in the comparison with *Other Fronts*. Josef Breuer and Sigmund Freud, *Studies on Hysteria*, trans. by James Strachey and Alix Strachey (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974), pp. 58, 138; Rodker had made various notes from Pierre Janet's *L'état mental des hysteriques* intermingled with thoughts on how well the diagnosis applied to Cunard and to himself. They are followed immediately in the notebook by notes from Benjamin Constant's *Adolphe*, the source for the title of Rodker's novella. John Rodker, 'Notes', n.d., Joan Rodker Papers, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin, Box 5, Folder 6.

[104] John Rodker, *Memoirs of Other Fronts*, p. 199.

[105] John Rodker, *Memoirs of Other Fronts*, p. 198.

were mutually involved as people are who know much about each other, who

out of the violence of their need to be completed (what perpetual frustration

this implies) fill in the reported picture with all that they most need.[106]

The shared desire to complete the self chips away at the individuality of both. Two

women whom the narrator meets strike him as closely resembling Olivia ('very like

Olivia they were'), and, by proxy, he finds it 'joyful to feel them part of me'.[107] The

main precedent for this blurring of characteristics is probably Albertine and the girls of

Balbec, but Rodker does more than Proust to foreground the dissolution of the

authorial voice in the mixture.

The war does not work entirely consistently in stripping Markham of a sense of

wholeness: escaping from the camp, he 'felt enormous', and, back in the Café Royal in

London, he received a round of applause from drinking companions that had not

expected to see him again.[108] But, in general, the isolation imposed by the war, both

physical and social, reveals an incompleteness that was normally hidden by those

around him. At the same time, extreme individualism, which Markham finds typical of

conscientious objectors, may not protect them from religious hysteria, but it does make

them incapable of putting together a coherent strike.

In the face of unsympathetic and publicly supported authority, where

cooperation and organisation is apparently impossible, all that Markham can offer is

flexible, contingent tactics that mix negation with compromise. This first form of

resistance is taken to its extreme in the hunger-strike by Blair, also known as Béhar.

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[106] John Rodker, *Memoirs of Other Fronts*, p. 19.
[107] John Rodker, *Memoirs of Other Fronts*, p. 20.
[108] John Rodker, *Memoirs of Other Fronts*, p. 119.

Eventually, in the culmination of a detailed and horrific scene, Blair/Béhar dies after being force-fed through one nostril after the other has collapsed. The description of the death may draw on the well-publicised case of the conscientious objector Edward William Burns, though the character in general likely takes Jean Varda for its source, who also went by the name of Yanko.[109] The narrator escapes this death. He does so through compromise, allowing himself to be cajoled out of his hunger strike with ice cream. Similarly, he accepts the offer of the Home Office Scheme, which took conscientious objectors to do civilian work in work camps, and which takes Markham to work in Dartmoor Prison. Both instances demonstrate his failure to follow up his serious feeling that 'nothing would ever involve [him]' in the war, a dogma which resembled the negation associated with manhood. Markham's compromise ensures his survival, even while it breaks down his sense of self.

Like the poems of *Hymns* but to a more developed extent, *Other Fronts* is a dissatisfying text, and one that anticipates that dissatisfaction. Relief for the protagonist, who has suffered violence and compulsion, is won only at the expense of a child. Power is achieved only through its exercise against the comparatively powerless. In so far as it offers hope, it is in the mirror-image of its narrative: Markham represents the survival of one most suited to his environment. Should that environment change, the traumatic cycle might be ended, and Markham himself become extinct.

An Ape of Genius **(c.1932-3)**

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[109] It is by this latter name that he is known in Agnès Varda's short film about finding her uncle, who had, by that point, moved to California. Agnès Varda, *Oncle Yanco*, 1967.

And when he turned on me, from the first I saw how close to him he'd thought me. Living with me for weeks, for months. I never absent from his thoughts. Yes! he enwombed me, and fed me with rich store of thoughts, and every aliment of every clime, ranging the world over to bring me whole to birth, in image of himself, giantling worthy of him. O fecundating womb-salute across the roaring city! Yes I am in his debt, considerably in his debt and it does not irk me to acknowledge it. [...] Do I have to knock down the man who bumps me in the street, or spit back on someone who has spat on me or love someone who loves me? [...] An arsenal takes time; as much time to collect as it took your enemy to prepare. A long time, for he has been preparing all his life. So you can count on being outclassed, since your motives spring from immature impulses, but a righteous cause has often prevailed and sacred indignation is an armour too. So it was not so much rancour that put off the fray or even a hope that given rope enough he'd hang himself. In short, however, I wasn't liking being loved that way.

This quotation is excerpted from one of the stretches of typescript kept in the Harry Ransom Center in Austin, Texas connected with Rodker's unfinished novel, *An Ape of Genius*. Three files marked, with inadvertent irony, 'Rodker, J., An ape of genius' contain typescript and manuscript notes towards the novel, with much of the typescript edited in pen by Rodker. Although not all the material in these files seems to belong to the same project and there are documents related to *An Ape of Genius* elsewhere in Rodker's papers, it is likely that it was intended to form part of the novel

that he never finished.[110] The passage shows the author contemplating the motives of

Lewis in crafting the character 'Julius Ratner' in *The Apes of God* from the live material

of Rodker, and giving an overview of the justification and strategy of his answer to

Lewis's 'fecundating womb-salute'. Just as in *The Tyro* Lewis had shaped Rodker's

material to better serve his editorial agenda, so now he had adapted the character of

Rodker as he understood it, epigenetically mutated it, and once more used it within a

project of social and aesthetic critique. Although Rodker reluctantly decides in favour

of 'Lex Talionis', to pay Lewis in kind, the acknowledgement of his inability to out-

Lewis Lewis starts to suggest a different method. To understand what Rodker's

innovations were, it is necessary to give some sense of Lewis's technique in *The Apes of

God*, before giving an outline of the archival material connected with *An Ape of Genius*.

In *The Apes of God*, the character of Julius Ratner forms part of Lewis's larger

attack on several elements of London's literary and artistic culture, including the

Sitwells and several figures associated with the Bloomsbury Group.[111] The figure of

Rodker-Ratner allowed an extension of Lewis's attack on the Parisian avant-garde

clustered around the magazine *transition*, edited by Eugene Jolas and which had

published James Joyce, Gertrude Stein, and Rodker's translations of Lautréamont's *Lay

of Maldoror*. As Patterson sums up, '[i]n the figure of Rodker, presented as the

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[110] On account of the disordered and sporadically paginated state of the folders relating to *An Ape of Genius*, I have not included page numbers. Except where stated, all citations are from Box 35, Folder 7 in the John Rodker Papers, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin. Although identified as a typescript in the finding aid, the folder includes a good amount of manuscript material. In addition, there are relevant drafts in folders 5 and 6 of the same box, and in Box 36, Folder 1 of the John Rodker Papers.

[111] Paul Edwards argues that a critique of 'Modernisms of a far more important sort' can also be read in the novel, by which he means critiques of Eliot, Joyce, Pound, Proust and Yeats. Paul Edwards, *Wyndham Lewis: Painter and Writer* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 344.

degenerate Ratner, [Lewis] finds an enemy that unites his hostility to *transition*, Stein, Lautréamont, Joyce and Jews'.[112] There are more sins that could be added to Lewis's catalogue: introspection, perceived sexual deviancy, and Freud, for example. Two further elements of the attack require particular emphasis: firstly, that Rodker's appeal to Lewis as a target was tied to Rodker's lack of professional success. A comparison can be made with Lewis's caricature of Sydney Schiff in the same novel. Schiff translated the final part of *À la recherche du temps perdu* as 'Time Regained' in 1931 and had funded publication of *The Tyro*. In *The Apes of God*, he is turned into the pseudo-Proustian Lionel Kein. Kein offers Lewis, on the one hand, an opportunity for an energetic attack on Schiff himself. Lewis takes delight in cataloguing, inventing and excoriating faults of appearance, mannerism and character, probably above faults of literary style.[113] On the other hand, both Rodker and Schiff present weak points for attacks on other more prestigious figures, and on larger groupings for which they become synecdoches. So, Kein, whose name hints at a cipher or a negative, serves as a proxy for an attack on Proust, specifically Proust's satirical method. He also, like Rodker, is useful as a figure through whom Lewis can attack Jews, understood as a racial whole, and to whom, at this time, Lewis was increasingly attributing a devastating influence on society. Lewis's later prose work demonstrates a fear of Jewish figures in positions of power, overt and covert: from the Bailiff in *The*

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[112] Patterson, 'Cultural Critique and Canon Formation, 1910-1937: A Study in Modernism and Cultural Memory', p. 160.

[113] Patterson, 'John Rodker, Julius Ratner and Wyndham Lewis: The Split-Man Writes Back', p. 96.

Childermass (1928) to the time-cult, 'the school of Bergson-Einstein, Stein-Proust' whose ascendancy threatens in *Time and Western Man* (1927).[114]

In a similar way, as a publisher of erotica, and lacking the strength of support that surrounded Joyce and Stein, Rodker served Lewis's attempt to attack a strand of modernism as sexually deviant. The attack also rebounded on the assembled caricatures of London's art figures, from the artist Dick Whittingdon, portrayed as amateurishly into flagellation, to the Lesbian-Ape, and to the guides through bohemia, Horace Zagreus and Dan Boleyn themselves. That Rodker's writing was in some respects comparable to other figures associated with the avant-garde, in turn allowed Lewis to argue for a reciprocal relationship between degenerate written forms and degenerate writers.

Emmet Stinson has discussed some of the ways in which *The Apes of God* aims to cordon off the authorial viewpoint from a material world that is dangerously corruptive. The prankster, Horace Zagreus, himself a caricatured echo of the historical Horace de Vere Cole, gives voice to most of the novel's critiques of London's art and artists. However, he merely echoes the words of the invisible Pierpoint, whose utterances are Lewisian both in content and style. Zagreus is a clown and a spectacle, an 'albino tropically-bronzed, triply armed with pierpointean dialectic'.[115] As Stinson argues, were Pierpoint to appear in the novel himself, he, like Zagreus, 'would be subjected to the withering objectification of the satiric eye […]. It is only through his

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[114] Wyndham Lewis, *Time and Western Man*, ed. by Paul Edwards (Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1993), p. 87.
[115] Wyndham Lewis, *The Apes of God*, p. 646.

absence that he can retain his authority.'[116] Pierpoint's pronouncements are submitted

to a degree of dramatised recalcitrance and narrative undermining that they do not

face in Lewis's critical prose. They also anticipate an incompetent aping and

misconstruction by figures like Zagreus that at least entertains the possible futility of

the satire put forward by Pierpoint and by Lewis.[117] Despite these caveats, the multiple

refraction is still best understood as an attempt on Lewis's part to achieve hygienic

distance from his subject matter without sacrificing the immediate venom of his

critique. His method is predominantly destructive but seeks a measure of self-

protection. It is important to stress this, not only because it clarifies the peculiar

qualities of Lewis's method, but also because it clarifies what is peculiar in Rodker's

response. For where Lewis attacks at exhaustive length the 'apes' of destructive

pseudo-creativity, Rodker's work becomes testament to what is 'fecundating' in

Lewis's method, almost despite itself. And where Lewis attempts to isolate a corrective

voice from the degeneracy it assaults, Rodker illustrates how Lewis is embedded in the

economics, reliant on the patrons and involved with the women of the society that he

excoriated. While *An Ape of Genius* remains unfinished, it is Rodker's refusal to fight

Lewis on his own ground that allows its critique, occasionally, to land effectively: not

only on Lewis, but, perhaps more valuably for scholars now, more broadly on the

mythologies that were constructed around literary modernism, particularly the Pound

circle in London.

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[116] Emmet Stinson, *Satirizing Modernism: Aesthetic Autonomy, Romanticism, and the Avant-Garde* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), p. 111.
[117] For a good discussion of further limitations that Lewis imposes on his surrogate, see Edwards, pp. 352–53.

Incompleteness is not the only obstacle to summarising *An Ape of Genius.* The order of the pages does not seem to correspond to the chronology of the novel, the mixture of typescript and manuscript at times tests legibility, and pages are interspersed which seem to relate to different projects: an autobiography, a piece of writing on the origins of our numerical system, and sketches by and of his daughter Joan. Despite these difficulties, several tendencies are apparent, and certain episodes legible. Rodker introduces the figure of Disraeli, his version of Lewis, whose name anticipates the revelation that Disraeli is half-Jewish. While the revelation is a crude expediency at the same time as a rather abstruse reference to Benjamin Disraeli's marriage to the widow of the MP Wyndham Lewis, it is consistent with the larger manoeuvre attempted by Rodker. That manoeuvre aims to demonstrate two things: firstly, that Lewis's attack on Rodker in *The Apes of God* had been motivated by self-hatred and self-recognition; secondly, that Lewis was unable to extricate himself from what he attacked.

Rodker's portrait draws in part from Lewis's own self-portrait as the eponymous hero of *Tarr* (1917-18; rev. and repub. 1928) mixed with Tarr's rival Kreisler, who forms his debased mirror-image in the novel. Rodker depicts Disraeli, like Tarr, in a relationship with a woman whom he dislikes but struggles to leave. In *An Ape of Genius*, however, the one woman has become three women, living in Hampstead, Bloomsbury and Chelsea. There is Hailey, based on the artist Jessica Dismorr, and Sturmer, based on the film critic Iris Barry. Both women want Disraeli, while he desires Veronique, possibly based on Cunard. As well as Disraeli's vacillating affairs, there are scenes including an argument between Disraeli's chamber pot and

toilet; a description of a horrific, ossifying illness taking hold of Disraeli; a meeting

between Disraeli's patrons, in which they discuss whether to give him a stipend; a

scene in which Disraeli begrudgingly asks a painter, Voigt, for £10; a scene in which

Disraeli insults another artist called Berkman in a bar, before bringing him back to his

studio and threatening him with a knife; as well as a polemical preface and the more

metafictional passage quoted above.

We can get some sense of how Rodker was advertising the work from a 1932

letter sent to Rodker from Constant Huntington of Putnam, the publishers who had

brought out *Other Fronts*. Huntingdon refers to Rodker's 'new book which will study

the intellectual and physical manifestations of the literary group to which you

belonged until it fell apart.'[118] He also declines Rodker's request of an advance

payment, no doubt one reason the novel was never completed. In any case, some of the

more fantastical and grotesque elements that appear in Rodker's drafts suggest the

publishers would have been disappointed by the result. From the two plans of the

novel that appear in the file, it seems that Rodker was intending a fairly loose structure

in which Disraeli may only have been one actor among several. One of these plans

seems to attribute equal importance to relationships between Pound and a Phyllis,

perhaps Reid or Bottome, and between Ford Madox Ford and Violet Hunt. There are

also hints at other strands that would look at the relationship between Pound, Lewis

and the Georgians.[119] Rodker draws attention to involvements that are illicit, socially

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[118] Constant Huntington to John Rodker, 22 July 1932, John Rodker Papers, Harry Ransom
Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin, Box 36, Folder 1.
[119] Patterson suggests that Rodker brought together two plans initially separate: 'a lightly
fictionalized version of his personal literary history, to have been called *Heroes of our Time* and
his satirical novel in response to Lewis to be called *An Ape of Genius*'. Patterson, 'John Rodker,
Julius Ratner and Wyndham Lewis: The Split-Man Writes Back', p. 104.

and aesthetically. The general tendency is towards correcting the narrative put forward

of a group of unattached young men revolutionising art singlehandedly by pointing to

their reliance on the artists, the women, and the economic systems that they verbally

rejected.

Given the novel's apparent genesis in Lewis's attack, it is not surprising that the

majority of what was written focusses on him. The revelation of hidden and illicit

relationships is also one part of Rodker's answer to Lewis's portrait of him in *The Apes

of God.* In Lewis's text, Rodker had appeared as a cheap pornographer, with 'his small

shop in Soho' and pretensions to artistry.[120] To an extent, Lewis's portrait can be

reduced to the accusation that Rodker infects art with sex and money, and an

unsavoury mixture of the two. Rodker does not deny the charge. In fact, sexual and

artistic capacities are linked in the sections that deal with Berkman and Disraeli,

though not straightforwardly. Instead, Rodker sets out to show that the interplay of

sex, art and money was just as present in Lewis's career.

As in *Other Fronts*, Rodker exposes hidden, unflattering bonds. Where Lewis

did his best to remove his body from *The Apes of God*, Rodker reintegrates it into a

fictional world of Lewis's own creation. He depicts that body as limited and faulty in a

portrait of an ageing Lewis who suffers from toothache and impotence. With

somewhat heavy-handed apophasis, Rodker begins a physical portrait:

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[120] Wyndham Lewis, *The Apes of God*, p. 162; Soho is presumably chosen to suggest seediness.
Heinz puts Rodker's business premises during the period of the Casanova Society in 4 Took's
Court, Holborn and the John Rodker imprint was based on 1 Farringdon Avenue nearby, so
Lewis was off by a good mile. Heinz, 'John Rodker (1894-1955) and Modernist Material Culture:
Theatre, Translation, Publishing', pp. 194, 222–23.

> Now I could tell you how it looked; the suffering pallor of that shallow bowl,
> the moony eyes mongolian lustrous slant [...] Rather let us take our hero as he
> is, let him pretend to what he will, the tyro's grin or radiant youth, that every
> moment of advancing age denies, and place him in this humbler setting.

While Rodker suggests that to motivate physical detail as 'odious' or otherwise is a rather 'facile aspect of the writer's craft', it does gain some ironic power in the attack on Lewis because Lewis's own writing treated the body with such disgust, from the hardened, mechanical Tyros to *The Apes of God*, which sought to exploit that motivation against others while remaining himself aloof, the observer unobserved.

In Rodker's hands, even Lewis's insistence on the eye is brought down to the corporeal level. Disraeli aims to write '[a] whole outline of philosophy', 'the Universe through The Eye', a text we can identify with Lewis's *Time and Western Man* (1927). But where Lewis insists on the eye as the organ that can evaluate at a distance, Rodker counters with an insistence on the eye's organic and receptive mechanism: '[t]wo holes that caught the light, to move other holes that angled the light, let in more light, and made the flesh to quake, the cells to seethe, to rise, to make a hole, a tube, round which lives life.' Rodker's language is clearly vaginal, as it is oral: the eye is also '[a] maw to triturate and close upon, suck in'. Thus, he does not simply appropriate Lewis's anti-bodily rhetoric to twist it into an erotic context and involve Lewis; he implies that a sexual conception *already* underpinned Lewis's pronouncements against them. His language was already permeated not just by sex but by women.

Lewis's own theory of creative production, which he sought to keep separate from the bodily, thus becomes closely implicated with his body, the sex and women

that he attempted to hide while he extolled an art that was dead. Rodker implies a link between Tarr's insistence on 'deadness' as 'the first condition of art', and the older Lewis's self-reflexive satire that seeks to destroy everything except himself.[121] Disraeli longs '[j]ust to say no! No to every call from life'. But even this longing is tied to a sexual motive in Rodker's interpretation: 'It was the refusing that meant everything to [Disraeli], the no-saying, that was his "petit-mort", he got his orgasm.' Just as Lewis's motives as artist and thinker are interwoven with sexual impulse, so are Lewis's failures as an artist linked to his failures as a lover. Disraeli struggles to paint Hailey, unable to finish, just as he is unable to start when Veronique reluctantly agrees to sex. By contrast, Berkman, a self-portrait by Rodker, overcomes his creative block to paint Hailey with comparable ease and accomplishment, though she misses Disraeli's agonies. Jealousy leads Disraeli to knock into him at a dance, a recollection of Kreisler's similar solecism in *Tarr*. Sexual and artistic jealousy are the key motives for Disraeli's hatred of Berkman, but Disraeli's own explanation is that '[h]e's a jew [and] I hate jews'. Rodker seems to have toyed with more or less confrontational verbal responses from his avatar.[122] In any case, the combined insult prompts Berkman to throw wine in Disraeli's face. To avoid a public conflict, Disraeli invites Berkman to his studio, where he is initially amiable before threatening him with a kris, which replaces the paintbrush as surrogate phallus.

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[121] Wyndham Lewis, *Tarr*, ed. by Scott W. Klein (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 265.
[122] In one manuscript draft, Berkman responds with 'Don't you [...] well, I hate people hate jews.' The lines are crossed out from 'I hate', to be replaced with 'what do you know about them anyway.' John Rodker, 'Manuscript Documents Relating to *An Ape of Genius*', John Rodker Papers, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin, Box 36, Folder 1. This version is retained in the edited typescript. In Disraeli's studio, Berkman is more diffident still, making clear that he objects to the personal insult rather than Disraeli's antisemitism.

An Ape of Genius describes Disraeli's twinned sexual and artistic impotence, but Rodker's primary interest is introspective. Rodker's recognition of himself in Lewis is reflected in his appearance in the text in two forms: Lewis's Ratner, transformed into a safe containing a revolver; and the painter Berkman.[123] While Berkman is described in terms of stubby fingers and a constantly shifting face, his physical similarity to Disraeli is remarked on twice – they are 'doubles'. Rodker entertains the possibility that Lewis's portrait of him, motivated by self-recognition and self-loathing, accurately identified flaws in both men. Thus, in writing about Lewis, Rodker is forced to write about himself. The recognition involves Rodker in revelations that rebound on both writers, while tying them closer together.

The tactic takes on particular weight in a passage describing Sturmer's pregnancy with Disraeli's child. Barry, the source for Sturmer, did have two children by Lewis, in 1919 and 1920.[124] However, Rodker's own fathering of a child with Butts, which he described in *Other Fronts* around the same time, is too close to the description to be chance:

> And the child was born, and he would not look at it. He hated them both. So a home was found for it. Its demons claimed the little changeling. He thought of Rousseau and it seemed all right to him.

For a character based on Lewis to think of Rousseau's abandonment of his children and feel vindication in the philosopher's precedent is surprising: Lewis had, with T. E.

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[123] On one hand-written page, Rodker has made the note in the top-left-hand corner: 'Two mes – innocent me / Ratner' and, in the main diagram of the page, links 'J. R.' to Berkman

[124] Robert Sitton, *Lady in the Dark: Iris Barry and the Art of Film* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), p. 65.

Hulme, Irving Babbitt and Eliot, 'attacked Rousseauistic notions of equality and rights, and defended new models of authority.'[125] However, as David Dwan has observed, Lewis's rejection of Rousseau was an incomplete one. Rousseau's championing of the individual, as Lewis saw it, was too valuable for him to jettison the thinker completely.[126] We might also hear the Rodker of *Other Fronts* and 'Liberating Forces', where refusal or failure to do one's duty holds possibilities for creation.

On one page a narrator, possibly Berkman, describes a consultation with Disraeli, in which he asks the narrator to confirm that Sturmer's child was not his, but belonging to 'the merchant MacGregor', presumably another fictionalised name. The incident seems likely to have been based on a dinner Lewis and Rodker had in May 1919. Rodker's diary entry reads as follows:

> Dined with Lewis yesterday. Much drink. V[er]y close conversation pertaining to I[ris] Barry.
>
> Want to know when Costa saw her last [e]tc. He is convinced she fucked. Probably piqued because not Lewis. Several hours of more than entertaining conversation. 7-12. Very charming, solid. Backbone – wh[ich] Ezra by comparison hasn't.

Going back to the diary the following year, Rodker added the note: 'Lewis has had a baby by Barry & it is said she now lives with him?'[127]

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125 Rachel Potter, *Modernism and Democracy: Literary Culture, 1900-1930* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 11.
126 David Dwan, 'Modernism and Rousseau', *Textual Practice*, 27.4 (2013), 537–63 (p. 552).
127 John Rodker, 'Diary 1919-1921', entry for 27 May 1919. The later note is dated 1 October 1920.

Whether inspired by this incident or not, Rodker moves from the anecdote to build an analysis of the sexual politics of Lewis's branch of the London avant-garde more generally. Rodker also integrates Lewis's charm and his own susceptibility to that charm. The narrator admits to feeling flattered by the confidence, but that, in retrospect, he can see that it was already part of a project in which one found '[t]he boys & men together, & the surprising female, he most repudiated & thrust out.' He continues:

> Had I known what I see now! [...] Could I have looked to the future & seen the glorious boys, suspect projections of that idealised past, he was to make. No one nowadays makes such boys. They melt in the mouth, pure moonshine that they are, polished metal, gleaming ice-flesh, remote grave face in blizzard light. No need to ask where they came from. They c[oul]d never have existed so but in some world of hearty desire, where neither man is nor woman, lustrous, untouched, most savage, brainy, virgin: the boy that all of him had wanted once to be: perhaps had been, and the memory lost a long time: unless some woman, wholly in the past, enshrined it still.

The passage is a sharp summary of the interwar Lewis, from the Tyros meant to revive the pre-war boys, themselves a fabrication, through to Lewis's fascination with the armed men of National Socialism. At the same time, the likeness between Lewis and Rodker was not just one of private behaviour, and the 'female … thrust out' recalls the all-male author list of the Ovid Press as well as it does Lewis's projects. By identifying the nostalgic element in the Tyros, Rodker also clarifies the proto-fascist elements in Lewis's pre-war work and coterie-construction. It is not just Pound who was a man 'in

love with the past' as Lewis had dubbed him; Lewis's own thinking was shown to be

nostalgic and temporally muddled, rather than the pristinely spatial and forward-

looking one he professed.[128]

Before concluding, it is worth noting the other side of Rodker's answer to

Lewis's charge that Rodker was one who sullied art by mixing it with sex and money.

