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Foreword

This book is the crowning output of a major research project generously funded by Sapienza University of Rome in 2021, which gathered colleagues from Sapienza and other Italian and European universities around the one-hundredth anniversary of what can be considered the *annus mirabilis* of British Modernism, 1922, which famously saw the publication of Eliot's *The Waste Land*, Joyce's *Ulysses*, and Woolf's first experimental novel, *Jacob's Room*. Celebrations were held all over the world in the months leading up to the anniversary and beyond: to mention only a few, the *Global Ulysses* project¹, reflecting on the global impact of Joyce's masterpiece; the 2021 Festival of Modernism, organized online by the British Association for Modernist Studies; special journal issues devoted to Modernism, like the ones edited in Italy by Emilia Di Rocco and myself for *Studium*, and many others (Di Rocco, Plescia 2023).

Our research group, composed of specialists in English and American language, literature and translation based at Sapienza University, in collaboration with colleagues from

1. <https://irishstudies.nd.edu/initiatives/special-projects/global-ulysses/>.

Ca' Foscari University (Venice), the University of Oslo, and The City University of New York, devoted its efforts to re-defining the linguistic, literary and cultural boundaries/borders of Anglophone Modernism, within four research strands with corresponding research questions: a linguistic-stylistic strand, exploring the limits and possibilities of style; a conceptual strand, exploring theoretical boundaries; a transatlantic strand, crossing geographical/temporal borders; and a literary strand, looking at genre and text type, the literary vs. the non-literary.

The research outputs of the three-year project include a seminar series held at Sapienza in 2021-2022, several publications by the team members, and a final conference held in November 2024. In this volume, we have reached beyond the immediate research group to include scholars from different areas and fields of interest who have contributed in interesting ways to our project: tackling linguistic and stylistic dimensions, questions of form and shape that go beyond verbal language, conceptual and theoretical issues, as well as the mutual, intimate bond between modernist form and critical practice. In an effort to honour different voices and promote multilingualism in critical practice, we have also decided to publish three essays in Italian, printed in the second section of this volume.

Much remains to be done, and this book aims to address crucial questions, such as whether the boundaries/borders of Modernism can actually only be grasped from a post-modernist perspective. Indeed, some have argued that it was the rise of Postmodernism from the 1