Lewis draws on the traditional antisemitic double-think that condemns Jews

simultaneously for being despicably rich and despicably poor. Hence, Ratner is

simultaneously guilty of making money by unsound means ('Julius married a big

carrotty anglish intelligentsia. Thereupon he had dough') and for being dirty and

poor.[129] Rodker's response is twofold. On the one hand, he depicts a Lewis who lacks

money, and is frustrated about his poverty to a point of obsession. Disraeli lives in the

'slummiest parts of the town, among the reek, the slush under foot; the grotesque, the

starved ones, the monstrous millions of the city', lodged among the crowds whom his

writing vituperates. Once more, Lewis is shown to hate what he finds himself in. Even

the acidity of Disraeli's writing, the text suggests, reflects the lost fortune of his father's

pickle factory. There is also a suggestion in one plan, and traces in a page of

manuscript, that Rodker meant to dedicate one chapter to beggars. Their exact

motivation is unclear, but in the rhetorical question 'what claim can they make large

enough to compensate them for everything they have not had?', we might understand

that they were intended to form a sympathetic mirror to the money-seeking Disraeli.

Sympathy, for himself, for Lewis, for others, is one of the elements that most strikingly

distinguishes Rodker's work from Lewis's and, arguably, as Patterson suggests, guts it

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[128] Wyndham Lewis, *Time and Western Man*, p. 67.
[129] Lewis, *The Apes of God*, p.147.

of its power as satire.[130] That Ratner wants money is despicable; that Disraeli wants money may be embarrassing and hypocritical, but it is neither reprehensible nor avoidable given his place within a larger economic system.

As well as showing Disraeli's lack of money, Rodker depicts Disraeli's means of acquiring it. He is shown begging money off acquaintances, including the artist Voigt, probably a version of Ford. Worse, he is reliant on a group of condescending patrons, one of whom is Sydney Schiff, appearing once more in the role of Lionel Kein. In a meeting with two other patrons of Disraeli, Burney and Wilfrid, Lionel begrudgingly agrees to a plan to give Disraeli a stipend to live on, since it is embarrassing to have him their friend and so poor. Disraeli initially refuses the stipend, but accepts on the condition he can receive it through a third party, Stoks, since Stoks too 'has to work for his money'. It is through the mouths of Disraeli's patrons that Rodker is most efficiently brutal, acknowledging Lewis's ambitions while setting them within sharp limits. In a critique that seems to take in Pound as much as Lewis, Rodker has one patron observe that

> after all [Disraeli's] a Renaissance figure, he says so himself, and I think he's justified. Not a Michael Angelo [sic], nor even a Leonardo, but one of the little ones say. [...] And we, it seems, correspond to the Renaissance princes, you know they had their Selfridges.

Disraeli's paintings might not be outstanding or equivalent in value, say to those of Picasso, but he is 'unique, at least in this country' and, after all, he 'gives you your

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[130] Patterson, 'John Rodker, Julius Ratner and Wyndham Lewis: The Split-Man Writes Back', p. 106.

money's worth.' Lewis had, indeed, identified himself with the Renaissance, even while considering Michelangelo his 'Bete-Noir'.[131] His introduction to *The Tyro*, for example, had responded to the vogue for discussing a renaissance in English art, defending his work in both prose and visual art in the magazine by observing that '[d]uring the Renaissance in Italy this duplication of activities was common enough, and no one was surprised to see a man chiselling words and stone alternately.'[132] Rodker's deftness is less in the belittlement of Lewis within the renaissance framework than it is in showing the attraction of that same framework to Lewis's patrons, exposing Lewis's own mobilisation of it as self-delusion or hollow salesmanship.

Lewis's primary patrons are men, and Lewis's relationship to them is that of an ungrateful, somewhat Oedipal son:

> patient, ingratiating, charming, all smiles, as he waited, cap in hand, for whatever might come his way, with a sour pleasure in being the jester, providing the trimmings, but like a jester soured, made cantankerous, resolved later to have his revenge for it.

The portrait of their generosity in the face of Disraeli's ingratitude is an easy attack, dwelling on the moments of 'humility' and 'jovial obsequiousness', which seeks to turn *The Apes of God* into one more domestic squabble between Lewis and Schiff. Disraeli's financial dependence on women is dwelt on less, but it is evident in his terse remark to Hailey that 'I've made friends with the bunch again. I don't need you.' Disraeli's

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[131] Wyndham Lewis, 'The London Group, 1915 (March)', *Blast*, 2, 1915, 77-79 (p.77).
[132] Wyndham Lewis, 'The Objects of This Paper', *The Tyro: A Review of the Arts of Painting, Sculpture and Design*, 1, 1921, 2.

appeal to the Ratner safe, only to find a revolver, can be understood as Rodker's anticipation of any further demand on him by Lewis.

With the book unpublished, the revolver was never fired, but *An Ape of Genius* remains a perceptive, if uneven, critique of Lewis and his version of modernism. As the later pages of the typescript folder of the novel become muddled with drawings by and of Rodker's daughter Joan, there is a final, inadvertent recognition of the entanglement of art and life. There is some justice to Jacob Isaacs's remark that Rodker 'gave to publishing what should have been given to literature', but it ignores that his work as author, translator and publisher could become entangled in ways that could be fruitful rather than simply a hindrance.[133] *An Ape of Genius*, unfinished and involved in self-doubt as well as self-reflection, stands as testament not only to the limits of Rodker's work, internally and externally enforced, but also to his insistent exploration of what those limits reveal and describe. In the next chapter, I discuss Isaac Rosenberg, in whose work we can trace a similarly calculated response to limitation and contingency, and their adaptation for the purposes of poetry.

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[133] Isaacs, 'Mr. John Rodker'.

Isaac Rosenberg: With and Against Contingency

Joseph Leftwich's entry in his diary for January 2nd, 1911, describes being introduced

that evening to Isaac Rosenberg by Stephen Winsten. They met on Leadenhall Street

then turned onto Whitechapel Road, discussing Shakespeare's sonnets. There they

encountered a colleague of Rosenberg's, who also worked as a photo-engraver under

Carl Hentschel. After going some way further, they stopped:

> When we get to the corner of Jamaica Street and Oxford Street [now Stepney
>
> Way], Rosenberg pulls a bundle of scraps of paper out of his pocket, and reads
>
> us his poems <u>under</u> a lamp-post.[1]

Recalling the moment twenty-six years later, Joseph Leftwich identified the poems

Rosenberg read out as including 'In the Workshop' and 'Life, Time and Memory'.[2]

Appropriately for their integration into this image of Rosenberg reading them in a pool

of light, both poems are alert to the interplay of light and dark, and both are heavily

pictorial.

> In 'Life, Time and Memory', Rosenberg's speaker exclaims:
>
> But lo! behind, what dim processional?
>
> What maiden sings and sighs?
>
> And holds an urn, and as the roses fall,
>
> And the wine pours and spills,

---

[1] Leftwich, 'Facsimile of Diary', entry for 2 January.
[2] Leftwich, 'Isaac Rosenberg', p. i.

She gathers in her lap and breathes on them;

And in the urn the spilled wine glows again,

Lit by her eyes divine.[3]

While 'swift-footed' Time surrounds 'wild-eyed' Life with 'yearning bitterness', killing the roses around her, Memory follows, bringing recompense. The moment is instructive for several reasons. Personified abstractions are involved in actions meant to be visualised: the poem's opening line instructs the reader to 'watch'. The visual emphasis is held in check by the poem's assertion of musicality, the 'ballad' of the title and figures who 'sing'. The poem is markedly allusive: close echoes of Keats's 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' (1819;1820) are bolstered by the insertion of an urn into the passage. It is no coincidence that the allusion is loudest with the arrival of Memory: her introduction into the poem brings with it a language that is also remembered, pieced back together imperfectly.

In 1910, David Eder, the psychoanalyst, had remarked on Rosenberg's work that, although he had 'an artist's feeling for expression and for words', the poet had 'not given utterance to [his] own personality and [the technique of the poetry] is all too reminiscent'.[4] The idea that his early work suffered from being insufficiently individual and insufficiently new was accepted by Rosenberg. Eder's criticism also corresponds to a common account of Rosenberg's poetic trajectory: from derivative, vague work in the

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3 Isaac Rosenberg, *Isaac Rosenberg*, ed. by Vivien Noakes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 8–9.

4 Isaac Rosenberg, *Isaac Rosenberg*, p. 231. Rosenberg quotes Eder's comment in a letter to Winifreda Seaton.

years before 1914 to his highest achievement in the poetry he wrote during the war.[5]

However, the use of Keats in 'Life, Time and Memory' suggests that what was

'reminiscent' in Rosenberg were not accidents of overexposure to certain writers, but

part of a more sophisticated project of allusion and recombination.

Time and again, those writing on Rosenberg have turned to metaphors of light

and darkness. Edward Marsh, at a Memorial Exhibition of Rosenberg's paintings and

drawings in 1937 described Rosenberg as 'an Aladdin whose lamp was a strong but

slender searchlight which lit up now and then, but only for a moment, some jewel in

the cave of darkness in which he groped'.[6] Rosenberg had once begged Marsh not to

call his poetry 'obscure', and Marsh's description of Rosenberg hints at how the

discussion of his obscurity can assume an inadvertently condescending character.[7]

Though he is now one of the more stable members of a small canon of British war

poetry, there remains an embattled note to some writing on Rosenberg, where the

obscurity of his reputation is regretted and challenged.[8] At the same time, his

originality and alienation from authority are taken to turn that obscurity into a badge

of honour.[9] The argument risks becoming circular. Instead, this chapter will attempt to

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[5] Wilson, *Isaac Rosenberg: The Making of a Great War Poet: A New Life*, p. 13.

[6] Cohen, p. 183.

[7] Isaac Rosenberg, *Isaac Rosenberg*, p. 264.

[8] In his 1998 lecture on Rosenberg, published the following year, Hill noted that Rosenberg still '[did] not have the kind of acceptance that comes with various forms of recognised accessibility'; when the lecture was republished in 2008, the line was changed to acknowledge the 'exemplary textual attention which his work [had] received' while still observing that 'Rosenberg does not have a wide readership'; Geoffrey Hill, 'Isaac Rosenberg, 1890-1918', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 101 (1999), 209–28 (p. 228); Geoffrey Hill, *Collected Critical Writings*, ed. by Kenneth Haynes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 464; see also Jean Moorcroft Wilson's remark that 'Rosenberg has not yet received full recognition and acceptance'; Wilson, *Isaac Rosenberg: The Making of a Great War Poet: A New Life*, p. 12.

[9] See, for example, how Peter Lawson draws on Dennis Silk to contrast Rosenberg's 'dynamic, Anglo-Jewish poetry and poetics' with Edward Marsh's 'Hellenic proclivities' in Lawson, pp. 31–32.

develop an analysis of Rosenberg's poetry that situates that obscurity within contexts, influences and debates over value that have themselves become obscure. To understand the phenomenon of Rosenberg's obscurity does not so much require us to rescue or extract his poetry from the engines of obfuscation, but rather to try to understand how those engines work.

The history of Rosenberg's appearance in print is one of contingencies and constraints. During his life, Rosenberg's work appeared in a range of publications that, taken together, show little aesthetic or political coherence. After his death, his sister took on the task of seeing his work into publication with similar opportunism. However, Rosenberg's death in France increasingly shaped the way his work was presented and continues to do so. The poems he wrote about the war have come to summarise his poetic achievement. In turn, the framework under which he has received critical attention has been as a poet of war, as one who attempted to articulate what war is and means.

Turning to Rosenberg's publication history offers something of an antidote. Editorial agendas yoke and fix Rosenberg's poetry to serve various purposes. Although they restrict the available meanings of those poems, they do so with more variety than anthologies that once more set Rosenberg in dialogue with the same set of British poets who fought in the First World War. They also open up some ways to chart Rosenberg's development that do not take his end for their beginning. In biographies of the poet, his death looms large from the first page. From some critical accounts of him, one might think he entered the world dressed in khaki. This chapter seeks to restore the element of contingency to understanding Rosenberg's poetry that is lost in teleological

accounts, and which is necessary to understanding the development of his poetic method.

The first part of this chapter addresses several aspects of Rosenberg's obscurity. The term's sponginess and its popularity as a category for analysis among critics of Rosenberg makes it worth distinguishing some of the different ways it might be helpful to understand it. In the second part of the chapter, I move on to consider Rosenberg's publication history, focussing on *Colour*, one of the few magazines in which Rosenberg's poetry was published while he was still alive. While Leftwich attributed the magazine with a significant role in the shared poetic progress of his friendship circle, a study of the magazine's contents suggests other more significant forces at work. *Colour*'s editorial code favoured a mixture of visual and literary art, and justified that mixture by insisting on the prioritisation of its readers' relaxed enjoyment of the magazine's contents, rather than any overly curious or technical engagement with the visual arts. Within this context, Rosenberg's denser, more syntactically obscure poems assume an antiphonal position. However, we can also see ways in which Rosenberg drew on *Colour* to develop a poetics that integrated elements of this unpromising context.

The third part considers how these developments fed into Rosenberg's later poetry, with a particular focus on 'Returning, we hear the larks' and 'Daughters of War'. I draw attention to Rosenberg's treatment of death, in part because we can observe a change in the role it plays in his later poetry, in part because of the importance Rosenberg's own death in the war has come to play in subsequent analyses of his poetry. The motivation of Rosenberg's poetry for various ends, both in the

immediate aftermath of his death, and in the second half of the twentieth century, will

be the subject of the final chapter of this thesis.

Rosenberg's Obscurity

The use of Keats in 'Life, Time and Memory' is not atypical in Rosenberg's work, but

his models for poetry and sources for allusions also included writers whose

reputations have not survived as well as Keats's. Some of the limitations that this shift

confers can be seen in Paul Fussell's discussion of 'Break of Day in the Trenches' in *The*

Great War and Modern Memory, which was published in 1975, the same year the first

three biographies of Rosenberg appeared. Together, they marked a turning-point in

Rosenberg's reputation. Fussell names 'Break of Day' the 'greatest poem of the war'

and quotes it in full.[10] In keeping with his larger argument in the book, he suggests that

part of the poem's greatness lies in its intelligent and ironic response to a poetic

inheritance, in this case, especially to pastoral and elegiac traditions. Fussell finds

echoes of Thomas Nashe, Matthew Arnold and 'all the familiar *dusts* of Renaissance

lyric-elegy which fall at the ends of lines.' Fussell then quotes examples of the word

'dust' from Sidney, Shakespeare and James Shirley.[11] Fussell's motivation of 'dust' is

too general to be entirely satisfactory, and the rest of his argument makes no attempt to

trace the contours of Rosenberg's own canon. That is not to say that Rosenberg had not

read the poets Fussell mentions. In an aerogramme to Joseph Cohen, Rosenberg's sister

Annie Wynick described how her brother 'was always buying more books in

Farringdon St. Market or Charing X & in those days one paid coppers as the stallsellers

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[10] Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, revised edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 272.
[11] Fussell, p. 273.

had no idea of the value'.[12] But the image Wynick gives of an insatiable reader is also

an image of someone picking through second-hand books, a scavenger among the

'flotsam of literature', whose choices occur within a framework of contingency and

economic necessity.[13]

In a 1912 letter to Laurence Binyon, Rosenberg explained that he '[knew] little

of modern poets as they are difficult to get hold of – but Francis Thompson a little'.[14]

While this would change in the remaining six years of his life, it is not insignificant that

Thompson was Rosenberg's initial encounter with modern poetry. Thompson, a late

Victorian Catholic poet, had lived homeless in London for two years, until he was

taken in by the Meynells. The Meynells, like Thompson, were literary and Catholic.

After Thompson's death in 1907, the circle around the family used obituaries to build

the poet's fame and, between 1909 and 1910, sales of his poetry reached 18,000

volumes.[15] Like Gerard Manley Hopkins, whose work he knew at least to some extent,

[16] Thompson was working through adventurous linguistic experiments, but as part of

an explicitly Christian project that made him a difficult influence for some writers of

the succeeding generation to digest.[17] In 1955, William Empson credited Thompson

[12] Annie Wynick to Joseph Cohen, aerogramme, 18 December 1956, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin, Wilfred Owen Papers, Correspondence to Joseph Cohen and third party correspondence, 1916-1957, Box 2, Folder 8.

[13] Richard Curle, 'Second-Hand Bookshops', ed. by St. John Adcock, *Wonderful London*, 2.14 (1926), 640–51.

[14] Isaac Rosenberg, *Isaac Rosenberg*, p. 237.

[15] Brigid Boardman, *Between Heaven and Charing Cross: The Life of Francis Thompson* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1988), p. 353.

[16] Francis Thompson, *Poems of Francis Thompson*, ed. by Brigid Boardman (London: The Athlone Press, 2002), p. xxvii.

[17] The key word in the above formulation may be 'explicitly' as much as 'Christian'. The significance of religion in literary modernism has been increasingly discussed. See, for example, Pericles Lewis, *Religious Experience and the Modernist Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

with having 'brought back the peculiar merits of the seventeenth-century "metaphysicals" in a usable form.'[18] More recently, Tara Christie has seen Thompson as a precursor to Rosenberg's experiments in 'combining […] Donne's imagery with late Romantic poetic diction'.[19] In a 1917 letter to Gordon Bottomley, Rosenberg would admit that he did not 'like him as [he] did the first time [he] read him – [Thompson's] much too fond of the stars.' At the same time, he maintained that 'some of his poems are as good as anything in our language'.[20] Not only Thompson's diction, but his poetic treatment of a God both immanent and ineffable would inform much of Rosenberg's poetry.

An incomplete list of the canon that emerges from Rosenberg's letters would consist of the early and powerful influence of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, William Blake and Thompson; slightly later, and with increasing importance, John Donne, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Walt Whitman; among his contemporaries, the influence of Gordon Bottomley and Lascelles Abercrombie. An interrogation of the allusions in Rosenberg's work is unlikely to get past a superficial level until it comes closer to the work of the poets Rosenberg most esteemed. Even where the less familiar writers are acknowledged by critics and biographers, it is often with an element of apology. Adam Phillips writes that Rosenberg aspired 'primarily' to the tradition of the Romantics and, 'through them to Rossetti, Swinburne and Francis Thompson'; by contrast, Joseph Cohen has described how, '[l]ong past Keats and Francis Thompson, past Browning,

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[18] William Empson, *Selected Letters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 241.
[19] Tara Christie, 'Modernism, the Metaphysical Poets, and the First World War' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Emory University, 2007), p. 70.
[20] Isaac Rosenberg, *Isaac Rosenberg*, p. 352.

Swinburne, and Blake, Rosenberg had reached up to Donne'.[21] While the metaphors are

reversed, in both cases the account seems to be motivated by a wish to identify

Rosenberg with influences of more assured stature, in the hopes that the canonicity

will rub off on him. Hence also the way in which the influence of Abercrombie and

Bottomley tends to be ignored or mentioned with regret. While there is not space in

this chapter to discuss these poets' influence on Rosenberg, their dramas in blank verse

are the closest and most significant precedent for Rosenberg's own work in the form.[22]

Rossetti and Thompson also stand out as profound influences both on the style of the

poetry and on the subjects poetry is seen as fit to address.

The problem is not just that the specific allusions and appropriations of

Rosenberg's method will be lost if we lose sight of the poems and poets he admired

because we are embarrassed by that admiration. That risk is not inconsiderable and

probably contributes to the ease with which his work can be dismissed as obscure or

extraneous. Other more important problems arise. An account of modernism that

privileges the adaptation of certain stylistic features, the time-limited endorsement or

rejection of certain works, inevitably establishes barriers to attainment to those with

less money to stay abreast of the most recent publications. Rosenberg is not an extreme

case in this respect, but his peripheral status in terms of class and canonicity remains

instructive. An account of the poetry of the 1910s that centred Rosenberg's work would

not simply change how we understand the contributions of his contemporaries, but, at

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[21] Adam Phillips, *On Flirtation* (London: Faber and Faber, 1994), p. 180; Cohen, p. 153.
[22] Geoffrey Hill does acknowledge Abercrombie and Bottomley's verse dramas, but only to distinguish Rosenberg's 'markedly classical' examples from the '*bizarrerie* of such works'; Hill, *Collected Critical Writings*, p. 463.

least as significantly, it might mean a disruption that spreads to the texts and writers coming before and after.

The stylistic obscurity of Rosenberg is best understood as a development of pre-Raphaelite obscurity, particularly that of Rossetti, and has an analogy in the early work of Paul Nash, an analogy made more attractive by Bottomley's correspondence with and encouragement of both men.[23] Thematically, it is a development of Christian mystical obscurity, but one that has been pushed towards a more Deistic conception of God and one in which an erotic infatuation with a vaguely adumbrated woman becomes identified simultaneously with artistic achievement and with a more threatening corruption. I identify its starting-point as Christian advisedly and on account of the primary poetic sources Rosenberg cited. It is possible, even likely, that specifically Jewish contexts did influence Rosenberg's reception of Christian writers, but that influence requires more evidence than has yet been brought to bear. While Beth Ellen Roberts has made some persuasive arguments for Kabbalistic sources for key motifs in Rosenberg's poetry, her arguments are weakened by the fact that she discusses Lilith without mention of Rossetti, and describes a culture of Hasidism that 'produced' Rosenberg, without any more historical specificity or nuance.[24]

In terms of syntax, Rosenberg probably owes to Rossetti the technique of using sentences that amass vertiginous numbers of clauses. To take an extreme example, 'Mid-Rapture' from Rossetti's *The House of Life* (1870; 1881) consists of two sentences,

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[23] For Rosenberg's correspondence with Bottomley, see Isaac Rosenberg, *Isaac Rosenberg*; for Nash's, see Gordon Bottomley and Paul Nash, *Poet & Painter: Being the Correspondence between Gordon Bottomley and Paul Nash, 1910-1946*, ed. by Claude Colleer Abbott and Anthony Bertram (London: Oxford University Press, 1955).

[24] Beth Ellen Roberts, 'The Female God of Isaac Rosenberg: A Muse for Wartime', *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920*, 39.3 (1996), 319–32.

kept in a sort of order by parallelism and subclauses, but made recursive by repetition. The sestet reads:

> What word can answer to thy word; — what gaze
>
> To thine, which now absorbs within its sphere
>
> My worshiping face, till I am mirrored there
>
> Light-circled in a heaven of deep-drawn rays?
>
> What clasp, what kiss mine inmost heart can prove,
>
> O lovely and beloved, O my love?[25]

The suspension of syntactic closure is made to dramatize a struggle towards withheld meaning and a consciousness of the limitations of language as a tool for achieving understanding. In this case, the suspension also suggests the attempt to hold to a point of rapture. Even the sonnet form, which we might understand to impart closure, does so less within a sequence which 'rejects strict linearity' and where '[e]very vantage point is provisional.'[26] Given the amount of Rosenberg's writing that was unpublished before his death, and the rather contingent and haphazard conditions of the publication of his work that took place while he was alive, there are also unresolvable questions of syntax and word-choice in his works.[27]

Accumulating clauses combine in Rosenberg's work with the stylistic legacy of Francis Thompson, where a similar principle to Rossetti's is at work, but in which the

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[25] Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Collected Poetry and Prose* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2003), p. 139.

[26] John Holmes, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the Late Victorian Sonnet Sequence* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), p. 24; Jerome McGann, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the Game That Must Be Lost* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 43.

[27] See Vivien Noakes's discussion of difficulties in editing Rosenberg's poems in Isaac Rosenberg, *Isaac Rosenberg*, pp. xxiii–xxvi.

style seems more wilfully crabbed and contorted to respond to the demands of the line and a principle of maximal semantic compression. In 'The Mistress of Vision' (c.1897), Thompson writes:

> There was never moon,
>
> Save the white sufficing woman:
>
> Light most heavenly-human –
>
> Like the unseen form of sound,
>
> Sensed invisibly in tune, –
>
> With a sun-derivèd stole
>
> Did inaureole
>
> All her lovely body round;
>
> Lovelily her lucid body with that light was interstrewn.[28]

Thompson shares various features of style with Rosenberg. In the above, we can see Thompson's 'habit of adapting words from one part of speech to another' ('inaureole', of which Thompson is the only citation in the OED) and his 'use of obsolete words or archaisms' ('stole' meaning 'robe').[29] Thompson also uses compounds ('heavenly-human', 'sun-derivèd'), drops articles ('never moon'), and abruptly alters word-order for emphasis, as in the last line quoted.

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[28] Thompson, p. 97.

[29] 'Inaureole, v.', *OED Online* (Oxford University Press, 2019); Thompson, p. xxvii.

So far, we have discussed Rosenberg's obscurity in terms of internal properties, which we can link to a larger project of making the reader work towards a sense of the unknowable. However, obscurity cannot be satisfactorily understood as something purely internal; it must be referred to the surrounding context of its publication and reception. While a poem can attempt to be rebarbative or difficult with the aim of making its reader work, obscurity is partly a question of how hard the reader is willing to work in the first place, and what direction that work will take. *Colour* declined to make its readers work. When Rosenberg's poems appeared in the magazine, the nature of their obscurity was subjected to new and unusual pressures.

Colour

In '"Jewish" London Fifty Years Ago' (1966), Leftwich described how:

> We all began to contribute to English literary magazines; Rosenberg, Rodker and I to *Colour*, Bomberg to *Blast*, Wyndham Lewis's Vorticist journal, Rodker to the *Egoist* – he knew Ezra Pound and Isadora and Raymond Duncan. There was *Voices*, edited by Tom Moult, where Louis
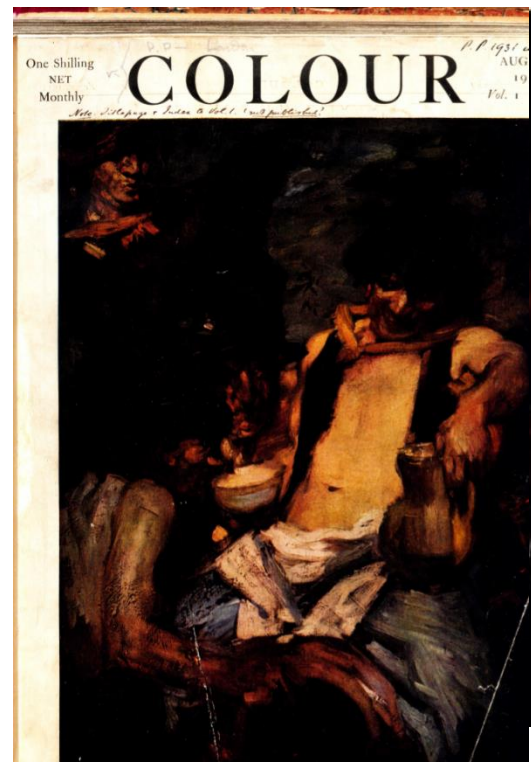
Front cover of the British Library's copy of the first issue of *Colour* in August 1914, showing *The Topers* by Frank Brangwyn

Golding got his first work published.[30]

In an 'Autobiographical Note' (1978) he again attributed *Colour* with a key role in the story of how he and his friends were first published. After writing that Rosenberg had influenced Rodker and himself to compose poetry, he noted that

> we were beginning to be printed. One issue of the 'Colour' magazine contained poems by Rosenberg, Rodker and me. It was in 'Colour' too that my poem on Rosenberg's death appeared.[31]

In both cases, Leftwich followed on from the discussion of magazines to describe the places that he and his friends frequented, including Harold Monro's bookshop and the Café Royal. Leftwich draws an implicit analogy between these physical spaces, which the young men shared with important artists and poets of the period, and the pages of *Colour*, as though the magazine were a further cultural space to which they together gained entry. However, Leftwich's account is inaccurate in several respects. Rodker was not published in *Colour*, or certainly not under his own name, though in 1920 his poem 'Wild West Remittance Man' did appear along with three of Leftwich's poems in the first issue of *The Apple*, a short-lived offshoot of *Colour* specifically focussed on graphic arts rather than reproductions. Bomberg was never published in *Blast*, though his work did appear in the first issue of Lewis's next magazine *The Tyro.*

As for Rosenberg, while three of his poems appeared in *Colour* ('Heart's First Word', 'A Girl's Thoughts' and 'Wedded' appeared in June, July and August of 1915 respectively), Leftwich did not appear in the magazine until later. The first poem

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[30] Leftwich, '"Jewish" London Fifty Years Ago', p. 15.
[31] Leftwich, 'Autobiographical Note', p. 9.

attributed to him in *Colour* is from April 1918, although two of his poems had appeared

in the September 1915 issue, mistakenly attributed to 'A. Leftwich'.[32] The only time

poems attributed to Rosenberg and Leftwich appeared in the same issue of *Colour* was

in October 1919. However, although 'Killed in Action' was attributed to Rosenberg, it

was in fact a poem Leftwich had written on the death of his friend. The misattribution

carried over into the 1922 edition of Rosenberg's poetry edited by Gordon Bottomley,

and Ian Parsons would also include 'Killed in Action' in his edition of the *Collected*

Works of Isaac Rosenberg, this time correctly attributed to Leftwich beneath Parsons's

dedication to him.

The problem with Leftwich's account is not so much in the detail as that one

might read it to suggest that Rodker, Rosenberg and Leftwich were making a concerted

move into a specific magazine. The timing and location of their appearance in print

suggests that this was not the case.[33] Their Whitechapel milieu and their Jewishness

may not be entirely irrelevant. Writing on *Colour*, Kunio Shin has observed both the

high number of 'Anglo-Jewish artists and writers who appeared in its pages' as well as

a recurring 'interest in the question of Jewishness as a subject for modern art and

literature' among contributors.[34] The editor had also written a melodrama called *The*

Jew of Prague some years before, which shows an interest in the dramatic uses of Jews if

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[32] Joseph Leftwich, 'All Shall Be Right', *Colour*, 3.2 (1915), 59; Joseph Leftwich, 'The Jew', *Colour*, 3.2 (1915), 59; the poems appear, with minor differences of punctuation and typography, in Joseph Leftwich, *Along the Years: Poems, 1911-1937* (London: Robert Anscombe & Co., 1937), pp. 43, 61.

[33] In one entry of his diary, Leftwich describes an occasion where he and Rodker worked together to send off material off for publication, but here they submit to different magazines, the *Pall Mall Gazette* and *Windsor Magazine*, respectively. See Leftwich, 'Facsimile of Diary', entry for 30 June.

[34] Kunio Shin, 'The Work of Modern British Art in the Age of Colour Reproduction: Wyndham Lewis and C. R. W. Nevinson in *Colour*, 1914-1921', *The Journal of Wyndham Lewis Studies*, 8 (2017), 57–86 (p. 66).

neither sympathy nor intelligence.[35] Shin is rightly cautious in identifying causes for

the phenomena he identifies. To understand the appearance of these writers and artists

in *Colour*, other groupings than the 'Whitechapel Boys' may prove more useful.

Rachel Dickson and Sarah MacDougall note the contributions to *Colour* by

Bomberg, Gertler, Kramer, Meninsky, Morris Goldstein, Horace Brodzky, Alfred

Wolmark, Mark Weiner as well as Rosenberg and Leftwich.[36] It is worth noting that,

with the exception of Brodzky, Leftwich and Wolmark, all the names listed were, for

some time, students at the Slade School of Art. C. R. W. Nevinson, Adrian Allinson and

Paul Nash, recent graduates of the Slade but without ties to Whitechapel, also

contributed to the magazine. The appeal of *Colour* to these artists may not be

immediately apparent. Joseph Cohen is unforgiving: the magazine 'made no attempt to

court the avant-garde, preferring a safe middle-ground, publishing the work of

popular Edwardian artists including Frank Brangwyn and William Strang.' Though

'occasionally a work by Augustus John or Gertler or Gaudier-Brzeska' found its way in

amid the 'stories, poems, and light, "safe" essays', *Colour* was essentially a 'chic,

bourgeois, coffee-table publication'.[37] The magazine's primary innovation was its use

of high-quality colour reproduction, rather than in the art and writing it contained.

Colour presented itself as a magazine for potential buyers of art and it was willing to

publish art by young and little-known British artists alongside better-known figures.

That they were published next to conservative Royal Academy work might have been

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[35] The play was subsequently turned into a novel: Alfred Wilson Barrett, *The Jew of Prague* (London: F. V. White and Co., 1912).

[36] Rachel Dickson and Sarah MacDougall, 'First Fruits: Isaac Rosenberg and His Circle in Print', in *Whitechapel At War: Isaac Rosenberg and His Circle* (London: Ben Uri Gallery, 2008), pp. 83–94 (pp. 87–89).

[37] Cohen, p. 114.

off-putting to some Slade students, but the magazine provided a platform in which

their work received the validation of inclusion, without the precondition of

membership sometimes required for exhibiting. Furthermore, the magazine ran

competitions: the fourth issue advertised one in which £45 would be split among 12

prizes for art in any medium.[38] Allinson won one of the top prizes for an oil painting,

The Café, a reproduction of which was published in the February issue.[39]

Other groups than the Slade played a role. Rodker's appearance in the first

issue of *The Apple* in January 1920 probably had more to do with that of Pound and

Wadsworth than it did with Whitechapel connections.[40] Leftwich's own contribution to

Colour perhaps originally came from his contact with Alfred Wolmark, a painter who

featured frequently in the magazine and whom it identified in March 1915 as 'one of

the founders of the "colour" movement in contemporary art as well as one of its most

original exponents'.[41] Wolmark and Leftwich collaborated on the *Jewish Association of*

Arts and Sciences the same year.[42] Leftwich's published material in *Colour* noticeably

increased after the war, which is also when writers associated with *Voices*, Louis

Golding, Eden Philpotts and Thomas Moult, became more noticeable as a presence in

its pages. Leftwich only appeared in *Voices* once, in December 1920, with a rather vague

article on Russian literature. Earlier, however, Moult had singled out Leftwich's work

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[38] 'New Competition Without Entrance Fee to Subscribers to "Colour."', *Colour*, 1.4 (1914), 156.
[39] '"Colour" Competition – Prizes', *Colour*, 1.6 (1915), 201; A. P. Allinson, 'The Café', *Colour*, 2.1 (1915), 15.
[40] The magazine included 'contributions by modernists Iris Barry, Pound, John Rodker, and Osbert Sitwell (of whom only Pound contributed again)'; Beasley, I: BRITAIN AND IRELAND, 1880-1955, p. 500.
[41] 'Palette and Chisel', *Colour*, 2.4 (1915), 118–19 (p. 119).
[42] Leftwich, '"Jewish" London Fifty Years Ago', pp. 13–14.

in *Renesans* and *The Apple* for praise.[43] Given the overlap of contributors between *Voices*

and *Renesans*, it may not be unreasonable to see Leftwich's increased appearance in the

magazine as part of a larger trend. The importance Leftwich attached to *Colour* in later

accounts of his milieu is not entirely unjustified, but it may owe something both to its

importance in his own entry into print as well as to the correspondence of Leftwich's

tastes with those of *Colour*: aesthetically eclectic but inclining towards conservatism.

Jugend **and** *Colour*

The first issue of *Colour* was published in August 1914, the same month that the

Foreign Office announced a state of war between Great Britain and Germany. As the

editor of *Colour* would repeatedly, and somewhat defensively, acknowledge, it was an

odd time to start such a magazine.[44] The most obvious precedent for *Colour* was *Jugend*,

the Munich-based magazine which gave its name to *Jugendstil*, the German iteration of

Art Nouveau. Early reviews of *Colour* linked the magazine explicitly to *Jugend*, reviews

which *Colour* would in turn quote. For example, the *Observer* reported that *Colour*

> fully deserves to meet with the success which has attended the career of
>
> 'Jugend,' the famous Munich colour paper. The editors of 'Colour' seem to have
>
> worked with copies of 'Jugend' on their desks. In the quality of the numerous
>
> colour-plates, in format, and in general get-up, the English publication closely
>
> follows, and is no way inferior to, her elder German sister.[45]

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[43] Thomas Moult, 'A Survey of Contemporaries – January – February', *Voices*, 3.2 (1920), 84–86; Thomas Moult, 'A Survey of Contemporaries – The Month of March'.
[44] See, for example, Alfred Wilson Barrett, 'Untitled', *Colour*, 4.4 (1916), 121.
[45] '"Colour"', *Observer*, 19 July 1914, p. 9.

It is notable that the comparison is purely formal: the 'quality' of the Observer's review is ambiguous, but probably refers to the technical expertise in the printing process rather than in the painting itself. While it celebrates the publication of work by certain artists including Frank Brangwyn and Augustus John, the review complains about the amount of advertising material and, tellingly, observes that at times 'one scarcely knows how to distinguish' illustration from advert.

The comparison made by the *Observer* of *Colour* to *Jugend* implied competition as well as dangerous proximity, with the former the best way to diffuse the latter. The same tension would become more acute in later comparisons. The December 1915 issue of *Colour* quoted the *Morning Post* and ended on the bullish note that '[s]o long as the public are offered work of this class German competition after the war need not be feared.'[46] Colour-printing became one more theatre in which to achieve supremacy. From the beginning, then, *Colour* found itself in a position where it was using the form of an avant-garde German little magazine but defining itself against many of the expectations of what that form might mean. *Colour* had to define itself in

Front cover of the first double issue of *Jugend* (1896), digitised by Heidelberg University Library. The cover illustration, by Fritz Erler, shows a youth, Michael, who became a symbol of the magazine.

[46] 'The Success of "Colour"', *Colour*, 3.5 (1915), 172.

relation to war – in March 1916, the editor described *Colour* as a magazine 'whose existence has been bounded by the great War' – and its vision of art was similarly bound up in the terms of the war.[47] It would draw from aspects of *Jugend*'s agenda and presentation, but attempt to adapt them to a new idiom amenable to British wartime nationalism.

The initial double-issue of *Jugend*, printed in 1896, began with a page of text announcing the magazine's intentions. The 'Munich Weekly for Art and Life' did not have a '"Programme" in the bourgeois sense of the word', but its publisher, Georg Hirth, and editor, Fritz v. Ostini, held the belief that 'no area of public life should be excluded, but nor should one be placed in the foreground'.[48] Their subject was everything 'that is interesting, that moves the spirit – we want to bring everything that is beautiful, good, distinctive, lively – and truly artistic' and their programmelessness (Programmlosigkeit) meant not only that it was suitable reading material for anybody, but that their 'field of … activity is so vast' that anybody with the right spirit should have something they could submit to the magazine.[49] It aligned itself with the lively and youthful, but was careful to welcome 'the old with the young', so long as they fulfilled the requirement of being 'fresh-minded'. The first issues of *Jugend* only used colour for the images on the cover but, by 1913, several high-quality colour images could be found in each issue. A change in outlook had also taken place. At the end of

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[47] Barrett, 'Untitled'.

[48] Georg Hirth and Fritz von Ostini, 'Jugend: Münchner Wochenschrift Für Kunst Und Leben', *Jugend*, 1.1/2 (1896), 2 ['Ein <<Programm>> im spiessbürgerlichen Sinne des Wortes haben wir nicht'; '[k]ein Gebiet des öffentlichen Lebens soll ausgeschlossen, aber auch keines in den Vorgerdgrund gestellt werden'].

[49] Hirth and Ostini ['Wir wollen Alles besprechen und illustrieren, was interessant ist, was die Geister bewegt; wir wollen Alles bringen, was schön, gut charakteristisch, flott und – echt künstlerisch ist'].

the century, Beth Irwin Lewis argues, *Jugend* remained 'staunchly modern, German,

and popular', but it had 'begun to lose its light-hearted edge' and 'assumed a more

middle-class orientation'. At the same time, its increasing nationalism was reflected in

depictions of 'sturdy peasants in idealized German landscapes' and an increasing

number of antisemitic caricatures.[50]

The first issue of *Colour* had a much shorter, anonymous editorial preface.

Occasionally, editorship of the magazine has been attributed to the curator and art

historian T. Martin Wood, who signed prefaces to several of the early issues.[51]

However, an article in the *Manchester Guardian* published in December 1913 suggests

another figure was responsible. The article anticipated the publication of 'a new

monthly periodical somewhat on the lines of the Munich "Jugend"' the following year

and identified Alfred Wilson Barrett, the second son of the actor and playwright,

Wilson Barrett, as the editor.[52] Other sources confirm Barrett as editor of the

magazine.[53]

Barrett began his preface by denying the need of one. Although '[t]here was a

suggestion that this page should be reserved for the Editor in order that he might

express therein the aims and ideals which have led to the production of this first

number, and the impulses that will guide its progress in the future', he, 'after some

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[50] Beth Irwin Lewis, *Art for All? The Collision of Modern Art and the Public in Late Nineteenth Century Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 304.

[51] This mistake can be found, for example, in Cohen, p. 114.

[52] 'Our London Correspondence', *Manchester Guardian*, 29 December 1913, p. 6.

[53] See the obituary written for him by his widow in 'Deaths', *The Times*, 26 November 1945, p. 1; see also *Belgian Art in Exile: A Representative Gallery of Modern Belgian Art*, ed. by Ligue des Artistes Belges (London: *Colour*, 1916), p. 1; Mike Ashley, *The Age of Storytellers: British Popular Fiction Magazines, 1880-1950* (London; Delaware: British Library; Oak Knoll Press, 2006), p. 250 Ashley names E. A. Hoppé (presumably a mistake for the photographer E. O. Hoppé) as initially working as the magazine's Artistic Director.

hesitation, has come to the conclusion that at a time when there is far too much talk and far too little "do"', it is not worth using space in the magazine to express 'aims and ideals'. For, 'while in these commercial days it is necessary to blow one's own trumpet, it is, perhaps, better not to blow it inside one's own house'. The preface ends with an apology for the weaknesses of the first issues, which are to be indulged as 'a few wrinkles upon its infant brow'.[54]

In certain respects, the preface to *Colour* closely resembles *Jugend*'s statement. Like *Jugend*, *Colour* refuses to commit to a detailed agenda or programme, and the reason for this is linked to the factitiousness of the programmes on offer. However, where *Jugend* suggests that this failure is part of an old order, one that can be overcome by combining forces under the banner of youth, *Colour* does not connect its struggle to a general sea-change; it is rather a symptom of 'these commercial days'. The present is not something to be shaped into a future, but from which one can carve out a domestic space, a 'house', in which to take refuge. Youth is not a marker of freshness and strength but, signified by an 'infant brow', something vulnerable and to be indulged.

Jugend's rhetoric around youthfulness mapped onto the magazine's self-conscious provisionality. It was short, modestly priced and appeared with enough frequency to allow topicality, often expressed in the form of political caricatures. As such, its rejection of explicit doctrine could be phrased as an aspect of its readiness to change, and its role in a larger project of social and artistic regeneration. The magazine's slippage into a vehicle for expressing bourgeois tastes and prejudices as it grew older should perhaps not surprise us. It is, in a sense, consistent with its

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[54] Alfred Wilson Barrett, 'Introductory', *Colour*, 1.1 (1914), 2.

celebration of youth as an anti-bourgeois force. *Colour*, by contrast, did not commit itself to any such struggle in the first place. The magazine was presented as an end in itself. It was large in dimensions, consisted of about forty pages, and it was published monthly, rather than weekly like *Jugend*. The closest comparison that *Colour* had to the anti-clerical satire of *Jugend* was the gentle caricatures of senior members of the Church of England by Victoria Monkhouse. These owed more of their character to 'Spy' in *Vanity Fair* than to the German illustrated press. In fact, Wood attacked the latter in his preface to the
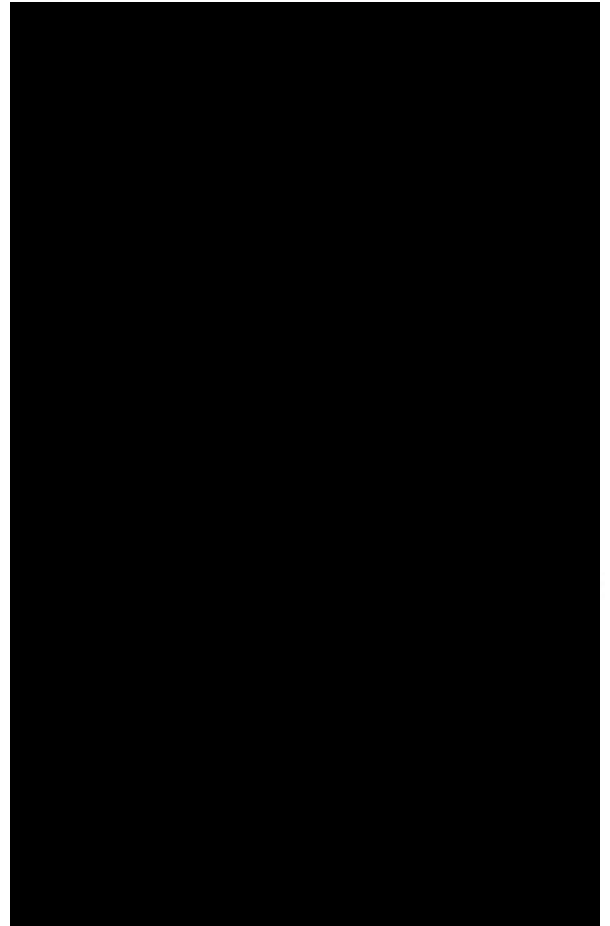
Victoria Monkhouse, 'Canon H. Scott-Holland', *Colour*, 1.3 (October 1914), p.117.

October 1914 issue, acknowledging their superior draughtsmanship when compared to English equivalents, but regretting their 'sinister choice of brutal forms'; it was 'the spirit reflected in this art that we contend against to-day in arms'.[55] In response, what *Colour* offered was rather insipid, but allowed it to pose a counterpoint to German art, seen as brutal and savage, whatever the objects of its satire. *Colour's* provisionality was in a sense generated by a need to give an immediate response to a shifting world, but it was the response of the advert and the middle-man. While *The Apple* would focus on monochrome prints designed for reproduction, *Colour*, as its name suggested,

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[55] T. Martin Wood, 'Our Illustrations', *Colour*, 1.3 (1914), 83.

specialised in colour reproduction. The magazine advertised its role as a middle man

for artists and buyers, while making a point that it did so without personal profit.[56]

The difference in terms of political orthodoxy can be explained partly by

location. *Jugend* was based in Munich, away from the centre of German political power

in Berlin. By contrast, the offices of *Colour* were on Victoria Street, Westminster, and its

printer was the Abbey Press on Great Peter Street, a three-minute walk away.

Although its preface was superficially similar to that of *Jugend*, *Colour*'s was more

amenable to English perceptions of England as a liberal, tolerant and level-headed

nation, as against the political extremity of other countries.[57] It was a self-image

defined almost by its lack of definition, and one which *Colour* made its own. However,

as the war continued and English nationalism altered in character, becoming more

explicitly xenophobic, a shift also took place in *Colour*.[58]

Pound's essay on small magazines attaches extreme importance to 'the clear

announcement of a program – any program'.[59] If the heritage from *Jugend* gives

justification for thinking of *Colour* as a little magazine, its catholicity is what challenges

that categorisation. An editorial statement in July 1915 proudly reported that the

magazine had received letters complaining about the prevalence of both futurist and

academic art in its pages. To both, *Colour* answered that they kept the futurist and the

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[56] See 'Palette and Chisel', *Colour*, 2.3 (1915), 79. The article claims to respond to rumours that the magazine was 'subsidized by, or run in the interests of, or in some way financially connected with, some commercial firm or individual'.

[57] See, for example, the preface to C. Russell and H. S. Lewis, *The Jew in London: A Study of Racial Character and Present-Day Conditions; Being Two Essays Prepared for the Toynbee Trustees* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1900), written by the Liberal MP James Bryce; the best account of how Jews fitted into and shaped English liberalism is to be found in Feldman, *Englishmen and Jews: Social Relations and Political Culture, 1840-1914*.

[58] Colin Holmes, p. 121.

[59] Ezra Pound, 'Small Magazines', *The English Journal*, XIX.9 (1930), 689–704 (pp. 702–3).

academic work 'because our net is wide and is cast to catch everyone who likes what is good and modern in whatever school, and if we had pleased either of them *entirely* we should have lost the other for ever'.[60] The 'modern' here is roughly synonymous with 'novel'.

Vorticist, Cubist and Futurist works were not heavily represented (possibly as much because of what was being submitted to *Colour* as what it would print), and the July 1915 Vorticist exhibition was reported by the magazine without enthusiasm, but also without particular hostility. The notice commented that some of the work, especially that by Gaudier-Brzeska, had already been shown elsewhere. There were no comments on the artwork itself, but there was a note of distrust directed at the 'Note for Catalogue' which 'tells us at great length what Vorticism means', although the exhibition includes work by Nevinson, whom the writer identifies as a Futurist, and Bernard Adeney, whose contribution is a 'naturalistic landscape'.[61] Similarly, W. Teignmouth Shore's review in the September 1915 issue of *Some Imagist Poets, an Anthology*, edited by H.D., praised Aldington, Lawrence (misspelt 'Laurence'), and Lowell, but took issue with the anthology's preface for making points either obvious or misguided. It also expressed irritation with the idea of a school of poets more generally, since 'poetry is the most individual of the arts' and the anthology was best understood as 'a collection of poems, good and bad' rather than the result of a meaningful or coherent programme.[62] The position is consistent with the policy of a magazine where in theory all are welcome so long as they do not insist that only their

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[60] Alfred Wilson Barrett, 'Our Christmas Number', *Colour*, 3.4 (1915), 115.
[61] 'Palette and Chisel', *Colour*, 2.6 (1915), 198.
[62] W. Teignmouth Shore, 'Books', *Colour*, 3.2 (1915), 70.

method is right. *Colour* set itself against the cliquishness of avant-garde groups, and did so in the name of consumers of art and with an understanding of art as something to be leafed through and chosen from without strict obligation. Any law beyond vaguely defined taste or common sense would be a needlessly divisive imposition.

Despite its pretensions to a programme, Shore still found the Imagist Anthology more appealing than the rest of the 'modern poetry' that he had been reading lately. He had been 'told [he] should worship' Brooke, Masefield and others, but had found their work 'immature, cold, usually quite uninspired'. The Imagist Anthology, however, brought him 'deep enjoyment'. He went further, writing that '[t]here is more true poetry in this small volume than in all Francis Thompson' and that he was gratified that he was not, as he had feared, becoming 'fossilized'. It seems likely that it is the poems' simplicity and rhetorical directness, or at least the appearance of such, perhaps combined with the magazine's interest in Japanese culture, that attracted Shore and elevated them above work by the Georgian anthologists and Thompson.[63] If we see Shore simply as a weathervane, signalling the transformation of Imagism into Amygism, Lawrence Rainey's characterisation of Imagism as 'the first anti-avant-garde' points to the possibility that the sympathies between magazine and movement ran deeper.[64] Imagism, 'informal, antitheoretical, absorbed in matters of writerly technique, and averse to more global programs that linked poetry to contemporary social transformations or posed questions about the status and functions of art', was in many ways well-suited to the sort of readership *Colour* aimed to cultivate.[65]

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[63] Shin, p. 62.
[64] Rainey, p. 30.
[65] Rainey, p. 30.

The very brevity of *Colour's* initial preface can be seen as demonstrating its belief that art and literature were objects to be enjoyed with a minimum of theorisation. Unlike the absorbedly technical quality of Imagism, however, the distrust of theory extended to anything it saw as an overcurious engagement with artwork. Despite a page for 'Connoisseurs' in early issues, concerned with antiques, the magazine deliberately shied away from engaging with the technical grounding of the paintings and other artworks that it reproduced.[66] In a November 1915 editorial statement, Barrett defended the presence of fiction in the pages of *Colour* rather than more technical discussion of art (poetry is not mentioned). The terms of his defence were twofold: firstly, that some readers enjoyed the 'little stories'; secondly, that 'we are not strictly speaking an art journal at all'. He explained:

> Our public is part, and it will soon be the whole, of that very large class of people who love good pictures without in the least desiring to know how they are made, without in many cases even desiring to know who made them, as one may like a good motor-car without wishing to know how it was put together, or a good horse without desiring to know its parents, and to a great part of our readers the technical side of art, and too much information about artists, their domestic life, and how they paint their pictures and do their hair, would merely throw them out of love with the pictures themselves.[67]

Barrett aims at a tone of blasé common sense and urbanity. When he writes that 'Artists, authors (we are an author) and actors should be mysterious beings', it is not

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[66] See, for example, A. W. Oxford, 'Connoisseur Page', *Colour*, 1.1 (1914), 35.
[67] Barrett, 'Our Christmas Number'.

the hieratic mystery of high modernism, but the discretion of an unintrusive waiter. Incidentally, it was a claim made good by his own reticence to include his name in the magazine. While *Colour* was advertised as 'the most fascinating magazine in the world', the editor made clear that that fascination was one of surface impression rather than a curiosity as to composition or creation, such instincts being trivial at best and invasive or perverse at worst.

Colour against Germany

Colour asked to be read on the level of surface and to be seen as a successor to *Jugend* only on the superficial level of style. It was a demand designed to defend the magazine from the charge of disloyalty, but one that became insufficient as time went on. The initial presentation of *Colour* as an open and liberal venue of art quickly altered. Where an article in October 1914 had presented as a self-evident error the idea that one should stop appreciating German music because of the war, the same issue had also included Wood's attack on German caricaturists.[68] A small unattributed drawing showing a Munich tavern was published in the magazine's sixth issue, drawn in a style approximating some of the *Jugend* caricaturists but also including the note that '[t]his picture is not
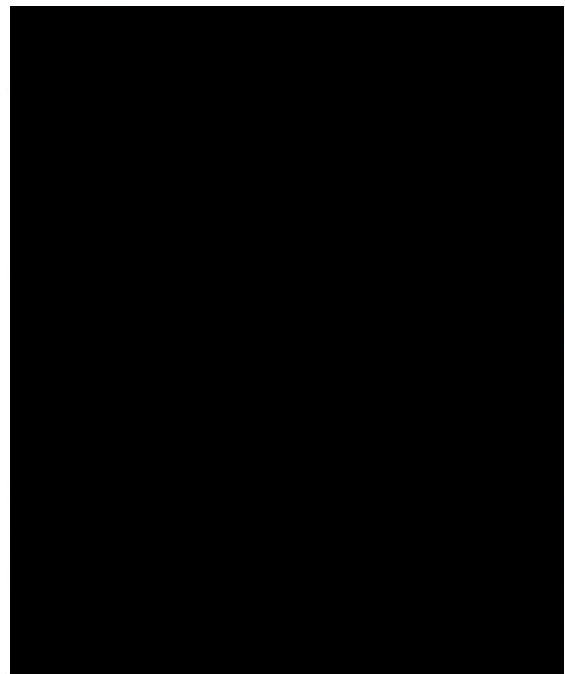
'Munich Beer', *Colour*, 1.6 (January 1915), p.216. The note appears at the bottom right of the picture.

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[68] Geoffrey Garrod, 'Music and the War', *Colour*, 1.3 (1914), 116.

intended as an inducement to people to deal with the enemy!'[69] Even without the

exclamation mark, the note would be recognizable as a joke, albeit a weak one, but it

marks a slide towards the same views held in earnest. As early as June 1915, Léon de

Smet was identified in brackets as 'the Belgian Artist'.[70] The identification anticipated a

key early initiative by *Colour* where the magazine published a book of colour plates by

the League of Belgian Artists, with profits going to the Belgian Red Cross among

others.[71] Other Belgian artists began to be similarly identified by nationality, and then

other artists too, somewhat haphazardly. It was only in the February 1916 issue that

the magazine attempted an explanation. Beneath a muted painting of poppies and toy

military figures, the artist was listed as H. Davis Richter, R.B.A. with a note that read:

> In view of the complicated relationships existing between European nations
>
> we think it desirable to give the nationality of artists whose names may
>
> suggest foreign extraction, however remote that may be.[72]

The note proceeded to give Richter's credentials as an Englishman – he was 'British by

birth, born at Brighton in 1874' and 'his family is intimately associated with the West of

England' – before it noted some places his work had been exhibited over the last year.

The cause for the note was generated by 'Richter' as a potentially German name, and

the anxiety not to appear to be supporting German artists.

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[69] Note to 'Munich Beer', *Colour*, 1.6 (1915), 216.
[70] Note to Léon de Smet, 'Portrait of John Galsworthy', *Colour*, 2.5 (1915), 178.
[71] Ligue des Artistes Belges; Shin comments on the book and discusses further publishing ventures by *Colour*; Shin, pp. 64–65; for further discussion of Belgian artists in wartime Great Britain, see Caterina Verdickt, '"My Heart Is Sore about Brave Belgium" – Artistic Exodus: Belgian Refugee Artists in Great Britain during the Great War', in *14/18 – Rupture or Continuity: Belgian Art around World War I*, ed. by Inga Rossi-Schrimpf and Laura Kollwelter (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2018), pp. 111–24.
[72] Note to Herbert Davis Richter, 'Untitled', *Colour*, 4.1 (1916), 9.

The anxiety was tied up with fears of crypto-German influence that became a

recognisable feature of English antisemitism during the war.[73] Thus, while they were

not the only ones affected, it is unsurprising that the names of several Jewish

immigrants published in *Colour* were marked in the same way. Two works by Mark

Weiner were followed by the reassurance of 'Russian' in brackets.[74] Only when he

changed his surname to the more Anglicised 'Wayner' was it allowed to stand alone.[75]

Jacob Kramer was similarly noted to be Russian.[76] In beginning to categorise its artists

in this way, the magazine had shifted substantially from a theoretical position where

anything outside the surface impression of an artwork was an unseemly irrelevance.

Now, the national identity of the artist was the one key piece of information to list, in

addition to fellowship of the Royal Academy. We can draw an analogy with the way

the role of the poet increasingly came to be understood during the war. The belief in a

coherent and authentic poetic voice of the sort we saw in *Voices*, one that received its

authority from the writer's experience, can be seen in embryonic development in

Colour. The latter magazine's position had been to some extent a natural progression

from the tactics of self-defence it felt obliged to adopt. Art went from being a relief or

even a counter to the war for a 'public which is interested in beauty and colour' to a

concerted part of the war effort.[77] The editor reminded his readers that, not only was

the magazine enjoyed by soldiers in trenches and dug-outs but that many of its artists

had served or were serving in the war.[78] The July 1915 issue reproduced drawings

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[73] Colin Holmes, p. 125.

[74] Mark Weiner, 'The Jew', *Colour*, 3.2 (1915), 66; Mark Weiner, 'Untitled', *Colour*, 3.3 (1915), 102.

[75] Note to Mark Wayner, 'Major L. Rothschild', *Colour*, 4.6 (1916), 214.

[76] Note to Jacob Kramer, 'Untitled', *Colour*, 4.5 (1916), 179.

[77] 'Palette and Chisel'.

[78] Barrett, 'Untitled'.

showing 'the

principal monuments

[of Diksmuide and

Dinant in Belgium]

which the hordes of

barbarians have

destroyed'.[79] These

could be bought as

postcards, and the

issue reassured the

Two of the postcards advertised in *Colour*, 2.6 (July 1915), p.225, showing the Church of St Nicolas in Diksmuide and a view over Dinant, both reduced to rubble in 1914.

reader that 'Every Set

you will mean some comfort for a wounded Belgian Soldier'.[80] If Germans

destroyed art, then the continued support of art became a patriotic duty and *Colour* had

a meaningful role to play in carrying it out. Yet the images still operated by an appeal

to another world: the monuments appear on the postcards in their pre-war, complete

and undestroyed state, while their rhetorical force comes from the loss of that

completeness. The magazine saw the increasing presence of stylised depictions of war

alongside the youthful Edenic art that recalls work in *Jugend*, but it became consigned

to a position where the only way art could become more than a triviality was through

its destruction. Again, there is an analogy with the cult of the war poet, who only

achieves credibility through his suffering and, ideally, death.

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[79] 'The Ruined Monuments of Belgium', *Colour*, 2.6 (1915), 224.
[80] Alfred Wilson Barrett, 'E Pur Si Muove!', *Colour*, 2.6 (1915), 197.

Rosenberg in *Colour*

Poetry was not a priority in *Colour*. It often seems intended merely to fill the white space of the page, either by being squashed and arranged around images or through aimless prolixity. 'Heart's First Word' and 'Wedded' both appeared on pages where a longer written piece ended and an image above left only a small white space. The squeezing results in a more complicated interaction of Rosenberg's poetry with its printed environment than might
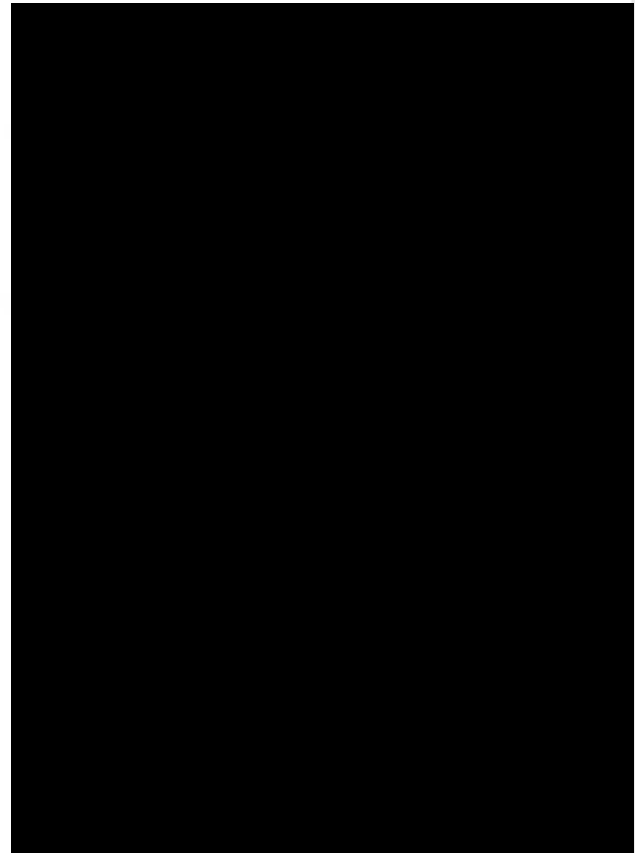
Maurice Langaskens, 'The Swans' and Isaac Rosenberg, 'Wedded', *Colour*, 3.1 (August 1915), p. 7.

otherwise be possible, as the poems follow the rhetoric of *Colour* up to a point but disturb its implications in certain respects.

The three poems by Rosenberg printed in *Colour* all involve a girl or woman, and a mystery, which is ineffable but clearly tied up with the knowledge of sex. With the focus on youth and newness apparent in 'A Girl's Thoughts' and 'Heart's First Word', they are well-chosen for the early *Colour* and its adoption of *Jugend*'s fascination with the bodies of girls and young women. These bodies decorate the contents of *Colour* both as small design flourishes and as full-page paintings. Where Beth Irwin

Lewis situates *Jugend*'s female bodies as part of a response to the anti-modern

incursions of the religious bourgeois, and points to Hirsch's editorials in the magazine

in defence of feminism, *Colour's* use seems less calculated.[81] There is a clear break

between the well-dressed affluent women who frequently appeared on its covers, and

the naked figures on the inside. The opening of the outwardly respectable magazine

serves to undress its models.

Rosenberg's 'Wedded' was published underneath a reproduction of a painting

'The Swans' by Maurice Langaskens, identified as a 'Belgian prisoner in Germany'.[82]

The image shows a naked woman bowing down to two swans on the edge of a body of

water. It suggests the folktales of swan maidens, where beings who can change forms

between women and birds become subject to the extortion of a man who steals their

swan-skin. At the same time, the image also acknowledges the visual tradition of Leda

and the Swan. Both allusions invest the image with menace and the painting professes

to show a scene of Edenic calm while hinting at the presence of male voyeurs and the

possibility of rape. The 'sigh-warm floating Eden' of 'Wedded' is to some extent a

counter to the moral framework of the painting: rather than Langaskens's implicit

opposition of innocence and sex, the latter only approaching the painting through

violence, the Eden of Rosenberg's poem is identified with sex. However, at the same

time, the poem's subjects are 'by past kisses chidden', and sexual knowledge is

suggested as the cause of the Fall. The small poem, slotted into the page, does little to

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[81] Beth Irwin Lewis, *Art for All? The Collision of Modern Art and the Public in Late Nineteenth Century Germany*, pp. 297–301.
[82] Isaac Rosenberg, 'Wedded', *Colour*, 3.1 (1915), 7.

disrupt the larger code of the magazine, but it poses a modicum of resistance to Langaskens's disingenuous image.

It is not unreasonable to see the crabbed syntax of much of Rosenberg's poetry and its open struggle with the expression of an idea 'understandable and still ungraspable' as being directly at odds with the magazine, whose forms of artistic pleasure involved entertainment and ingestion rather than a sense of desired knowledge withheld or unreachable.[83] However, the magazine also frequently found pleasure in titillation, a tendency that has at least some structural affinity with the delayed gratification of Rosenberg's withheld meaning. A short story by Rosenberg, unpublished during his life, describes a painter, Rudolph, who believes that 'the art of painting was the art of leaving out, and the pleasure in beholding a picture was the pleasure of finding out.'[84] The emphasis on the pleasure of working through obscurity is a useful counterpoint to the more doggedly heroic aspect it assumes elsewhere in Rosenberg's writing.[85] It also points to possible sympathies between poet and magazine.

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[83] Isaac Rosenberg, *Isaac Rosenberg*, p. 305.
[84] Isaac Rosenberg, *Isaac Rosenberg*, p. 199.
[85] See, for example, the 1917 letters to Winifreda Seaton, in which he defends his poetry with more vigour than he attempts with other correspondents; Isaac Rosenberg, *Isaac Rosenberg*, p. 353.

Section of a double-page spread from *Colour*, 2.5 (June 1915), showing Isaac Rosenberg's 'Heart's First Word' as it appeared opposite Arnold Palmer's 'The Boys are Marching'.

More significant than the appearance of Rosenberg's poems in the magazine was the poetic use he made of it in another work. 'Heart's First Word' was printed in June 1915, filling a space left by an article by Louis Zangwill on Rodin. It appeared opposite 'The Boys are Marching' by Arnold Palmer, and the influence of Palmer's piece can be seen in Rosenberg's 'Marching – as seen from the left file', written after he enlisted in October 1915. 'The Boys are Marching' copes with the obligation to fill space more wittily than some. It dramatizes the process of writing a page-filler by making it part of the psychology of being drilled for war, where the brain searches for something to occupy itself over a fixed period of time, where '[i]f you can't think, you must look at something'. The opening description of marching – '[a] hundred-and-twenty steps a

minute during two hours' – forces the writer's attention on the back of the person in front of him:

> I shouldn't think there's a man alive who knows his wife's face as I know Pearson's back. Khaki, black, red, black, khaki, black. First, there's his khaki hat. Round the bottom of that is a black rim – grease off his hair. Then there's his black hair, below which is an isthmus of shining red neck. Then comes a black rim round the top of his tunic – grease off his neck. The rest of him is khaki, except his boots, which are black. But none of his khaki matches.[86]

In 'Marching – seen from the left file', Rosenberg recycles aspects of Palmer's prose:

> My eyes catch ruddy necks
>
> Sturdily pressed back –
>
> All a red brick moving glint.
>
> Like flaming pendulums, hands
>
> swing across the khaki –
>
> Mustard-coloured khaki-
>
> To the automatic feet.[87]

Rosenberg has taken the fixation on a red neck, the exploitation of the 'k' sounds of 'khaki' with nearby 'k's (including 'neck' and 'back'), and the use of verbal repetition as analogous to the repetition of marching movement. Rosenberg's acceptance of or

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[86] Arnold Palmer, 'The Boys Are Marching', *Colour*, 2.5 (1915), 165–66 (p. 165).
[87] Isaac Rosenberg, *Isaac Rosenberg*, p. 102.

sympathy with some of the tropes of *Colour* combined with his divergence from others meant that 'Wedded' enters a fruitful dialogue with the image above it. His reading of *Colour*, or possibly only of the piece next to his own poem, shows a counter-motion and the creative redirection of those tropes.

Rosenberg draws from Palmer's piece in specific linguistic play. It also draws more generally from the attitude of *Colour* towards image and criticism, exemplified in Shore's review of the Imagists, which celebrates the clarity of image over complexity of theorisation. Rather than simply accepting the model in 'Marching', Rosenberg uses that position as a salve to certain tastes and as a platform to the second part of the poem, which is more complex and less suggestive of visual observation, more like Thompson whom Shore dismisses than the Imagists he praises. In the second part of the poem, the banality of Palmer's soldier is replaced by heroism, 'ancient glory | In these bared necks and hand'. However, as the soldiers are raised to the mythic level, forged by the god of war, so too are the forces amassed against them. If 'the hoofs of death' are now shoed by a 'subtler brain' in an age of mechanised warfare that makes 'ancient glory' outmoded, the arbitrariness of death meted out by the war renders the soldiers even more vulnerable:

> Blind fingers loose an iron cloud
>
> To rain immortal darkness
>
> On strong eyes.

Whereas God had been a figure for the poet to hoodwink in 'God Made Blind', the threat now is of a divine blindness or indifference that kills arbitrarily.

Rosenberg's use of Palmer is worth commenting on for two reasons. Firstly, it helps challenge the idea that Rosenberg's experiences in the Western Front affected how directly or vividly he treated subjects, an idea that owes more to practices of reading war poetry than it does to the evidence of Rosenberg's development as a poet. By looking at his work in *Colour*, one can see a different context for Rosenberg's increased use of simply-phrased visual description. The study of 'Marching' suggests a stylistic evolution that was primarily textual, rooted in Rosenberg's response to writing and its reception, rather than a natural and inevitable response to changed circumstances. Secondly, that Palmer's text influenced Rosenberg's writing outside of the magazine, apparently by virtue of its chance placement by the editor, gives an example of how the contingencies inherent in the form of the little magazine can enter even the fabric of poetry not published in them. It is fitting that 'Killed in Action' – which, by contrast to Rosenberg's three poems, is clear in its meaning and rooted in a moment that can be mapped onto an actual event – should come with the movement into *Colour* of the *Voices* crowd, with its own emphasis on the honesty and singularity of the poem's speaking voice. And, to some extent, it is appropriate that the poem should not in fact be his. As Rosenberg was posthumously drawn into the category of war poetry, the contingencies and specificities of his life in the East End and the carefully negotiated formal questions of his poetry were stripped away. As a result, he could more easily fit the standard template of the war poet whose excellence comes from his suffering and his ability to communicate that suffering with clarity.

Rosenberg and War Poetry

Colour helped Rosenberg develop a poetics that gave a new primacy to an image-complex drawn from the visible world rather than abstractions given visual attributes. It was a shift no doubt encouraged by Rosenberg's reading of the Imagist poet F. S. Flint and the *Georgian Poetry* anthologies.[88] It is the shift which has also served as useful hinge for analyses of Rosenberg's poetic progress, a shift usually attributed to the war.

From a 1915 draft letter from Rosenberg to Pound, it appears that the latter anticipated what has become the standard narrative of Rosenberg's poetic progression. Rosenberg wrote that '[a]s to your suggestion about the army I think the world has been terribly damaged by certain poets (in fact any poet) being sacrificed in this stupid business.'[89] Rosenberg himself offered some support for the idea of the war helping his development as a poet. Recovering in a military hospital in Bury St Edmunds later the same year after a fall during training, Rosenberg wrote to Sydney Schiff. He acknowledged that there was the possibility that '[o]ne might succumb, be destroyed' in the war, but added hopefully that 'one might also (and the chances are even greater for it) be renewed, made larger, healthier'.[90] Later letters saw Rosenberg turn to the opposite belief. The final letter he wrote ends by remarking that his poetic judgment was faulty from not reading poetry and that his 'vocabulary small enough before is

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[88] Rosenberg had read Flint's *The Net of Stars* (1909) by January 1911 and Edward Marsh sent him *Georgian Poetry, 1911-1912* in 1914. See Isaac Rosenberg, *Isaac Rosenberg*, pp. 233, 257.

[89] Isaac Rosenberg, *Isaac Rosenberg*, p. 275.

[90] Isaac Rosenberg, *Isaac Rosenberg*, p. 281.

impoverished and bare', a description that corresponds with Stephen Winsten's account of the effects of solitary confinement.[91]

Despite Jon Silkin's now familiar argument that the war was an episode in Rosenberg's poetic development rather than the generative point it was for Wilfred Owen, there lingers a sense that experience of war improved Rosenberg's poetry.[92] If the foregoing analysis of Rosenberg's place in *Colour* allows us to see an alternative chronology and motivation for such a development, that does not mean that the war had no effect on Rosenberg's poetry. There is, firstly, of course, the subject matter of the Western Front: the trenches, parapets, heaped stones, heaped bodies, fleas. As these became, to varying extents, recognisable symbols and clichés of the war, they increasingly lent themselves to a more oblique, allusive deployment. So, while mud does not appear in any of Rosenberg's finished poems specifically located in the trenches, the clogged landscape of *The Amulet* and the mud and lice of Egypt in *Moses* both gesture towards the conditions in which they were composed as much as the distant worlds they describe. The mud-stained manuscript of *The Amulet* makes the point eloquently.

We can also observe a change in Rosenberg's approach to favoured themes. Death threads its way through much of Rosenberg's small corpus, as we should expect from a keen reader of Donne, Rossetti and Thompson. The 'lit-faced shadows' of

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[91] Isaac Rosenberg, *Isaac Rosenberg*, p. 364; Stephen Winsten, 'Winsten, Stephen Samuel (Oral History)', reel 9.

[92] Jon Silkin, *Out of Battle: The Poetry of the Great War*, 2nd edn (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1998), p. 261; Wilson's 2007 biography maintains that the conditions of the Western Front led Rosenberg to reject 'the last vestiges of the derivative Romanticism which had marked his poetry as late as mid-1915', 'focused his perception and gave his work an immediacy and edge it had previously lacked'; Wilson, *Isaac Rosenberg: The Making of a Great War Poet: A New Life*, p. 13.

'Night and Day' could 'feel the skeleton rattle as they go', but here and elsewhere in Rosenberg's earlier poems, death is part of life and life is typically represented as a brief, uneasy disruption of death's rule, as in 'Midsummer Frost'. Rosenberg's later work introduces the possibility of sudden death, which in turn leads him to alter the way death is used to structure the poems. As with the vivid description discussed in the previous section, the shift anticipates Rosenberg's arrival in the trenches and suggests an imaginative engagement with the possibility of sudden death anticipating the exposure to it that characterised trench warfare. 'Chagrin', for example, written around 1914-1915, has an intermediary character. The speaker asks for an end to 'this hanging death' but concludes with an image of us 'suddenly […] lifted of all we know', hanging 'from implacable boughs'. Death is the suspension in which we already find ourselves; but it is also there as the transcendent removal with which the poem ends. Increasingly, the latter form dominates, with the threat of sudden death occupying a central place in the poems and set more firmly in opposition to life. The core of the poem is thus not only something beyond full apprehension or expression, like the inspiration of 'Night and Day', but also the negation and opposite of being, of apprehension and of expression.

In poetic terms, the outcome can hinge rather reductively on these generative opposites. At their best, however, Rosenberg's poems convincingly stage a confrontation of death and being that also confronts the extent of their implication in one another. These are achieved not in spite of Rosenberg's debts to pre-Raphaelite and late Romantic poetry, but through them, balancing their model of death against the sudden, apparently arbitrary offerings of the Western Front. At times, as in 'In the

Trenches', the revelation of death risks landing as a punchline. However, Rosenberg's

syntax, complex and at times obscure, usually helps to avoid this result by making the

revelation of the core of death a more graduated process, in which the time of the poem

comes to be identified with historical time. The experience of reading the poem thus

becomes a struggle to achieve meaning that can only resolve itself in the discovery of

death, a discovery that undoes that poem's material.

To explore the implications of this development in Rosenberg's work, I will

discuss two poems: 'Returning, we hear the larks' and 'Daughters of War'. If the first

has been discussed less than 'Break of Day in the Trenches', it has still received a

disproportionate amount of attention compared to Rosenberg's other work. Outside

Silkin's sensitive attention and book-length studies of Rosenberg and his work, the

second has been discussed only sparingly. This does not in itself make the poem

especially worthy of attention, but Rosenberg attached particular importance to it,

singling it out as his 'best poem' in a note to Rodker.[93] The comparative study of

'Returning, we hear the larks' and 'Daughters of War' should not only make clearer the

techniques at work in both, but also begin to adumbrate the priorities that have

informed Rosenberg's posthumous reception.

'Returning, we hear the larks'

Initially, 'Returning, we hear the larks' seems to obey the same structural logic as

'Marching – as seen from the left file', and the similarity of the titles is not incidental. In

both cases, a continuous verb, the execution of which is tedious, is interrupted. In

'Marching', it is interrupted by a change of perspective; in 'Returning', by the larks'

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[93] Isaac Rosenberg, *Isaac Rosenberg*, p. 390.

song. The imagery of 'Returning' had also to some extent been anticipated in 'Marching', and the latter poem's rain of immortal darkness. But where 'Marching' is charged by the possibility that heroic strength and prophetic vision can suffer annihilation, the heroism is largely absent in 'Returning'. The speaker observes that 'though we have our lives, we know | what sinister threat lurks there', and 'there' sits ambiguously, able to refer back to the night of the first line, or to the lives themselves. That knowledge is then further restricted:

> Dragging these anguished limbs, we only know
>
> This poison-blasted track opens on our camp –
>
> On a little safe sleep.

The opening clause can be understood as causing the restrictions on knowledge, keeping it confined within the narrow boundaries of the 'poison-blasted track'. The larks' song serves as a disruption on various levels: it draws the soldiers and readers out of the constraints of the track; the imperatives of 'hark!' and '[l]o!' break from the indicatives that precede them, while demanding the reader's sensory engagement. Of course, this demand cannot be fulfilled. What is presented as a return to sensual experience beyond anguish in fact signals the poem's turn towards a set of three similes:

> Like a blind man's dreams on the sand
>
> By dangerous tides,
>
> Like a girl's dark hair for she dreams no ruin lies there,

> Or her kisses where a serpent hides.[94]

Their accumulation is, on the one hand, a method of dramatizing failed recognition. One simile yields to the next without attaining a sufficiently encompassing representation of the experience to stand alone. As such, it is an expansive form of a statement of ineffability. But, in the process of reading, the similes do not erase each other in sequence. Their accumulated impression is development and addition: dreams become hair become kisses. The movement is towards immanence, and towards palpability. It is also towards a greater disruption within the simile itself.

On account of the previous description of showering and dropping song, the 'dreams on the sand' initially sound like new missiles landing on a beach; however, we soon resolve them into the blind man on the sand whose dreams endanger him in the presence of rising tides. The dreams return as verb in the next simile, and while the general sense is fairly accessible, there is ambiguity as to whom the ruin threatens – the girl or another? There is a richer ambiguity in the meaning of the conjunction 'for', which seems poised both to attempt to gloss the simile in its presentation ('here is why the song is like hair'), and to suggest that the danger lies only in her ignorance. The threat is focussed primarily on a (male) lover, not only by the following line which refines the purpose to a more articulated image of the *femme fatale*, but by its allusiveness. Against John Holmes's argument that Rosenberg 'turn[ed] his back […] on Rossetti's aesthetic if not on his morbidity',[95] we can hear in Rosenberg's description of the hair an allusion to Rossetti's Lilith in 'Eden Bower' (1869):

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[94] Isaac Rosenberg, *Isaac Rosenberg*, p. 113.
[95] John Holmes, p. 164.

> All the threads of my hair are golden
>
> And there in a net his heart was holden[96]

and

> Wreathe thy neck with my hair's bright tether,
>
> And wear my gold and thy gold together[97]

While the figure of Lilith is discussed in various Jewish sources, Rossetti's version probably draws primarily on Goethe's *Faust*.[98] In 'Eden Bower', she addresses the Snake as lover and conspirator, seeking to overthrow Adam and Eve. This union underpins some of the ties between the hair, snake and kiss of Rosenberg's poem. Rosenberg's hiding serpent has also been anticipated by the 'poison-blasted track', and the soldiers' own recognition of lurking threat.

These allusions are overlaid by a more extended echo of Emerson's 'Each and All' (c.1837), a poem that Rosenberg singled out in a 1915 letter to Winifreda Seaton as 'deep and beautiful', showing the 'kind of beaminess' characteristic of Emerson's poetry, 'like a dancing of light in light'.[99] Emerson's light has been replaced by dark, but in both there is an imaginative movement from birdsong to shoreside to a woman. Emerson considers first a sparrow, then shells by 'the bellowing of a savage sea', then a lover's 'graceful maid'.[100] The tenor has changed: Emerson's poem might be

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[96] Rossetti, p. 44.
[97] Rossetti, p. 47.
[98] Rossetti, p. 304.
[99] Isaac Rosenberg, *Isaac Rosenberg*, p. 271.
[100] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Emerson's Prose and Poetry*, ed. by Joel Porte and Saundra Morris (New York; London: W. W. Norton, 2001), p. 433.

understood as a celebration of qualia and the impossibility of an artificially maintained experience, though it extends to a larger argument about the relationship between beauty and truth. The poet 'thought the sparrow's note from heaven, | Singing at dawn on the alder bough' but having 'brought him home, in his nest at even', he finds that something is lost: the sparrow 'sings his song, but it pleases not now, | For I did not bring home the river and sky'.[101] Rosenberg's reconstruction of the movement of Emerson's poem highlights the fragility of the moment of transcendence its soldiers achieve, a structural confirmation of the recognition that 'Death could drop from the dark | As easily as song', but, more than this, that death and the decay of pleasure is the inevitable follower.

At the same time there is a reversal: where Emerson balances initial pleasure with subsequent disappointment, Rosenberg has the startling arrival of a 'strange joy' appear in the context of pained tedium. The sudden leap from that joy to the similes seems to dramatize the unavailable leisure of an emotion recollected in tranquillity. That unavailability is not to be understood as a rejection of Romantic poetics as inadequate to modern warfare, as a Fussellian reading might have it. Instead, it is a response to the possibility of sudden death. Emersonian transcendence is mingled with the dangerous seductions of Rossetti's work, and its marriage of these poetic models underpins the strangeness of the poem's joy.

I have dwelt particularly on Rosenberg's combination of source materials because it counters the tendency to see Rosenberg as a poet responding directly to the war rather than one who integrates the sensory data of the war into a sophisticated

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[101] Emerson, p. 432.

poetic system, though not without alterations to that system. There is the risk that this emphasis comes at the expense of acknowledging the real material constraints and forces on Rosenberg. In key respects, 'Returning' is a product of Rosenberg's status as a private rather than an officer. Rosenberg sent out short and unpolished work when he could, since 'one never knows whether you'll get a tap on the head or not'.[102] And, whereas officer-poets had periods of rest, and greater ease in terms of material and storage, Rosenberg was writing on scraps of paper 'from tea to lights out' and without privacy.[103] The abruptness and urgency of the poem, its depiction of startled recognition reminiscent of the 'paroxysm' that Rodker put at the heart of contemporary poetic production, also express the specific conditions of their composition. If it has been accepted as simple truth-telling, this is in part because Rosenberg dramatizes the processes of thought forced by those conditions in a way not entirely dissimilar to Arnold Palmer.

'Daughters of War'

Rosenberg sent Rodker a typescript of 'Returning' on which he made a note: 'I will send you when I get it typed a poem I call Daughters of War, done in the grand style, but I think my best poem.'[104] With some exceptions, critics have not shared Rosenberg's high estimate of 'Daughters of War'.[105] Santanu Das's comment is probably representative: that '[w]hile [Rosenberg's] longer poems such as 'Daughters of War' or his ambitious verse play 'The Unicorn' are locked in a private mythological world, his

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[102] Isaac Rosenberg, *Isaac Rosenberg*, p. 355.
[103] Isaac Rosenberg, *Isaac Rosenberg*, p. 357.
[104] Isaac Rosenberg, *Isaac Rosenberg*, p. 390.
[105] Leavis praised it as 'great poetry'; F. R. Leavis, 'The Recognition of Isaac Rosenberg', *Scrutiny*, 6.2 (1937), 229–34 (p. 234); Cohen sees in it Rosenberg's 'definitive statement of the feminine principle'; Cohen, p. 159.

shorter – and often more successful – trench poems inhabit the local geography, as does 'Break of Day in the Trenches".[106] If 'Returning' sits somewhere in the middle on a spectrum of Rosenberg's poetry between the rooted and the mythological, then 'Daughters of War' can be seen to push further into the mythological. 'Returning' marks one of Rosenberg's attempts to bridge between two levels of material and ideal, but the material comes into 'Daughters of War' only glancingly.

We can see in 'Daughters of War' the tension Rosenberg expressed in his remark to Laurence Binyon that 'I would like to do imaginative work [in painting] but I have hardly attempted anything – practising portraiture mostly as I feel that is the most paying – and one must live.'[107] 'Daughters of War' is 'imaginative work', maintained in 'the grand style'. The poem does not give the ready recognition of description, nor the relief of a material footing. Even the tree that dominates the opening section is 'the tree of life', too invested with symbolic freight to invite questions about what species of tree it is or what its leaves look like. As such, it fails certain criteria that we might bring to bear on it, such as a sense of immediacy or visual precision. However, it comes closer to the qualities Rosenberg praised in Thompson, poetry that is 'richly coloured without losing that mysteriousness, the hauntingness which to me is the subtle music – the soul to which the colour is flesh and raiment.'[108] The pursuit of something as nebulous as 'hauntingness' exposes Rosenberg's poetry to charges like those of Yeats: 'all windy rhetoric'.[109] But its fascination with the

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[106] Santanu Das, *Touch and Intimacy in First World War Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 96.

[107] Isaac Rosenberg, *Isaac Rosenberg*, p. 237.

[108] Isaac Rosenberg, *Isaac Rosenberg*, p. 237.

[109] Cohen, p. 181.

undefinable, and its sense of the way in which those qualities can characterise style as well as content, make it a model unusually well-suited to the treatment of death, which is beyond capture by mind or experience.

The poem had a long gestation, and Rosenberg reworked it over the course of a year with particular attention to the opening stanza. At one point, he toyed with the idea of including a line that would have fixed the poem to a greater extent. In a 1917 letter to Gordon Bottomley, Rosenberg asked his advice on a line that would read either 'Before the pierced voice has ceased in the tree tops' or 'Before the <?faded> expiring voice has ceased in the boughs'.[110] Either would have given the poem more of a setting, or at least the impression of a material occasion generating the more mythological material. It would have also put the poem in clearer dialogue with 'Returning', where lark-song hints at the whistle of a shell. Instead, the poem begins with the line: 'Space beats the ruddy freedom of their limbs–', where the active verb belongs to the absence surrounding bodies and colour belongs to the abstract noun 'freedom' rather than the limbs. We attribute the limbs to the Daughters from the title, and because they dance with 'man's spirit naked', a process of negative definition that anticipates the difficulties of attribution that run through the poem.

What material description there is in the poem fastens onto the Daughters and the men. Charles Tomlinson criticised the poem for 'purple writing' and Blakean excess of language.[111] Putting aside the question of value for the moment, we can also see an analogue of Tomlinson's comments in the poem's subject matter as well as its

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[110] Isaac Rosenberg, *Isaac Rosenberg*, p. 342.
[111] Charles Tomlinson, *Isaac Rosenberg of Bristol* (Bristol: Bristol Branch of the Historical Association, 1982), pp. 15–16.

treatment. The Daughters, 'mighty daughters' and 'strong everliving Amazons', are

reminiscent of the giant women of Franz von Stuck or Robert Crumb. The men too, the

'we' of the first section of the poem, though under the control of the Daughters, are still

shaped in a heroic mould: they are 'best sculptures of Deity, | And sinews lusted after

| By the Archangels tall.' The description associates the men with the 'daughters of

men' whom the 'sons of god' take as wives in Genesis. D. H. Lawrence had adapted

the same idea in *The Rainbow* (1915), with Ursula Brangwen secretly aspiring to one of

the Sons of God rather than the 'servile' and 'cringing' Adam.[112] For Lawrence, the idea

is, at least in part, a Nietzschean inheritance, as Ursula and the novel seek an

alternative to Christian moral strictures by rejection of Christianity's contaminating

Jewish prehistory. By associating with this alternative race, one can dodge the burden

of biblical history and its obligations, including Original Sin. Rosenberg's use is

different. The emphasis seems to be more on the range of powers directed at men: we

are not presented with a benevolent God to offset the Daughters, but a counter-image

of equally predatory Archangels.[113]

 With the lust of the Archangels set in a timeframe before the conquest of the

Daughters, there is the suggestion of death as a release from homoeroticism into the

fulfilment of heterosexual union. The world of war and heroism is not, then,

exclusively masculine, but one which prepares the man for a more mythic union with

woman. 'Returning' had offered a similar vision: the transcendence of lark-song, with

its shadow-image of the transcendence of death, is presented both as man's fantasy ('a

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[112] Lawrence, *The Rainbow*, p. 271.

[113] Maccoby finds an allusion to the angels in Lot's house described in Genesis; Deborah Maccoby, *God Made Blind: Isaac Rosenberg; His Life and Poetry* (Northwood: Jews in Modern Culture Symposium Press, 1999), p. 190.

blind man's dreams') and as deathly woman. In its essence, this is no 'private

mythology', but a variation on the *femmes fatales* of *fin de siècle* poetry, familiar

especially from Rossetti and Swinburne. Rosenberg's key innovation is to extend the

crisis that the *femme fatale* initiates from the individual crisis of the enchanted male poet

into a public sphere. Private death and private succumbing are expanded. In the

description of 'our corroding faces | That must be broken – broken for evermore' there

are the traces of the loss of individuation that the transformation implies. The head of

the anonymous soldier, crushed by a wheel in 'Dead Man's Dump', becomes law

rather than exception as men's faces are erased, leaving indistinguishable skulls.

Like 'Returning', the poem begins with the description of a continuous general

action followed by a revisiting and reinterpretation of that action. Here, the Daughters'

dance and their transfiguration of the men is the continuous action, and the last two

stanzas of the poem present an isolated utterance. The one speaking in the final stanza

has traditionally been identified as one of the Daughters, though it is significant that

Rosenberg avoids the clarification that a pronoun would have given. The voice speaks

of how '[m]y sisters force their males | From the doomed earth', and a 1917 letter to

Edward Marsh identifies the speaker as an '"Amazon" [...] without her lover yet',

waiting for him to be released through death.[114]. In both 'Returning' and 'Daughters of

War', the interruption is associated with sudden death. In the former, it is the threat of

death in the middle of a 'poison-blasted track'; in 'Daughters of War', it is the

anticipation of a specific death that takes place within the ongoing system of dying.

The significance of this is twofold. Firstly, it helps Rosenberg develop what he

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[114] Isaac Rosenberg, *Isaac Rosenberg*, p. 341.

described as the main object of 'Daughters of War': the depiction of the inexorable, in life and beyond.[115] Where 'Returning' hinges on the uncertainty of the soldiers' fate even while gesturing towards inevitability, 'Daughters of War' inhabits a mythic level that attempts to domesticate death. It does so, not in the sense of making it prosaic, but in showing it to be as much a part of being as is life. Secondly, the utterance suggests the return to historical time in the poem, but with a difference. The utterance itself seems to be heard by the dead men,

> Whose new hearing drunk the sound
>
> Where pictures lutes and mountains mixed
>
> With the loosed spirit of a thought,
>
> Essenced to language.[116]

Death brings the men new powers of hearing and understanding. They are able to catch the 'loosed spirit of a thought', their own spirits having been released from their bodies by death. The release of the spirit of thought allows it a synaesthetic fullness ('pictures lutes and mountains mixed'). The word '[e]ssenced' suggests a further sense – the essences of perfumes – but it goes beyond the sensory to the intrinsic or essential, a purified union between thought and language. It is worth dwelling on this aspect of the poem because it provides evidence against Silkin's argument that Rosenberg's poems from the trenches show that he quickly cast off any belief that 'war might cleanse or was anything but an "affliction"'.[117] However critical his view of the war

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[115] Isaac Rosenberg, *Isaac Rosenberg*, p. 341.

[116] Isaac Rosenberg, *Isaac Rosenberg*, p. 118.

[117] Silkin, *Out of Battle: The Poetry of the Great War*, p. 275; this is a change from the view Silkin expressed in 1959 that Rosenberg's work 'never glosses over [...] as he conceived it, war's

could be in his correspondence, Rosenberg's poetry did not relinquish the possibility of

the war bringing rebirth and transformation.[118] Similarly, his dismissal of patriotic

motives did not stop him from producing a 'patriotic gush jingo spasm' (as he

described the poem 'Pozières' in a letter to Rodker), even in France.[119] That is not to say

that the possibility is not exposed to irony within the poems: whatever purity is won in

'Daughters of War' is won only in death. But to ignore that Rosenberg continues to

make poetic use of the possibility is to obscure how his poems work, and to sanitise

them.

With the utterance of the Daughter, the poem enters historical-mortal time, in

which a single death can be anticipated rather than seen only in terms of a timeless

dance of the dead and dying. Roditi's characterisation of Rosenberg's interpretation of

the war feels here especially just, its 'finite metamorphosis of the infinite, an

incarnation of becoming in being.'[120] The moment is also implicitly a return to the time

in which the reader encounters the poem, and the union that it describes of thought

and language is in ironic counterpoint to the struggle to achieve meaning that the

reader brings to bear. Rather than having that struggle take place within a neatly

progressive structure, the sudden arrival into historic time offers rupture instead, but a

rupture that is located within recurrence. The insistent repetitions of the poem make

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possible discovering, or developing of man's strength', and that Rosenberg died too young to
see '[t]hat war does not cleanse the earth, and rarely strengthens, but brutalises man's spirit';
Jon Silkin, 'The Poetry of Isaac Rosenberg', in *Isaac Rosenberg, 1890-1918: A Catalogue of an
Exhibition Held at Leeds University May-June 1959, Together with the Text of Unpublished Material*
(Leeds: University of Leeds; Partridge Press, 1959), pp. 1–3 (p. 2).

[118] Vivien Noakes, 'War Poetry, or the Poetry of War? Isaac Rosenberg, David Jones, Ivor
Gurney', in *The Oxford Handbook of British and Irish War Poetry*, ed. by Tim Kendall (Oxford:
Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 174–89 (p. 179).

[119] Isaac Rosenberg, *Isaac Rosenberg*, p. 315.

[120] Edouard Roditi, 'Isaac Rosenberg et La Poésie Judéo-Anglaise', *L'Illustration Juive*, 12, 1931,
22–27 (p. 27) ['une métamorphose finie de l'infini, une incarnation du devenir dans l'être'].

that recurrence felt throughout. It takes various forms: the same or similar adjectives are applied to different nouns ('Their naked dances with man's spirit naked'); the repetition of phrases across the poem ('mighty daughters'), including in direct succession ('no softer lure – | No softer lure'). There is also the return of words as different parts of speech such as the 'gleams' of line 6, and the hands that 'gleam up' in line 52, the word's return set up by 'gloomed' and 'glee' in the preceding lines. The repetition of specific words takes place within larger patterns of syntactic parallelism ('From the doomed earth, from the doomed glee'). The sudden emergence of end-rhymes in the third stanza ('faces', 'embraces', 'faces') almost suggests a lyrical interlude but, as with death in the poem, the end rhymes are pronounced examples rather than an aberration. They are woven into a form where their repetition of sound makes them characteristic rather than unique.

One draft has the poem end with what in the published edition is line 39: 'Leaving grey ashes to the wind – to the wind'. It would instead now end with a line, which in its cadence anticipates Laurence Binyon's 'For the Fallen':

But these shall not see them,

Or think of them in any days or years,

They are my sisters' lovers in other days and years.[121]

The repetition, along with a switch from negative to positive, might be thought to give the impression of a secure conclusion, but I would argue that the arrival of these lines, following the obscurity of the preceding, is to give a sense of conclusion without a full

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[121] Isaac Rosenberg, *Isaac Rosenberg*, p. 119.

sense of what has been concluded: the sound rather than the argument of resolution. Comprehension is pitched just beyond life. The obscurity of the poem dramatises a struggle for interpretation in the face of ongoing decay. While the poem does not despair of achieving interpretation entirely, the 'prophetic gleams' of poetry, and the reader's work with the poem, are the extent of what is offered. The material of the poem cannot yield full insight, since full insight belongs to the existence that comes after death, or not at all.

Rosenberg Post Mortem

In the previous chapter I argued that the recovery of the contingencies and specific sources of Rosenberg's poems could help illuminate some of the obscurities in his work and define the shape and purpose of others. I suggested that we best achieve these aims not by attempting to sever Rosenberg from the web of conflicting forces in which he was working, but rather by understanding the nature and operation of those forces. It is with this in mind that I turn now to Rosenberg's posthumous reception. Rosenberg's death made it easier to motivate his poetry and control its meanings: no new work or authorial statement could come to refute or reshape judgments.

In the first part of this chapter, I look at how Rosenberg's poetry was adapted to two publication contexts, *Art and Letters* and *Voices*, and how his poetry was taken up on both sides of an increasingly crystallised opposition between Georgian and modernist factions. As Peter Howarth has observed, it is an opposition that remained complicated and various, and one in which the cruder contours were shaped by conflicts within British poetry that belonged more to the second half of the twentieth century.[1] The second half of this chapter turns to that period, and looks at how Rosenberg came to be marshalled in arguments by three English poets: Geoffrey Hill, Jon Silkin and Charles Tomlinson. Ostensibly, the arguments concerned Rosenberg's place in literary history and the correct way to remember his poetry. However, we can see that these arguments were also intended to respond to the contemporary poetic landscape, in which Rosenberg served as a useful proxy. From considering the uses to

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[1] Peter Howarth, *British Poetry in the Age of Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 4.

which Rosenberg and his poetry are put, I conclude by bringing together some threads

that have run through this thesis. I also suggest that we think of the Whitechapel

Renaissance in a way that acknowledges the continued, productive thought generated

by conflicting claims and motivations, without letting the terms of those claims ossify

or excessively distort how we construct its history.

Between the Georgians and the Modernists

Isaac Rosenberg was killed on April 1st, 1918. The same year, John Rodker concluded

his section on recently published books in the September issue of *The Little Review* with

a short paragraph:

> We regret to announce the death in action of Isaac Rosenberg. He had
>
> produced a volume of poems and a play *Moses* (both privately printed). His
>
> death is a greater loss to poetry in this country than any death during the
>
> war.[2]

Despite its ostensible conventionality, the notice represents the first attempt after

Rosenberg's death to find a place for his work in the growing conflict between

Georgian and modernist poetry. The studied impersonality of the first sentence and the

factual simplicity of the second combine to suggest that the third, evaluative sentence

is authoritative and coolly determined. The significance of Rosenberg's death is

outlined in such a way that he does not compete with the two key figures of the

London avant-garde who had also been killed on the Western Front: the sculptor Henri

Gaudier-Brzeska and T. E. Hulme. In 1918 even more so than now, Hulme's reputation

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[2] John Rodker, 'Books', p. 50.

as a poet was subordinated to that of philosopher and critic, and Herbert Read's 1924 edition of *Speculations* relegated Hulme's small poetic oeuvre to the last of three appendices.[3] By emphasising Rosenberg's potential as a poet rather than as a visual artist, Rodker avoided competition with Gaudier-Brzeska. While various poets had died in the war, the key figure that would have occurred to the reader of Rodker's notice was Rupert Brooke. After Brooke's death in 1915, the poet had quickly been transformed into a symbol of a mythologised and sacralised pre-war England, and of a boundless talent and promise prematurely destroyed. His *1914 and other Poems* (1915) was one of only two books of poetry to surpass the five volumes of *Georgian Poetry* in sales, the other being John Masefield's *Collected Poems* (1923).[4] In 1918, Brooke's *Collected Poems* was published, prefaced by Edward Marsh's Memoir of the poet.

Rodker's challenge was bold but characteristic: not only had he been convinced of Rosenberg's genius, but he was also one of the louder assailants of Georgianism.[5] Two years later in *The Little Review,* where Rodker was working as foreign editor, he would criticise the second anthology published for Alfred Kreymborg's magazine *Others* (1920) for having 'settled into that steady poetical jog-trot, the "townsman's guide to nature," known as Georgian poetry,' a condition that Rodker associated with emasculation, cliché, old age and vacuity.[6] Rodker's tribute to Rosenberg can be seen, not just as an acknowledgment of a friend, but as a deliberate addition of Rosenberg to

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[3] T. E. Hulme, *Speculations*, ed. by Herbert Read (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Truber & Co., 1924), pp. 265–67.

[4] *Georgian Poetry, 1911-1922: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by Timothy Rogers (London; Henley; Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), p. 9.

[5] Leftwich, 'Isaac Rosenberg', p. iii.

[6] John Rodker, 'The "Others" Anthology', *The Little Review*, 7.3 (1920), 53–56 (p. 53).

a developing modernist hagiography, a martyr-poet that could be set against the establishment Brooke.

In doing so, Rodker made use of a tactic familiar from the polemic of Pound and Eliot: the mobilisation of unpopularity into a sign of superiority and exclusivity. Rosenberg's pamphlets had been printed privately for several reasons, one of which was that Marsh had patronised the publication without expecting a financial return. Rodker's parenthetical comments on the private publication of Rosenberg's poems of course had a practical purpose, though it gives little useful information for one looking to buy. But we can also see Rodker making a virtue of Rosenberg's necessity. In the pages of *The Little Review*, the reference to private printing could also suggest an insider's tip and add to the allure of the little-known poet. A similar technique can be seen in Rodker's review of David Bomberg's *Russian Ballet* (1919), which appeared in the October 1919 issue of *The Little Review*, where Rosenberg's 'Chagrin' was also published. The review verges on the condescending in the description of Bomberg's 'interesting little book', but Rodker concludes that the modest price means that the book's sales will serve as evidence as to 'whether there are more than 200 people all told who are interested in Art'.[7] Here too, Rodker turned the obscurity of his friend's work into a sign of his superiority to common and commercial values. Those values were increasingly identified with Georgian poetry. In setting Bomberg and Rosenberg beyond or outside commercial values, Rodker contributed to the double-bind in which others associated with modernism were caught. If market success was artistically

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[7] John Rodker, 'Russian Ballet', *The Little Review*, 6.6 (1919), 35–36.

suspect, then one could not be seen to seek it; in turn, one became more reliant on a small, loyal group of connoisseur-buyers.

It was a double-bind that had been familiar to Rosenberg during his life, though not obviously by choice. Two patrons fulfilled, in a particularly concentrated form, the requirements of the connoisseur-buyer model of financial support. Joseph Cohen describes Edward Marsh and Sydney Schiff as acting as 'absentee patron[s]' to Rosenberg. Cohen introduces the term with reference to Schiff, who met Rosenberg in 1915 and fulfilled a role for the poet similar to that of Marsh: 'he put no pressure on him to produce works in return for occasional support, and he was available whenever Rosenberg needed him.'[8] The role played by Schiff and Marsh points to two problems with Rodker's use of Rosenberg in *The Little Review*. Firstly, the struggle between Georgians and modernists was not a struggle in which Rosenberg was invested while he lived: he could not have been, since the distinct identities of the Georgian and modernist factions only really took form during and after the First World War. Furthermore, the attempt to make him an anticipatory member of one faction immediately comes up against difficulties. If we look at his patrons, Marsh or Schiff might be easier to pin down as Georgian and modernist respectively, though it would still involve a selective focus on parts of their lifework. That Rosenberg was reliant on both of them makes him trickier to fix. Similarly, if we look at where Rosenberg's work was published while he was alive, it is to be found both in Harriet Monroe's *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse* and Marsh's *Georgian Poetry, 1916-1917*, publications which have become symbolic of the modernists and Georgians respectively.

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[8] Cohen, p. 116.

The Georgians only came into existence as a group of poets in 1913 with the publication of *Georgian Poetry, 1911-12*, but in time 'Georgian' turned into a much broader label signifying intellectual inertia, a failed project and poetic backwater rather than a specific publication context. The transformation mostly took place in the aftermath of the war and indicates a change to the make-up and character of the Georgians, by then under J. C. Squire rather than Marsh. It also indicates a more coherent project of self-assertion and conglomeration among writers setting themselves in opposition than we find before the war. Later, an assault on Georgian poetics became one of the tasks for those looking to defend the historical and critical importance of the modernists, particularly Eliot. The history of early twentieth-century poetry was represented as a struggle between Georgianism and modernism, with the latter emerging triumphant.[9] In this light, a deprecation of Georgian poetry helped to show the necessity of the modernist project as well as a way of consolidating its victories.

The post-war reconfiguration of Georgianism took place alongside the posthumous reconfiguration of Rosenberg's poetry. While alive, Rosenberg appears to have been fairly opportunist in his approach to publishing his work, and the few magazines in which poems by him appeared show no obvious pattern or trend. His choices appear to have been influenced by those of people he personally knew: the appearance of his poems in *Colour* follows a trend of other Slade students having reproductions of their paintings published there; the 1914-15 publication of two poems and his lecture on art in *South African Women in Council* came about when the editor attended a lecture

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[9] Timothy Rogers gives a good if short and somewhat partisan account of developing critical attitudes to the Georgians in his introduction to Rogers, pp. 34–41.

Rosenberg gave in Cape Town.[10] After his death, Annie Rosenberg, later Annie

Wynick, showed a similar opportunism as to where her brother's poetry was

published, and his work soon appeared in the magazines *Voices*, the *Little Review*, *The*

Menorah, *The Rainbow*, and *Art and Letters*. However, the flexibility available to

Rosenberg was diminishing as the tribal identities of Georgian and modernist

solidified. Increasingly, Rosenberg had to belong to one or the other, and his identity as

Georgian or modernist was a necessary condition for his poetry to be conceived as

having value for the group in question. At the same time, his early death encouraged

the sense of a large promise almost reached, and one that could be variously conceived.

What follows is divided into two sections. In the first, I look at the 1919 appearance

of Rosenberg's work in *Art and Letters,* a magazine which published a range of interwar

modernist work. In the second, I turn to Rosenberg's appearance in *Voices*, a magazine

which published many poets who also appeared in *Georgian Poetry* and which, like *Art*

and Letters, hoped to offer a renewed 'sense of cultural mission' and was animated by a

determination to learn from the war.[11]

Rosenberg among the Modernists: *Art and Letters* (1919)

Shortly after the war, Sydney Schiff agreed to subsidize the dormant magazine *Art and*

Letters, with Osbert Sitwell joining Herbert Read as the magazine's editor. In its

previous incarnation from July 1917 to June 1918, *Art and Letters* had propagated

'Nietzschean-influenced socialist modernism' and supported a British neorealist

tradition of visual art, championed by the painters Charles Ginner and Harold Gilman,

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[10] Cohen, p. 102.
[11] Beasley, I: BRITAIN AND IRELAND, 1880-1955, p. 486.

who also served as editors.[12] The more literary and assertively modernist focus the magazine took when it was revived in January 1919 can be partly attributed to Sitwell, but Schiff evidently had a substantial amount of editorial control.[13] Cohen credits Schiff with Rosenberg's inclusion in the summer 1919 issue of *Art and Letters*.[14]

Rosenberg is represented by five poems, a reproduction of a pencil drawing, and a memoir of several pages written by Annie Wynick, which Schiff shortened for publication.[15] The poems chosen are short early pieces rather than the poems and verse dramas written after Rosenberg's enlistment that have since served as the hinge of the poet's reputation. The choice seems to be informed by a desire for a varied sample of short poems by Rosenberg that had already been published elsewhere. 'Heart's First Word' and 'Wedded' had been published in *Colour* as well as in Rosenberg's pamphlet *Moses: A Play* (1916) where 'I did not pluck at all' also appeared. 'Wedded', 'In Piccadilly' and 'If you are fire' had all been included in Rosenberg's pamphlet *Youth* (1915) and they come from each of the three sections: 'Wedded' from the first section titled 'Faith and Fear'; 'In Piccadilly' from the second, 'The Cynics Lamp' [sic]; 'If you are fire' from the third, 'Change and Sunfire'.

The inclusion of 'In Piccadilly' is surprising, since Rosenberg tore out the section 'Cynics Lamp' before sending copies of *Youth* to Schiff and to R. C. Trevelyan. The reason he gave to Schiff was that the poems were 'trivial'; to Trevelyan, he explained that they were 'commonplace' and affectedly coarse. Rosenberg saw the

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[12] Beasley, I: BRITAIN AND IRELAND, 1880-1955, p. 487.
[13] Beasley, I: BRITAIN AND IRELAND, 1880-1955, p. 494.
[14] Cohen, pp. 175–76.
[15] Cohen, p. 176.

removal of these more libidinal poems as a 'castration' of sorts, but feared that, had

Trevelyan read them, he 'would not have said "You do it like a navvy" but, "You do it

like a bank clerk".'[16] Wynick's biography presents her brother as a diligent, suffering

worker rather than a remarkable genius. She describes how 'through all his terrible

experiences [Rosenberg] maintained the same demeanour of earnestness and carried

out whatever duties were assigned to him with courage and steadfastness'; despite 'all

the discouragement to artistic effort in such an existence, he yet contrived to write

poetry and to draw'.[17] There is an uncomfortably apologetic note throughout, as

though the poems can only be entertained because they were achieved in the face of

adversity. Wynick also points to his publication in '"The Poetry Review," Chicago, and

in "Poetry," edited by Mr. E. Marsh', which probably refers to *Poetry* and *Georgian*

Poetry respectively.[18]

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[16] Isaac Rosenberg, *Isaac Rosenberg*, pp. 376–77.

[17] Annie Rosenberg, 'Isaac Rosenberg: In Memoriam', *Art and Letters*, 2.3 (1919), 108–11 (p. 111).

[18] Annie Rosenberg, p. 108.

The drawing included is Rosenberg's 1914 'Pencil Study of a Girl', a portrait of Margueretha Van Hulsteyn. Van Hulsteyn was better known as the actress Marda Vanne, and Rosenberg met and drew her in Cape Town.[19] The drawing is observably the product of a Slade School education and, specifically, the 'imperious voice and example'

Rosenberg's "Pencil Study of a Girl" as it appeared in *Art and Letters* 2, no. 1 (Summer 1919).

of his tutor Henry Tonks, whose influence is visible in the emphasis on the face's mass and its strong shaping lines, especially on the eyelids, lips and chin.[20] In 1919, that influence would have served as a slightly outdated token of avant-garde status. While several of the more prominent painters associated with modernism had attended the Slade – Bomberg, Gertler, Lewis, Paul Nash and C. R. W. Nevinson – they had all worked to distance their style from that of Tonks in the years before the war.

Art and Letters attached importance to continuity in British modernist art. The same issue that featured Rosenberg's work also included Ginner's memorial tribute to the Slade-educated Gilman, who had died earlier in the year. However, if the

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[19] Cohen, pp. 112–13.

[20] Maurice de Sausmarez, 'The Drawings and Paintings of Isaac Rosenberg', in *Isaac Rosenberg, 1890-1918: A Catalogue of an Exhibition Held at Leeds University May-June 1959, Together with the Text of Unpublished Material* (Leeds: University of Leeds; Partridge Press, 1959), pp. 28–29 (p. 28).

juxtaposition suggestively linked Rosenberg to advances in art by association, it also

tied him to an era on its way out. Rosenberg was granted membership to a modernist

canon but in an ancillary role. For the first issue of *Art and Letters* under his editorship

in 1919, Osbert Sitwell led with his own poem 'Te Deum', which ventriloquized a

philistine readership complaining because they thought they had killed modernism in

the war:

> We will not buy 'Art and Letters,'
>
> It is affected!
>
> Our sons
>
> And brothers
>
> Went forth to fight,
>
> To kill
>
> Certain things–[21]

The 'certain things' include 'Cubism, futurism, and so on'. The title expresses

thanksgiving for these things' survival, and Sitwell develops the religious theme in the

poem's second half. The philistines becomes Pharisees, disappointed to find 'that the

tomb was empty': they wanted Christ to remain dead, since he was no sportsman, and

had been forty days in the desert without shooting anything.[22] Even while the

magazine advertised Read's *Naked Warriors* (1919) and published the work of Siegfried

Sassoon and Wilfred Owen, Sitwell's poem pointed in another direction. He presented

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[21] Osbert Sitwell, 'Te Deum', *Art and Letters*, 2.1 (Winter, 1918-19), 1–2 (p. 1).
[22] Sitwell, 'Te Deum', p. 2.

Art and Letters as a victorious survival: if modernists had died in the war, their loss was

surmountable. In such a triumphalist narrative, there could be little space for more

than perfunctory retrospection, angled towards the celebration of what survived and

the renewal of present efforts. Furthermore, that triumphalism was expressed in

Christian terms, albeit facetiously, and with the magazine's enemies made disbelieving

Jews.

Rosenberg's work sits awkwardly in the issue. It follows T. S. Eliot's 'Burbank

with a Baedeker: Bleistein with a Cigar' and 'Sweeney Erect', both of which would be

published the following year in *Ara Vus Prec* by Rodker's Ovid Press. Towards the end

of the issue is an article by Pound on Jean de Bosschère, which poses the rhetorical

question: 'In the flood of "war" poetry how much have we had that does not seem

utterly inadequate from any possible angle of contact?'[23] De Bosschère's work is

presented as an exception to this inadequacy, and Pound takes De Bosschère's remark

on another writer, 'Il est la guerre', as an effective way of summarising and dismissing

'a popular figment of transient imprint and publication'.[24] Within this hostile

framework, it would be easy to read Rosenberg's claims to cultural capital as undercut:

pre-emptively ridiculed by the Jewish Bleistein's 'lustreless protrusive eye' and

retrospectively dismissed as '"war" poetry' by Pound.[25] If the choice of poems means

that Rosenberg dodges the blunt confrontation with Eliot and Pound's work that the

inclusion of *Moses* or 'Daughters of War' would have made inevitable, Rosenberg's

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[23] Ezra Pound, 'Durability and De Bosschère's Presentation', *Art and Letters*, 2.3 (1919), 125–26 (p. 126).
[24] Pound, 'Durability and De Bosschère's Presentation', p. 126.
[25] T. S. Eliot, 'Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleistein with a Cigar', *Art and Letters*, 2.3 (1919), 103–4 (p. 103).

work suffers in other ways. The most obvious problem is that they look naïve after

Eliot's, both in their occasionally archaic idiom ('O, shut hands, be empty another

year'; 'Yea! Its abundance knelt') and in their vision of sex.[26] 'In Piccadilly' probably

addresses itself to sex-workers:

> Lamp-lit faces! To you
>
> What is your starry dew?
>
> Gold flowers of the night blue![27]

The speaker imbues his addressees with a mystical allure through abstract questioning,

but then reshapes that allure into innuendo in the second stanza where 'starry dew'

becomes 'pavement's slime'. The identification of the sex-workers with semen and

primal amorphous matter has some resemblance to Eliot's identification of Bleistein

with 'protozoic slime'. In both cases the 'slime' points to a disgust with mess, which

their verse form aims to counter by its own order and shapeliness.

In its subjects, innuendo and the depiction of 'sheen of eyes that lust',

Rosenberg's poem shows its provenance from 'The Cynics Lamp'; in its note of moral

indignation and its abstraction of its subjects, it also risks a general tone that is naïve,

priggish and 'like a bank clerk'.[28] In contrast to Rosenberg, the bank clerk Eliot's use of

the figure of Sweeney allows him greater freedom than Rosenberg's first person. In

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[26] Isaac Rosenberg, 'Unnamed [I Did Not Pluck at All]', *Art and Letters*, 2.3 (1919), 107–8 (p. 108); Isaac Rosenberg, 'Heart's First Word', *Art and Letters*, 2.3 (1919), 106–7 (p. 107).

[27] Isaac Rosenberg, 'In Piccadilly', *Art and Letters*, 2.3 (1919), 106.

[28] Isaac Rosenberg, *Isaac Rosenberg*, p. 296.

'Sweeney Erect', Eliot is able to depict the inside of a brothel while maintaining a distant narratorial voice:

> The ladies of the corridor
>
> Find themselves involved, disgraced,
>
> Call witness to their principles
>
> And deprecate the lack of taste.[29]

Eliot hints at a disillusionment won by experience without needing to make the question of that experience a focal point of the poem.

If Eliot seems to succeed where Rosenberg fails in terms of impersonality and tonal sophistication, it is worth noting that similar terms of comparison could be rephrased in Rosenberg's favour. In her overview of contemporary English literary magazines, Harriet Monroe in *Poetry* wrote:

> Of *Art and Letters*, edited by Frank Rutter and Osbert Sitwell, only a belated summer number has reached us. Besides a few rather weak drawings, and some clever prose by Dorothy Richardson, Ezra Pound et al, we have two pert and prancing poems from that slim thoroughbred T. S. Eliot, and five lyrics by Isaac Rosenberg, the young London poet and art-student whose vivid Trench Poems were printed in POETRY in December, 1916. [30]

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[29] T. S. Eliot, 'Sweeney Erect', *Art and Letters*, 2.3 (1919), 104–5 (p. 105).
[30] Harriet Monroe, 'Our Contemporaries: New English Magazines', *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*, 16.3 (1920), 168–72 (p. 172).

The next paragraph remarks on Rosenberg's bravery in the war and how the poems reached the office 'scrawled in pencil on a scrap of torn paper', before echoing Wynick's notice of the nearing publication of Gordon Bottomley's edition of Rosenberg's poems.[31] While biographical detail dwarfs literary analysis in Monroe's review of Rosenberg, the 'vivid' qualities of his work are set against the superficial, merely 'clever' work of Eliot, Pound and Richardson, whose technical expertise becomes evidence of their own lack of authentic observation and feeling. The idea of Eliot as a skilled racehorse is of a piece with Monroe's criticism of Huxley's 'Leda', published in *Coterie,* as 'simply an excellent college exercise', in which artifice is identified with leisure-class self-indulgence.[32] The same note is struck in Monroe's comparison of Eliot and Herbert Read. Read's 'Huskisson Sacred and Profane' carries:

> a suggestion of Eliot in its sardonic whimsicality, but it is more barbaric, it gets further than Eliot from civilization—a wild wind blowing through the little patterned English fields.

It is probably not a coincidence that Read, like Rosenberg, had been a combatant in the First World War. The primitive vitality ascribed to Read in the adjective 'barbaric' has an analogy in the application of 'vivid' to Rosenberg's 'Trench poems': they convey a sense of reality and immediacy that life is seen to assume in battle. The word 'vivid' combines the sense of the sharply seen with that of the vital and lived: what is vivid in the poems from the trenches is not so much Rosenberg's language in making a scene visible, but that they come with the stamp of authenticity. Incidentally, that stamp was

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[31] Monroe, p. 172.
[32] Monroe, p. 171.

partly illusory: only one of the *Trench Poems* Monroe printed was written in France. Without drawing explicit connections, Monroe was entering Rosenberg into a canon that could to some extent cut across the growing division between Georgians and modernists.

Monroe's distinction between serious authentic poetry on the one hand and shallow experimentation on the other was not a new one, but its renewed impetus in the years after the war helps to show Rosenberg's place in a larger gambit attempted by *Art and Letters*. Experimentation was more vulnerable than before the war to the charge of meaningless superficiality. What Monroe divides in the magazine – 'prancing' Eliot and 'vivid' Rosenberg – the editors hope will merge in the whole: the technically experimental work of some being justified or, at least, excused by its proximity to other work understood to be seriously and authentically expressed. Implicit in Rosenberg's place in *Art and Letters* is conditionality and ancillary status. It was left to other magazines to give him a more leading role.

Rosenberg among the Georgians: *Voices* (1921) and Samuel Roth

Rosenberg's Whitechapel friend Stephen Winsten published poetry and art criticism in *Voices*, but the posthumous appearance of Rosenberg's poem 'The One Lost' under the title 'I mingle with your bones' in the magazine in 1921 is more likely attributable to the efforts of Samuel Roth, who wrote the memorial tribute for Rosenberg that follows the poem in publication.

Roth is now best known for the public scandals of the years that followed. In 1927, James Joyce called for an international protest against Roth's unauthorized republication of an altered text of *Ulysses* in the American magazine *Two Worlds*. The

protest was signed by writers including John Galsworthy, Thomas Mann, Luigi

Pirandello and Virginia Woolf. Robert Spoo argues that it was more professional

discourtesy than illegality that led to Roth's fall from grace.[33] However, following his

exclusion from the literary community, he turned to publishing erotica, which led to

him being charged with obscenity. Roth was the plaintiff in *Roth v. United States* and

was found guilty: the court ruled that obscenity was not defended by the First

Amendment and Roth spent several years in prison. Some publishers would still work

with him, among them Rodker, who had previously signed the protest, but Roth's

resentment at his treatment manifested itself in 1934 in a self-published book, *Jews*

Must Live: An Account of the Persecution of the World by Jewry on All the Frontiers of

Civilization. The book was quickly seized upon by American fascists for propaganda

purposes, and continues to be used as such. According to Jay A. Gertzman, Roth spent

the rest of his life trying to atone for what he referred to as 'that tragic book of mine'.[34]

In 1921, Roth had just arrived in London, having left New York to escape debts

following the failure of his Poetry Bookshop, where his employees had included Louis

Zukofsky and Charles Reznikoff.[35] Like Zukofsky and Reznikoff, Roth was also a

writer and his prose and poetry had been published in H. L. Mencken's *The Smart Set*

and Monroe's *Poetry*. It may have been in the latter that Roth first encountered

Rosenberg's work. Roth was acquainted with several of the key figures involved in

Voices. He knew Maurice Samuel from New York, and had edited an anthology *New*

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[33] Robert Spoo, 'Samuel Roth: Discourteous Reprinter', *Dublin James Joyce Journal*, 5 (2012), 99–111 (p. 107); Jay A. Gertzman, 'The Promising Jewish Poetry of a Pariah: Samuel Roth', *Studies in American Jewish Literature*, 28 (2009), 55–72 (p. 56).

[34] Gertzman, 'The Promising Jewish Poetry of a Pariah: Samuel Roth', p. 56.

[35] Gertzman, 'The Promising Jewish Poetry of a Pariah: Samuel Roth', p. 62.

Songs of Zion in 1914, which included contributions from Israel Zangwill. Zangwill

went on to single out Roth in a major speech on American Zionism in 1923 as one of

the 'young poets of the Diaspora'.[36] Most important for Roth's appearance in *Voices*,

however, was probably his encounter with the editor, Thomas Moult, whom he seems

to have met for the first time in London in 1921.[37] Roth convinced Moult to dedicate an

issue of the magazine to the American poet E. A. Robinson and we can get some sense

of the relationship between the two men from Moult's complaint to Roth:

> You get frightfully indignant and sarcastic whenever you don't find me coming
>
> up to expectations … [but] you come along and behave so rudely to Bessie [his
>
> wife] that she is ill for several days after it.[38]

If the letter is evidence of Roth's obnoxious and pugnacious character, it also shows a

relationship in which Moult was seeking – albeit failing – to please Roth. Given Roth's

influence on Moult, as well as the magazine's fascination with the war and war poetry,

Rosenberg was an easy fit for *Voices*. However, Roth's emphasis in the tribute is only

partly on Rosenberg as a war poet. Rosenberg is more significant for Roth as a poet

who speaks for Jewishness and Jewish Scripture.

A year after the article in *Voices*, *The Menorah Journal* would publish Laurence

Binyon's introduction to the Bottomley edition of Rosenberg's poetry followed by

Rosenberg's play *Moses* in its entirety. The latter was printed with a note from the

editor reading:

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[36] Gertzman, 'The Promising Jewish Poetry of a Pariah: Samuel Roth', p. 55.

[37] Jay A. Gertzman, *Samuel Roth: Infamous Modernist* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2013), p. 45.

[38] Gertzman, *Samuel Roth: Infamous Modernist*, p. 55.

> This Play first appeared in a very poorly printed pamphlet, privately issued in
>
> London in 1916. The Editor of THE MENORAH JOURNAL wishes to express
>
> his acknowledgement to Mr. Samuel Roth for bringing the pamphlet to his
>
> attention. The present version is an authorized advance printing from *Poems*,
>
> by Isaac Rosenberg, shortly to be published by Heinemann, London.[39]

The journal was based in New York and was dedicated to 'bringing out the values of

Jewish culture and ideals, of Hebraism and of Judaism, and striving for their

advancement'.[40] While it had yet to fall under Elliot E. Cohen's charismatic and

controversial editorship, in 1922 *The Menorah Journal* had already risen to prominence

in its efforts to articulate a viably modern American Jewish identity.[41] By bringing

Moses into this context, Roth implied Rosenberg's importance internationally as a

modern Jewish writer.

In Roth's tribute in *Voices*, he makes that argument explicit but, at the same

time, he ties Rosenberg's importance to his Englishness. The piece begins:

> We heard in America that among the poets led by the War unto the high
>
> mountain of renown, kissed darkly, and consigned to the care of startled
>
> angels, was one called Isaac Rosenberg. He was, profoundly, a priest of the
>
> Moses legend which finds an interpreter in every generation, so that the
>
> essayist Achad Ha'am, writing for a people that laboured to establish in

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[39] Henry Hurwitz, 'Untitled', *The Menorah Journal*, 8.3 (1922), 149.

[40] Henry Hurwitz, 'An Editorial Statement', *The Menorah Journal*, 1.1 (1915), 1–2 (p. 2).

[41] Lauren B. Strauss, 'Staying Afloat in the Melting Pot: Constructing an American Jewish Identity in the *Menorah Journal* of the 1920s', *American Jewish History*, 84.4 (1996), 315–31 (p. 315).

Palestine a Jewish cultural centre, is succeeded by Isaac Rosenberg, the truest

English poet of his day.[42]

If what is immediately striking is the sheer bombast of the prose, outlandish even by

the purple standards of *Voices*, the argument is peculiar in its own right. 'Achad

Ha'am' or 'Ahad Ha'am' was the pen name of Asher Ginsberg, the Russian Jew who

held a key place in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Hebrew letters and debates over

the character and aims of Zionism. At first sight, the link to Rosenberg is bizarre, as is

the idea of succession: when Roth wrote the tribute, Rosenberg was dead but Ha'am

was living in London and working in a managerial role within the Wissotsky Tea

Company. Whereas *Art and Letters* risked consigning Rosenberg to a closed-off past,

Roth placed Rosenberg into something neither past nor future.

The connection becomes more suggestive when we turn to Ha'am's 1904 essay

'Moses', which Leon Simon translated into English as part of Ha'am's *Selected Essays* in

1912. A pamphlet containing just the translation was published in London five years

later. In the essay, Ha'am rejected historicist accounts of the prophet as merely being

antiquarian pedantry, focussing instead on Moses as a legend recreated in the image of

the Jewish people. Ha'am proceeded to delineate the character of the legendary Moses:

he was not a military leader nor a statesman, but a Prophet, indeed 'the ideal archetype

of Hebrew prophecy in the purest and most exalted sense of the word.'[43] As such, he

was characterised by three features: firstly, truth, both in perceiving it and delivering

it; secondly, by an extremism that labours to recreate the external world in line with the

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[42] Samuel Roth, 'Isaac Rosenberg', *Voices*, 5.3, 74–75 (p. 74).
[43] Ahad Ha'am, *Moses*, trans. by Leon Simon (London: The Zionist, 1917), p. 5.

prophet's vision for it; thirdly, by absolute righteousness. These characteristics make

the Prophet unfit for direct engagement with the present world: he belongs both to the

past and the future instead, and he can only engage in the present world through

others. These 'human channels' are 'the Priests of the prophetic ideal', men capable of

'adapting their methods to the needs of each particular time, and not insisting that the

message shall descend on the workaday world in all its pristine purity'.[44] The Priest is

'above all the man of the hour', whereas the Prophet is not, and this is why Moses must

die before seeing Canaan: what succeeds the achievement of the Prophet's vision is 'a

period of those half-measures and compromises which are essential to the battle of

life', and for which men 'more skilled to compromise with life' are better suited.[45]

In an essay on Ha'am's biblical criticism, Alfred Gottschalk endorses the idea

that Ha'am might have seen himself as a successor to Moses, one who envisaged a

glorious national future in the face of an insufficient present, conscious of the fact that

he himself would never live to see it fulfilled.[46] Rosenberg's play was published a year

before Simon's translation, so there is little chance of direct influence, though Ha'am's

ideas were discussed in the Anglo-Jewish press and he may have encountered them in

conversation.[47] In any case, Rosenberg's Moses is a markedly different creation from

that of Ha'am. Rosenberg depicts a Moses intimately involved in his present. His

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[44] Ha'am, p. 7.

[45] Ha'am, pp. 14, 17.

[46] Alfred Gottschalk, 'Ahad Ha-Am as Biblical Critic', *Hebrew Annual Review*, 7 (1983), 105–19 (p. 160).

[47] As early as 1908, the Jewish Chronicle referred to Ginsberg as '[t]he famous Jewish philosopher' in 'Russia: The Jewish Question', *Jewish Chronicle*, 26 June 1908, p. 12; Rosenberg is unlikely to have read Ha'am in Hebrew. In a 1917 letter to Bottomley, he wrote that, despite tuition as a child, he now 'read Hebrew like a parrot without knowing the meaning'. Isaac Rosenberg, *Isaac Rosenberg*, p. 338.

refusal to obey Pharaoh's injunction that the molars of the slaves be removed seems to be less the actions of one compelled by the urge 'to fight the battle of justice' than a bold piece of *Realpolitik*.[48] He plans:

> A small misdemeanour, touch of rebelliousness;
>
> To prick the vein of father, monitor, foe,
>
> Will tell which of these his kingship is.[49]

He anticipates that Pharaoh's word 'will be a foe's' and plans to use that opposition to unify the Jews to his cause, make their 'red-streaked eyes | Glitter with sacrifice'. Moses is shown restless, ready to 'ride the dizzy beast of the world', to shape or submit those around him to his will. He lacks the hygienic cordon between Prophet and world that Ha'am's priest provides, and does not seem to want it. The play concludes with his determination to 'grandly fashion these rude elements | Into some newer nature, a consciousness' as he strangles the intoxicated father of his lover.[50] He does so because the father, Abinoah, 'has one obsession, hatred of Jews', and has discovered Moses's real parentage. In his struggle against two fathers, Rosenberg's Moses recalls other rebellious biblical sons. Rosenberg had already depicted David's son Absalom in his poem 'Chagrin'. There is also a resemblance to Noah's son Ham, the more so because the name of 'Noah', the world's first vintner and drunkard, is buried in the name of the 'drunken rascal' Abinoah, whom Moses calls father. Rosenberg's Moses is a rebel, but the status of that rebellion is more suspect in its motivations and resonances than it is for Ha'am.

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[48] Ha'am, p. 8.

[49] Isaac Rosenberg, *Isaac Rosenberg*, p. 157.

[50] Isaac Rosenberg, *Isaac Rosenberg*, pp. 160, 168.

The rebellion's chances of success are also put into greater jeopardy. A stage direction has Prince Imra, the Pharaoh's son, coming to arrest Moses on Abinoah's summons, though we do not know if he has yet been made aware of Moses's Jewishness. The possibilities of creative violence are left suspended at the end of the play, and Tomlinson sees that suspension as dominating our impressions of the text over any larger sense of Moses's destiny.[51] However, Rosenberg expands that destiny beyond his source material in two directions: if we are invited to consider the possibility of a Moses executed before he liberates the Jewish people, we are also to consider that he might be more than a Prophet. The Old Hebrew, who introduces the idea of Moses as a 'Messiah' to indicate his unfitness for the title, later identifies an unseen voice as the Messiah's. It is only after this that we and the Old Hebrew discover that the voice belongs to Moses. Rosenberg's free alterations to the narrative of Exodus make Moses more corporeal while also enlarging his possible claims to spiritual authority.

Roth draws from both Ha'am and Rosenberg's versions of Moses in his essay. By having Rosenberg led to 'the high mountain of renown', he links Rosenberg himself to Moses on Mount Nebo, looking out over Canaan, as Ha'am had linked himself to Moses before. The metaphor pushes Ha'am's reading of Moses onto Rosenberg for, where Rosenberg's Moses must kill to bring spiritual change, Ha'am's must die. Roth thus charges Rosenberg's death with the potential for spiritual renaissance.

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[51] Charles Tomlinson, 'Fate and the Image of Music: An Examination of Rosenberg's Plays', *Poetry Nation*, 3, 1974, 57–69 (p. 61).

The renaissance is anticipated in the poem that prefaces Roth's piece, 'The One Lost', though it appears without a title in *Voices*. The poem was composed in 1914-1915, a little before Rosenberg began work on *Moses*, and it shows the heavy influence of Donne's love poetry.[52] The clearest source is 'The Relique', with the same basic conceit of the speaker and addressee sharing a grave at the arrival of Judgment Day. In the body of his essay, Roth quotes from *Moses* and the poems published in the same pamphlet in May 1916, where 'The One Lost' did not appear. It is unclear whether the poem is there by Roth's design, Moult's, or that of someone else. The version printed is different from its published form both in *Youth* (1915) and in *Poems* (1922), which suggests that whoever arranged its publication had access to Rosenberg's unpublished work.[53]

Rosenberg's speaker exults in dodging Judgment Day, because bodily resurrection will be thwarted by the intermingling of bones:

And I, lying so safe

Within you, hearing all,

To have cheated God shall laugh,

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[52] Isaac Rosenberg, *Isaac Rosenberg*, p. 381; for Rosenberg's use of Donne and the wider revival of Metaphysical poetry in the early twentieth century, see Christie, 'Modernism, the Metaphysical Poets, and the First World War'.

[53] The *Voices* version lacks the title, which was included from its appearance in a 1915 letter to Marsh (*Isaac Rosenberg*, 269) and reproduced in *Youth* and *Poems*. The version in the letter to Marsh and the version in *Youth* only contain the first two stanzas that appear in the four stanza version of *Poems* (contra Isaac Rosenberg, *The Collected Works of Isaac Rosenberg*, ed. Ian Parsons (London: Chatto and Windus, 1979), 208n1). The *Voices* version is the same length as that in *Poems* (sixteen lines), but printed as a verse paragraph rather than in stanzas. The *Voices* version has "throng'd wards of Heaven" where *Poems* has "through wards of Heaven". Parsons writes that he has not found the *Poems* variant elsewhere (90).

      Freed by your thrall.[54]

Rosenberg has not imitated Donne slavishly. He updates Donne's legal terminology:

God is now a 'lender' and the speaker dodges the '[d]ole owed for good's dearth'.[55]

Where the speaker and addressee in 'The Relique' may conspire '[t]o make their soules,

at the last busie day, | Meet at this grave, and make a little stay', it is only later

generations of men who are to be tricked by their twin burial.[56] Rosenberg's speaker is

more ambitious: where Donne's only foresees trickery of men, Rosenberg's aims to

cheat God. Donne toys with a specifically Christian blasphemy when he writes that, by

a misconception, the poem's addressee 'shalt be a Mary Magdalen, and I | A

something else thereby'.[57] In place of this, Rosenberg's speaker is within a tradition of

Jewish prophets who struggle with God, most obviously Jonah, who likewise tries to

hide himself from God's sight. Thus, when the speaker describes himself as 'lying so

safe | Within you, hearing all', we may be meant to hear three meanings: the literal

sense of mingled bones; the erotic sense; and, thirdly, Jonah in the hull of the ship and

the belly of the whale. As such, the interplay of deathly and erotic becomes tied to a

question about evading one's destiny.

    There is a further difference between the poems, enhanced by the publication

context of Rosenberg's. In Donne's poem, the speaker and addressee are perceived as

'a loving couple'; Rosenberg's poem allows this reading, but is also amenable to one

that reads it as a war poem.[58] The muddle of bones could belong to the same landscape

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[54] Isaac Rosenberg, 'I Mingle With Your Bones [The One Lost]', *Voices*, 5.3 (1921), 73.

[55] Isaac Rosenberg, 'I Mingle With Your Bones [The One Lost]'.

[56] John Donne, *Complete English Poems*, ed. by C. A. Patrides (London; Vermont: J. M. Dent; Tuttle, 1994), p. 59.

[57] Donne, p. 60.

[58] Donne, p. 59.

as the 'sprawled dead' of 'Dead Man's Dump' or the 'layers of piled-up skulls' from a fragment, both of which Jon Silkin included in the *Penguin Book of First World War Poetry* (1979). Rosenberg began the poem in early 1915; he enlisted at the end of October 1915 and reached France in June 1916. So, reading the poem with reference to the war is chronologically appropriate so long as one does not demand the poet's personal experience of battle. For *Voices*, the assessment of the war was bound up with a belief in the authentic accounts of the men who had fought in it. Under these conditions, to read Rosenberg's poem as a war poem, the category that would give it most relevance in the magazine, also risks turning it into an imposter.

The crux is helpfully resolved by one of the prominent myths of First World War poetry: that of the writer who is given foreknowledge of his own death. One thinks, for example, of Brooke's 'The Soldier', Alan Seeger's 'Rendezvous', Owen's 'Anthem for Doomed Youth' or Alfred Lichtenstein's 'Leaving for the Front'. The Donnean conceit in 'The One Lost' of a speaker talking posthumously thus becomes implicated with the data of Rosenberg's life. Not only does Rosenberg's poem seem to join others that suggest the soldier foreseeing his death in battle; the posthumous publication of Rosenberg's poems among living writers also suggests a voice speaking from beyond death to the living. This second effect is encouraged by publishing the poem before Roth's article. In Roth's hands, the myth serves a further purpose. It provides a new reason for thinking of Rosenberg as a prophet: indeed, in the sentence that joins Rosenberg to Moses, he is also joined to the other 'poets led by the War' to death. Rosenberg, like Moses, is attributed foreknowledge of his death.

Roth executes a twofold manoeuvre in which Rosenberg's death is necessary to mark him as a prophetic inheritor, but it is also the tragedy which excuses his poems' infelicities. Of 'In the Park', 'Wedded', 'In Piccadilly', and 'Lady You Are My God', Roth writes that '[t]here is here a flourish of an experiment in music and colour which fails chiefly because of the poet's untimely death.'[59] A partial exception is *Moses*, which he identifies as 'the ripe, full-grown flower of genius which here goes hand in hand with its time.'[60] For a verse drama about an ancient prophet to go 'hand in hand with its time' is a further sign of Rosenberg's prophetic overcoming of time, one which justifies Roth's problematic chronology of succession. However, it is also built into a criticism, one tied to place as well as time. Roth writes that there are times when

> this Moses of Rosenberg's, alas, is sometimes so little like a Jewish leader that he
>
> talks almost like a contributor to *The Egoist*. 'I am rough now, and new, and will
>
> have no tailor,' is strange speech in the mouth of the man who pronounced for the
>
> first time the words 'an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.' But the lapses in speech
>
> are few. And the instances of ascendancy are numerous and precipitous.[61]

The quotation from *Moses* that Roth gives suggests several possible grounds for the comparison to a contributor to *The Egoist*: its simple and mostly monosyllabic vocabulary, which might be typical of some magazines, if not obviously *The Egoist*; and the reference to the 'tailor', which risks bathos. It is noticeable that the lines Roth singles out for particular merit in *Moses* contain repetition and repetition with slight alteration which relate more obviously to the biblical parallelism of 'an eye for an eye,

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[59] Roth, p. 74.
[60] Roth, p. 74.
[61] Roth, p. 74.

a tooth for a tooth' (Exodus 21:24). The meritorious quotations are drawn from sections of greater metrical regularity than 'I am rough now, and new, and will have no tailor', a line which should probably be read as a four-beat mixture of anapests and iambs, and which appears in the poem flanked by a line of iambic trimeter ('To suit my hungry belly') and the single word '[s]tartlingly'.[62] Taken together, the three lines may come threateningly close to prose rhythms for Roth.

In addition to these questions of style, we might also read in Roth's remark a rejection of Rosenberg's interpretation of Moses. Although Roth qualifies his criticism by moving on to give examples of the 'instances of ascendancy' that make up most of the rest of the essay, the lapses are significant enough that the play is ultimately 'not a triumph of but over the Moses legend'.[63] The assessment suggests that Rosenberg appropriated the legend for his own ends rather than fully and accurately gauging its implications. The insistence on newness in the line he quotes, as well as the insistence on the self, suggest other links to *The Egoist*. Dora Marsden had identified 'the one assertion of egoism' as being 'that a man shall make it his concern with things to force them to minister to him', an assertion which seems to capture much of the motivation of Rosenberg's Moses.[64]

Roth may be right to see Rosenberg recreating Moses in a Stirnerean mode: Rosenberg's friendship with Rodker suggests one avenue to Marsden's ideas. However, if the interpretation of Moses as egoist strikes Roth as inaccurate, part of his rejection of it is also born out of a distrust of *Zeitgeist*. His aside on *The Egoist* yokes

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[62] Isaac Rosenberg, *Isaac Rosenberg*, p. 156.
[63] Roth, p. 74.
[64] Dora Marsden, 'Views and Comments', *The New Freewoman*, 1.13 (1913), 244–45 (p. 244).

Englishness, journalism and the radical intelligentsia of pre-war London into an image of something ephemeral, parochial and trivial. The weight of the Moses legend is thus more than Rosenberg's poetry can carry. Rosenberg's Englishness, philosophical debts and neglect of recognised metrical patterns bind him down to a specific time, just as his Jewishness and death in the war tie him to divine time. Rosenberg the Anglo-Jewish poet brings together both time-frames in a way that makes him a bridge between them. However, he does not, like Ha'am's Moses, tie past to future, so much as the futural vision to the usable present: despite the suggestions of prophecy, then, Rosenberg is their 'human vessel'; he is not a Prophet but a Priest of the Moses legend.

While Roth clearly invests Rosenberg with greater significance than he receives in *Art and Letters*, we can still see a pattern. In both magazines, Rosenberg is allowed to gesture towards a future, but he is not trusted to shape it. His role is carefully delimited and tied to his time. In both cases, there is a sense that Rosenberg is limited by his historical moment: in the case of *Art and Letters*, that moment is the war, with Rosenberg a victim of the world-order that allowed it to take place; in *Voices*, Rosenberg is tied more to the intellectual atmosphere of pre-war London. It is ironic that, by tying Rosenberg to *The Egoist*, Roth does more to credit Rosenberg as a modernist than does Sitwell, though he does so to denigrate. However, it is an irony that only takes on significance as we turn to the second half of the twentieth century, in which the categories of Georgian and modern became tools in arguments, not only about the ties between literary history and poetry in its present moment, but also about the specific constitution of English poetry.

Rosenberg in the Poetry Wars

A full history of Rosenberg's posthumous reception is beyond the scope of this chapter.

Such a history would take in, among others, Dannie Abse, Keith Douglas, Elaine

Feinstein, Michael Longley, Edouard Roditi, Cathal Ó Searcaigh and Arnold Wesker.[65]

It would also require a more extended discussion of the 'flourishing and demise of a

post-Romantic critical idiom' under the aegis of F. R. Leavis, whose appraisal of

Rosenberg was closely related to his critical defence of D. H. Lawrence.[66] That the list of

is overwhelmingly male is probably not coincidental: Rosenberg's membership in a

canon of soldier-poets grouped him among men who have in turn been particularly

venerated by men. I focus in this section on three critical discussions of Rosenberg

written by poets in the second half of the twentieth century: Jon Silkin's chapter on

Rosenberg in *Out of Battle* (1972); Charles Tomlinson's published lecture *Isaac Rosenberg*

of Bristol (1981); and Geoffrey Hill's lecture 'Isaac Rosenberg, 1890–1918' (1998), later

published in his *Collected Critical Writings* as part of the volume 'Inventions of Value'

(2008). The three poets form a somewhat eclectic trio, though they all taught in

universities, with Hill and Silkin colleagues at Leeds University.

All three also appeared in the anthology of Silkin's magazine *Stand* (1973), with

Tomlinson represented by translations of several poems by Giuseppe Ungaretti. Titled

Poetry of the Committed Individual, Silkin introduced the anthology by giving an account

of the growth of *Stand*. He described its beginnings in 1952 in the midst of the struggle

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[65] For a close reading of three poems written for Rosenberg, see Tara Christie, '"For Isaac Rosenberg": Geoffrey Hill, Michael Longley and Cathal Ó Searcaigh', in *The Oxford Handbook of British and Irish War Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 542–63.
[66] Fernihough, p. 5; Leavis, p. 231.

for ascendancy between two phases of 'neo-romantic poetry', the latter represented by

Mavericks (1957), and the 'composite rationalism' represented by Robert Conquest's

collection *New Lines* (1956).[67] Silkin positions *Stand* outside the local struggle,

celebrating the end of the belief that 'only one set of aesthetics could properly exist'

and remaining quiet about his own inclusion in *Mavericks*.[68]

To varying degrees, all three can be seen in opposition to the set of priorities

that Conquest and the other poets identified with the Movement were seen to

represent. Both Silkin and Tomlinson became involved in acrimonious and well-

publicised exchanges with associated poets, and Hill similarly made clear that he

'reject[ed] the Larkin package'.[69] The objection hinged on a sense of the Movement

poets as parochial to the point of xenophobia, intellectually uncurious (affectedly or

genuinely), and unambitious in the methods and aims of poetry. At the same time, if

Hill, Silkin and Tomlinson looked for a usable Romantic legacy, it was as a reaction

against the New Apocalyptics as well against the anti-romantic Movement. It was as

part of the search that each poet turned to Rosenberg. In 1950 David Daiches had

argued that:

> [h]ad Rosenberg lived to develop further along the lines on which he had
>
> already moved, he might have changed the course of modern English poetry,
>
> producing side by side with the poetry of Eliot and his school a richer and more

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[67] Jon Silkin, 'Introduction', in *Poetry of the Committed Individual: A* Stand *Anthology of Poetry*, ed. by Jon Silkin (London: Victor Gollancz, 1973), pp. 17–39 (p. 17).

[68] Silkin, 'Introduction', p. 18.

[69] Hill, *Collected Critical Writings*, p. 701.

monumental kind of verse, opposing a new romantic poetry to the new

metaphysical brand.[70]

Rosenberg offers the three poets a speculative, counterfactual literary history, one that

takes its significance in part from being left in suspension. When Tomlinson quotes

Daiches and when Silkin describes the war as part rather than the culmination of

Rosenberg's achievement, they make similar use of Rosenberg's early death.[71] By

arguing that Rosenberg's poetry was steadily improving, they are not only able to

suggest an unachieved potentiality in Rosenberg's work, but they are also free to

determine the quality and character of that unachieved work themselves. As a result,

the 'new romantic poetry' that Rosenberg is understood to prefigure is left for them to

shape.

Others had already made use of the pliability of Rosenberg's reputation, most

notably Roth, but Rosenberg had further advantages to Hill, Silkin and Tomlinson both

as a historical figure and stylistic example. He plays the role of the poet whose work

could not fit in with the popular expectations of English poetry, expectations of poetry

deliberately simple or facetious in thought and style. The exclusion of Rosenberg from

the canon is not only an injustice to him, but an indictment of a society which can make

such an error of valuation. We can elucidate some of the uses to which Rosenberg is

put, and some of the differences in those uses, by looking at how he is set against three

other poets: Wilfred Owen, Rupert Brooke and T. S. Eliot.

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[70] David Daiches, 'Isaac Rosenberg: Poet', *Commentary*, 10 (1950), 91–93 (p. 93).
[71] Tomlinson, *Isaac Rosenberg of Bristol*, p. 18.

Early in his lecture, Tomlinson remarks that Rosenberg has been 'slow to attract widespread critical attention, let alone that sort of popular acknowledgement which ensured repeated printings of the poetry of Owen.'[72] The contrast between the reception of Owen and Rosenberg's poetry is used by all three to point to a culture wherein the lesser poetry is publicly celebrated and the greater poetry, the poetry which has the potential to yield further advances, is ignored. Owen is brought in by Tomlinson repeatedly in his lecture as a counterpoint to the sophistication of Rosenberg's thought: Owen merely objects to the war, where Rosenberg accepts it and attempts to comprehend its meaning; Owen lacks Rosenberg's 'sense of the numinous'; Rosenberg can see war not just as waste of life, as the 'humanistic' Owen does, but as a prompt to living effort and as a 'waste of death' for those who die without having achieved heightened spiritual power through readiness for destiny; both poets feel a desire to protect the suffering, but Rosenberg is still able to envisage the possibility of heroism beyond patriotism.[73]

Silkin and Hill also contrast Owen to Rosenberg, though their focus is different. Hill criticises Owen for mannered didacticism and for a naïve and condescending model of witness: the belief that he was necessary to speak 'on behalf of the inarticulate common soldier.'[74] The criticism is both ethical and stylistic for Hill. Owen's inherited mannerisms are evidence of his failure to properly respond to his circumstances and historical moment.[75] Rosenberg's achievement is simultaneously evidence of Owen's

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[72] Tomlinson, *Isaac Rosenberg of Bristol*, p. 1.
[73] Tomlinson, *Isaac Rosenberg of Bristol*, pp. 4, 14–16.
[74] Hill, *Collected Critical Writings*, p. 453.
[75] It is this failure that I understand to be at stake in Hill's identification of 'the Larkin package' with that of Owen, Edmund Blunden and Thomas Gray. See Hill, *Collected Critical Writings*, pp. 444–45, 701.

imaginative failure and of the triumph of the 'gloriously unmute throng' that Owen overlooked. Silkin writes that 'Owen's achievement centres on his poems of hatred, irony, and pity; Rosenberg's on struggle and change, of which the war was a part but not the culmination.'[76] It is partly for these reasons, and partly because of Rosenberg's class and Jewishness, Silkin suggests, that Owen can be marshalled as part of the myth of the 'war poet' where Rosenberg cannot. In the case of Owen's death, there is a risk that 'the sacrifice becomes pictorialized' and perversely manipulated into a tool to uphold the allure of war.[77] Owen, for each of the three, is a limited poet and adaptable to myths beneficial to established codes. Where Hill and Silkin emphasise the violence of the authority that co-opts his poetry, Tomlinson is more concerned with the limits of Owen's philosophy. In each case, the comparison with Owen is treated as natural; as such, even while they variously challenge the idea of Rosenberg as a poet delimited by the war, they implicitly place him in the category of war poets.

Rosenberg's naturalisation as a war poet is the cost of showing that a historical crisis does not require poets to confine their efforts to a single line of response. The immediate advantage of this lesson can be seen in a 1957 exchange in *Essays in Criticism* between Tomlinson and his erstwhile tutor Donald Davie. Tomlinson had contrasted the 'vice' of the New Apocalyptics with the 'dullness' of the Movement, observing that 'neither exerts a particularly magnetic attraction'.[78] Davie's rather pious reply observed:

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[76] Silkin, *Out of Battle: The Poetry of the Great War*, p. 274.
[77] Silkin, *Out of Battle: The Poetry of the Great War*, p. 273.
[78] Charles Tomlinson, 'The Middlebrow Muse', *Essays in Criticism*, 7.2 (1957), 208–17 (p. 215).

> Not for [Tomlinson], with his nerves of steel, to ask which does less harm,
>
> which (after Hiroshima, say) we can *afford*. He sees nothing to choose between
>
> raising a yawn and debauching a language.[79]

Tomlinson countered that Davie was 'fond of the example of Hiroshima as being the result of chaotic "nerve", but Hiroshima represented, surely, the death of the faculty of imagination in the leaders of democracy'.[80] Neither poet is persuasive on Hiroshima, in part because the bombing is only there as a placeholder for human folly, but that generic status is part of what helps us see Rosenberg's usefulness by analogy. His poetry showed that flat objection, as Tomlinson found in Owen, was not the only viable response to crisis. Furthermore, that flatness could be seen to make Owen more rather than less dangerous in the wrong hands.

Arguments about imaginative poetry and imaginative politics are yoked together in discussions of Rosenberg, not always persuasively. The first of these, and the justification for their union, is exemplified in a quotation from D. W. Harding's early and influential evaluation of Rosenberg's poetry, an article cited approvingly by all three:

> [Rosenberg's] finest passages are not concerned exclusively either with the
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> strength called out by war or with the suffering: they spring more directly
>
> from the events and express a stage of consciousness appearing before either
>
> simple attitude has become differentiated.[81]

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[79] Donald Davie, '*New Lines* and Mr. Tomlinson', *Essays in Criticism*, 7.3 (1957), 343–44 (p. 344).
[80] Charles Tomlinson, 'The Middle Brow Muse (I)', *Essays in Criticism*, 7.4 (1957).
[81] D. W. Harding, 'Aspects of the Poetry of Isaac Rosenberg', *Scrutiny*, 3.4 (1935), 358–69 (p. 361).

According to this claim, Rosenberg's composition manages to capture a process of apprehension, rather than functioning only as retrospective evaluation. Hill quotes the passage at the beginning of his chapter on Rosenberg and it chimes with concerns that return throughout *Inventions of Value*, concerns about the 'common bonding of reflection and language' and the ongoing labour required to realize intrinsic value.[82] It is also at the heart of his claim that Rosenberg was a 'rare if not unique' example of

> a poet who, having attained that which, in our fallibility, we recognize as perfection, takes the elements of that intense achievement and rethinks his way through them, even at the cost of diffusing and dissipating the grasped power.[83]

The complexity of the syntax in Rosenberg's poetry and its frequently unintuitive movement between allusively and symbolically expressed ideas are taken as evidence for uncomplacent intellectual effort, and a poetry that corresponds directly to that effort.

It is on this score that the opposition between Rosenberg and Brooke also proves useful to Hill and Silkin, for the most part as a cruder and more polarised version of the contrast between Rosenberg and Owen. In his introduction to *The Penguin Book of First World War Poetry*, Silkin puts the two poets at opposite ends of a scale of consciousness. Brooke represents the first stage of 'a passive reflection of, or conduit for, the prevailing patriotic ideas, and the cant that's contingent on most social abstract compulsions.' Siegfried Sassoon represents the second stage of protest, anger and satire and Owen the third stage of compassion. Finally, Rosenberg represents the

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[82] Hill, *Collected Critical Writings*, p. 489.
[83] Hill, *Collected Critical Writings*, p. 458.

fourth and last stage of consciousness, where the anger and compassion are

merged, with extreme intelligence, into an active desire for change, a change

that will re-align the elements of human society in such a way as to make it

more creative and fruitful.[84]

The movement in the stages of consciousness from passivity to something active and

creative is also a movement from the reception of past and present towards a futural

thrust. Rosenberg is simultaneously placed at an endpoint of achievement and cast as a

poet capable of bringing about a potential rebirth of society itself. Silkin's can thus be

seen as a less tempered version of Roth's identification of prophetic powers in his

poetry.

In a lecture on Ivor Gurney, Hill had branded the Georgian poetic effort,

represented by the poetry of Rupert Brooke, as 'superficial verbal glister' without real

weight of thought or achieved interpenetration of thought and language-use. The

surface 'glister' of Brooke's poetry belied the 'aureate' qualities of poetry and person in

Brooke.[85] The metaphoric thread of precious metals captures the divorce Hill finds

between the value of the marketplace and the intrinsic value poetry should seek to

realise. Silkin summarises the 'Georgian sensibility' as 'insular, complacent, and not at

all exploratory' even while he nods to their opposition to 'received poetic modes'.

Brooke is again their epitome, with his sonnets serving as superficial, rhetorical

'vehicles for imperialist attitudes'.[86]

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[84] Jon Silkin, 'Introduction', in *The Penguin Book of First World War Poetry*, ed. by Jon Silkin
(Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), pp. 11–73 (pp. 25–29).
[85] Hill, *Collected Critical Writings*, pp. 431–32.
[86] Silkin, *Out of Battle: The Poetry of the Great War*, pp. 65, 67.

For both Hill and Silkin, Brooke summarises both Georgian poetry and a model of ease that joins social class to poetic expression. Brooke represents an outmoded poetry and politics which is insufficient to the present, yet is favoured by the dominant class and capable of excluding other, more adventurous poets. Brooke's posthumous worship is contrasted with Rosenberg's comparative neglect. The opposition that they set up between Brooke and Rosenberg eschews several illuminating points of comparison, such as their eroticisation of death and fascination with Donne. However, by making Brooke stand in for Georgianism, they can more easily divide Rosenberg from the Georgians, even though they included some of the poets whose work Rosenberg valued most.

Rosenberg's poetry is used to affirm not only the value of complex poetry and thought, but to phrase it as a counter to the debased values of a society that would not celebrate him. The Georgians, who are understood as representative of establishment values in politics and aesthetics, are described as having rejected him as citizen and as poet: silence or ineloquence is all that is expected of a working-class Jew. It is in the vision of Rosenberg's double-exclusion that his usefulness against Movement poetry and its legacy becomes especially apparent, with the Movement poets represented as successors to the philistine, establishment Georgians. Where this tactic becomes thornier, and where Silkin's approach begins to distinguish itself more, is where the rejection of Rosenberg becomes identified with the rejection of literary modernism, understood as the work of specific writers as well as a general tendency.

In his essay on the 'middlebrow muse' of the Movement poets, Tomlinson had objected to the tactic he saw used by D. J. Enright and others of adopting a tone of 'self-

interested bonhomie – you make friends with the reader by assuring him how decent you and he are and how these chaps like Eliot lay it on a bit thick.'[87] While Hill, Silkin and Tomlinson all draw on Daiches's opposition between an imagined School of Rosenberg and School of Eliot, they all also draw on Eliot's criticism for terms of approbation for Rosenberg. Hill, recollecting Eliot's essay 'The Metaphysical Poets' (1921), writes that Rosenberg 'feels the ideas and thinks his feelings'.[88] Silkin makes a similar point in less Eliotic language when he describes poetry as the 'sensuous ramification' of an idea.[89] At different points, both Silkin and Tomlinson praise Rosenberg's capacity for 'impersonality', a criterion for poetry most famously articulated in Eliot's 1919 essay 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' and developed in relation to Rosenberg by Harding.[90] While the point should not be laboured, given the ubiquity of Eliot's influence, it gains some significance in response to the perception of the Movement poets as leaders of 'the conspiracy to pretend that Pound and Eliot never happened'.[91] Tomlinson's complaint over Enright's disingenuous bonhomie is at least in part a complaint over the way it prioritises a facile version of sincerity in which the speaking voice of the poem is equated with the authentic voice of the poet. We can compare the aside Hill makes in his lecture on Rosenberg:

> In consideration of British and American poetry in the second half of the
>
> twentieth century, the quotidian has been, with significant exceptions,
>
> overvalued as the authenticating factor in works of the imagination. The poem

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[87] Tomlinson, 'The Middlebrow Muse', p. 212.
[88] Hill, *Collected Critical Writings*, p. 450.
[89] Silkin, *Out of Battle: The Poetry of the Great War*, p. 260.
[90] Silkin, 'The Poetry of Isaac Rosenberg', p. 2; Tomlinson, *Isaac Rosenberg of Bristol*, p. 12; Harding, p. 358.
[91] Donald Davie, 'See, and Believe', *Essays in Criticism*, 9.2 (1959), 188–95 (p. 189).

itself, assessed in this way, becomes the author's promise to pay on demand, to

provide real and substantial evidence of a suffering life for which the poem

itself is merely a tictac or flyer. [92]

Hill groups the poets of the Movement with the confessional poetry of Sylvia Plath, Robert Lowell and others. In doing so, he adopts Eliot's insistence on the division of poet and poem and opposes a culture of poetry in which the poem relies on the banality or painfulness of the poet's life data to authenticate it.

In the context of his criticism of Rosenberg, this rejection is worth dwelling on for several reasons. Firstly, because it is superficially at odds with the importance of Rosenberg's life to Hill. As I observed, all three make use of Rosenberg's biography in their criticism to justify ambitious poetic responses to crisis. The cult of the war poets is in some respects the key example of the poem as a 'tictac or flyer' for suffering. However, Rosenberg's value might be better understood as that of a writer who can authenticate the experience of the poem, but in whose poetry the question of authentication is secondary. The poetic experience stretches beyond an immediate response to surroundings and positions them within a larger system of struggle and coherence. The valuation is linked to Tomlinson's emphasis on Rosenberg's treatment of music as a new way of ordering, 'a refocusing of that which is potential in human nature but which fixed attitudes, and conditions turn stagnant.'[93] There is implicit in this articulation a prosodic argument, which finds Rosenberg's sinuous line as more responsive and expressive of the world and consciousness they represent than fixed

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[92] Hill, *Collected Critical Writings*, p. 450.
[93] Tomlinson, 'Fate and the Image of Music: An Examination of Rosenberg's Plays', p. 61.

metre. There is also a political reordering that Silkin develops explicitly: '[m]usic means relationship, not rule'.[94] Both serve a double purpose of cordoning Rosenberg off from the Georgians, who are identified with metrical and political regression, while also setting up an analogous conflict in the present against the Movement, understood to be similarly regressive.

Yet the interwar Eliot is a difficult figure to yoke to an anti-establishment cause, and this is the second element of the appeal to impersonality that requires comment. As Howarth has observed, even while Eliot was writing acidly about the Georgian appeal to 'that offensive part of the middle class which believes itself superior to the rest of the middle class', he was courting that same part himself.[95] The gradual modifications of tradition outlined in Eliot's essay allow additions like that of Rosenberg on the grounds that he will be safely absorbed. For Eliot, the 'Hebraic' character of Rosenberg's style meant that his addition could even serve as a beneficently 'fertilizing' influence.[96] By drawing Rosenberg into this body of tradition, it can be hoped that he will shape our understanding of literary history and the poetry being produced. He gives a model for an undebased Romanticism separate from 'Bohemia' and one suspects that his authentic suffering provides some of the reassurance that the Romanticism is not trivial or self-indulgent. However, by reducing

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[94] Silkin, *Out of Battle: The Poetry of the Great War*, p. 314.

[95] T. S. Eliot, *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot: The Critical Edition*, ed. by Anthony Cuda and Ronald Schuchard, 6 vols (Baltimore, Maryland; London: Johns Hopkins University Press; Faber and Faber, 2014), I: THE PERFECT CRITIC, 1919-1926, p. 336; Peter Howarth, 'Georgian Poetry', in *T. S. Eliot in Context*, ed. by Jason Harding (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 221–30 (p. 226).

[96] T. S. Eliot, *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot: The Critical Edition*, ed. by Iman Javadi, Ronald Schuchard, and Jayme Stayer, 6 vols (Baltimore, Maryland; London: Johns Hopkins University Press; Faber and Faber, 2017), II: TRADITION AND ORTHODOXY, 1934-1939, p. 259.

Rosenberg's eccentricity, they risk reducing his specificity. And this is clearest in their

reluctance to engage fully with the writers to whom Rosenberg was responding.

Rosenberg's work is justified by its alliance with modernism, but the alliance

also serves another function. It allows aspects of modernism to be rehabilitated

through connection to Rosenberg. The reputation of interwar modernism had been

tainted by the antisemitism, reactionary or fascist politics of key actors, and it was

easier to treat 'the conspiracy to pretend that Pound and Eliot never happened' as a

failure in terms of poetry than politics. If Rosenberg, a Jewish working-class poet,

could be shown to share stylistic features with the modernists, then those features were

not necessarily vitiated by the politics of some of its practitioners. The recovery of

Rosenberg's work could also be understood as a refutation of those politics.

In his discussion of Binyon's criticism of Rosenberg, Hill seems to recognise a

risk in taking Rosenberg as a 'representative' Jewish poet, yet his own critical

vocabulary introduces related problems. When Hill suggests that Rosenberg learnt a

'sense of mass' from Bomberg, he draws on the artist's later account of the 'spirit in the

mass', but we may hear, in Hill's use, the meaning of 'mass' as the Eucharist and its

celebration.[97] Tomlinson strays into similar territory when he says that 'Rosenberg –

and there is some pleasure in being able to say this in a church – was in a very

fundamental sense a religious poet'.[98] Tomlinson's ongoing 'attempt to redefine

Christian concepts' encourages us to hear his pleasure as one drawn from irony,

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[97] Hill, *Collected Critical Writings*, pp. 455–56; on Hill's 'unsteady reliance on religious
metaphors', see Eric Griffiths, 'Hill's Criticism: A Life of Form', in *Geoffrey Hill: Essays on His
Work*, ed. by Peter Robinson (Milton Keynes; Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1985), pp.
172–84 (p. 183).
[98] Tomlinson, *Isaac Rosenberg of Bristol*, p. 18.

though the application of 'religious' probably owes more to the loose sense in which

Leavis used it in comparing Rosenberg to Lawrence than it does any sincere attempt to

engage with the nature of Rosenberg's religiosity.[99] Silkin, less invested than either Hill

or Tomlinson in the poetry of Pound and Eliot, and himself a Jew, tends less to present

Rosenberg as a redeemer of modernism. Rosenberg's value is more that of a

specifically working-class and 'Anglo-Jewish poetic sensibility' to which Silkin might

be seen as inheritor.[100]

The three poets bring Rosenberg into the present and find him useful for the

refutation of Movement poetics. It is striking that that act of updating involves the

shearing away of Rosenberg's sources, as though the poet's future can only be bought

at the cost of his past. Their accounts of Rosenberg are anachronistic, not only in the

conscious opposition to the Movement, but in the more careless separation of his

poetry from and opposition of it to that of the Georgian poets. The result is a

Rosenberg in whom the obscurities are partly of the three's own creation and whose

reintegration into literary history can only be partial, in both senses of the word.

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

It is possible to see the enthusiasm with which a writer or artist gets claimed for

different agendas as an index of their success. The larger the legacy, the more bitter the

competition for a stake in it. If we turn from Rosenberg to his generation in

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[99] Richard Swigg and Charles Tomlinson, 'Tomlinson at Sixty', in *Charles Tomlinson: Man and Artist*, ed. by Kathleen O'Gorman (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1988), pp. 223–32 (p. 232); Leavis, p. 231.

[100] Silkin, 'The Poetry of Isaac Rosenberg', p. 1; the argument for seeing Silkin as an inheritor of an Anglo-Jewish poetic tradition is implicit in the inclusion of a chapter on Silkin in Lawson, pp. 111–38.

Whitechapel more broadly, we can see an unevenly distributed attempt to revive and claim the period and its actors, to give them meanings that serve various ends. That redirection relies on a shared sense that something was not brought to perfection or fully achieved. What is often explicit in discussions of Rosenberg we can find implicitly in much of the response to the Whitechapel Renaissance. The perceived failure or thwarting of its actors becomes the impetus to take up their cause and renew their efforts. There is no easy resolution to the problem this sets up: if they failed, why value them? If they succeeded, why revive them? Returning to Houston Baker Jr., we can argue that 'failure' is the wrong criterion to bring to bear on them. Careful, integrated attention to the projects of its actors can illuminate alternative strategies or standards of success.

At the same time, within a discipline that continues to draw its borders by making and upholding claims about aesthetic value, to wash one's hands of the criteria of failure and success is easier said than done. It may still be useful to think in those terms, provided that we insistently refer those valuations back to the conditions of the works' creation and reception. Careful, integrated attention to the systems in which these writers and artists worked can help mark out not only the forces by which they and their projects were shaped, but the ways in which they have since been understood.

Ha'am's Moses looks ahead to a guaranteed future, knowing he will not reach it. Rosenberg's is sensible of his immediate moment, ready to respond and change tack as needed and to adapt that moment to his will, unparalysed by any nightmare of a set future. The attempt to rehabilitate those left out of the main literary current of a time-

period can tend to resemble Ha'am's model: critics find the point at which a writer or artist's project was prophetic, at which they anticipated or resembled those that we have agreed to value. A more nuanced version of this can be seen in the critical work of Hill, Silkin and Tomlinson. However, Rosenberg's model may prove more useful than either. It is a model that encourages criticism that remains immanent and invested in the local tactics and agendas of its actors, while attentive to the larger shaping forces in which those actors are implicated.

Appendix

Frequency table for individuals identified as members of the 'Whitechapel Boys' or

'Whitechapel boys' based on uses of the term in 43 sources:[1]

[1] 'Joan Rodker', *Telegraph*, 23 January 2011
<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/culture-obituaries/8277253/Joan-Rodker.html>
[accessed 30 January 2020]; Nayef Al-Joulan, *'Essenced to Language': The Margins of Isaac
Rosenberg* (Oxford; New York: Peter Lang, 2007), p. 146; William Baker; Beasley, I: BRITAIN AND
IRELAND, 1880-1955, p. 501; Dominika Buchowska, 'Whitechapel Boys and the British Avant-
Garde: In Search of the Polish Connection', in *Art of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and
Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland in 20th-21st Centuries And Polish-British & Irish Art
Relations*, ed. by Małgorzata Geron, Jerzy Malinowski, and Jan Wiktor Sienkiewicz (Toruń;
Warsaw: Nicolaus Copernicus University Press ; Polish Institute of World Art Studies, 2015),
pp. 51–59; Julia Carbonara-Levy, 'Joan Rodker', *Jewish Chronicle*, 15 April 2011, p. 38; Cloud, p.
5; Cohen, pp. 33–41, 44, 53, 59, 66, 98; Richard Cork, 'The Whitechapel Boys', in *Out of Chaos: Ben
Uri: 100 Years in London*, ed. by Rachel Dickson and Sarah MacDougall (London: Ben Uri, 2015),
pp. 158–71; Rachel Dickson, '"A Real Temple of Jewish Art"?: A Century of Ben Uri in London:
1915-2015', in *Visualising a Sacred City: London, Art and Religion*, ed. by Ben Quash, Aaron Rosen,
and Chloë Reddaway (London; New York: I. B. Tauris, 2017), pp. 273–94 (p. 292n32); Dickson
and MacDougall, 'The Whitechapel Boys'; Dickson and MacDougall, *Whitechapel at War: Isaac
Rosenberg & His Circle*, pp. 10, 23, 34, 60, 79; Sarah MacDougall and Rachel Dickson, *Bomberg*
(London: Ben Uri Gallery and Museum, 2017), pp. 20, 24, 27, 88, 124, 126; Diski; Susie Harries,
Nikolaus Pevsner: The Life (London: Chatto and Windus, 2011), p. 271; David Herman, 'Postwar:
Jews, Art and Refugees, 1944-75', in *Out of Chaos: Ben Uri: 100 Years in London*, ed. by Rachel
Dickson and Sarah MacDougall (London: Ben Uri, 2015), pp. 196–209 (pp. 198–99); David
Herman, 'Tradition with a Twist', *Jewish Quarterly*, 62.2 (2015), 36–42 (p. 37); Gerald Isaaman,
'Bomberg, the Painter "without a Mask"', *Camden New Journal*, 8 December 2017
<http://camdennewjournal.com/article/bomberg-the-painter-without-a-mask> [accessed 30
January 2020]; Anne Joseph, 'Exhibit Lauds UK Iconoclast Artist Who Saw the Light in
Jerusalem', *The Times of Israel*, 18 December 2017 <https://www.timesofisrael.com/exhibit-lauds-
uk-iconoclast-artist-who-saw-the-light-in-jerusalem/> [accessed 19 December 2017]; Hettie
Judah, 'Young Bomberg and the Old Masters at the National Gallery: The Renaissance
Influences on an East End Radical', *i*, 8 December 2019 <https://inews.co.uk/culture/arts/young-
bomberg-old-masters-national-gallery-the-renaissance-influences-on-british-radical-1335853>
[accessed 30 January 2020]; Maccoby, pp. 17–19, 27; MacDougall, *Mark Gertler*, p. 377n19;
MacDougall, '"Something Is Happening There": Early British Modernism, the Great War and
the "Whitechapel Boys"'; Sarah MacDougall, 'A Newly-Discovered Portrait of Joseph Leftwich
by "Whitechapel Girl" Clare Winsten, c.1919', *Understanding British Portraits*, 2016
<https://www.britishportraits.org.uk/blog/a-newly-discovered-portrait-of-joseph-leftwich-by-
whitechapel-girl-clare-winsten-c-1919/> [accessed 31 January 2020]; Morrisson, I: BRITAIN AND
IRELAND, 1880-1955, p. 408; Isaac Rosenberg, *Isaac Rosenberg*, pp. xxix, 371, 424n298; Isaac
Rosenberg, *The Collected Works of Isaac Rosenberg: Poetry, Prose, Letters, Paintings and Drawings*, p.
194n1; Patterson, 'John Rodker, Julius Ratner and Wyndham Lewis: The Split-Man Writes Back',
p. 97; Patterson, 'The Translation of Soviet Literature: John Rodker and PresLit', p. 189; Robert
Philpot, 'The Destitute UK Jew Who Became One of WWI's Greatest Poets from the Trenches',
The Times of Israel, 12 May 2018 <https://www.timesofisrael.com/the-destitute-uk-jew-who-

Name	Number of times identified as one of the 'Whitechapel Boys'
Aaronson, Lazarus	3
Bomberg, David	31
Brodetsky, Jack	1
Brodetsky, Selig	1
Brodzky, Horace	4
Epstein, Jacob	3
Fineburg, Bram	1
Gertler, Mark	26
Goldstein, Morris	7
Isaacs, Jacob	2
Kramer, Jacob	11
Leftwich, Joseph	25
Lowy, Ruth	1

became-one-of-wwis-greatest-poets-from-the-trenches/>; Rodker (née Cohen), p. 302n45; entries for David Bomberg, Jacob Isaacs, Joseph Leftwich, John Rodker and Stephen Winsten in Rubinstein, Jolles, and Rubinstein; Rumens; Chris Searle and Ron McCormick, *Whitechapel Boys: A Reading of the Poetry of Isaac Rosenberg* (Newport: Communimedia, 2018), p. 14; Anna Sheinman, 'Rare Judaica Paintings to Be Sold - for Icecream', *Jewish Chronicle*, 7 September 2012, p. 3; Shin, p. 66; Sigal; John Russell Taylor, 'The Hard Right Stuff', *The Times*, 2 October 2002, section T2, p. 13; Gloria Tessler, 'Why Do We Hide Our Precious Story?', *Jewish Chronicle*, 6 November 2015, pp. 40–41; Tessler, 'Bomberg - Art That Defies Definition'; Katherine Waters, 'David Bomberg, Pallant House Gallery, Chichester Review - a Reputation Restored', *The Arts Desk*, 2017 <https://www.theartsdesk.com/visual-arts/david-bomberg-pallant-house-gallery-chichester-review-reputation-restored> [accessed 22 October 2017]; Julia Weiner; Isaac Rosenberg, *The Selected Poems of Isaac Rosenberg*, ed. by Jean Moorcroft Wilson (London: Cecil Woolf, 2003), p. 10.

Meninsky, Bernard	7
Rodker, John	28
Rosenberg, Isaac	32
Rothenstein, Albert	1
Schloss, Hubert	3
Wayner, Mark	6
Winsten, Clare	11
Winsten, Stephen	20
Wolfe, Edward	1
Wolmark, Alfred	4

The inclusion of this table requires several caveats and remarks on methodology. The first is that the bibliography is substantial but by no means exhaustive and excludes references to the 'Whitechapel Group'. The table gives equal weight to a range of sources, including peer-reviewed articles and chapters, monographs, exhibition reviews and obituaries. I consider the inclusion of all justified in this instance because my purpose is to show an overview of how the term has been used generally rather than its application within academic literature alone. The number of obituaries for Joan Rodker, making passing reference to her father, as well as reviews of exhibitions by Gertler and Bomberg should be noted for the focus they bring to specific names.

Another methodological issue comes from the vagueness with which the term is frequently applied. A writer or painter might be named as a member of a larger group of 'Whitechapel Boys', but the identity of more than one or two of the other

members left unspecified. Whether the authors of the sources have a clear idea of the

names and number of the remaining members is often unclear, but the pressures of

brevity probably push the names with the most and least citations further to the

extremes, since writers will incline to list only a few of the most recognisable names,

before moving on. My own method for inclusion has prioritised explicit citations in the

absence of clear definitions. So, for example, when Mark Morrisson writes that the

Whitechapel Boys came to embrace Jewish painters, including 'the Slade School's most

aesthetically daring pupils: David Bomberg, Mark Gertler, and Jacob Kramer, among

others', I have only counted Bomberg, Gertler and Kramer, rather than numbering

Meninsky and Clare Winsten as well, whom Morrisson may well have also had in

mind but whom he has not named here.[2] Occasionally, where the term is used with

sufficient precision (regardless of soundness), I have used my discretion and counted

names that are implied within a defined set.

On request, I am happy to provide access to the spreadsheet on which the table

is based and that shows which names are given by which sources. Further work on the

corpus has the potential to yield more insights. For example, one could map the

changes over time for who has been grouped in the 'Whitechapel Boys'. One could also

trace patterns around which names are mentioned together.[3] These efforts would allow

a clearer sense of the ways the term has been applied over time and the uses to which it

has been put.

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[2] Morrisson, I: BRITAIN AND IRELAND, 1880-1955, p. 408.

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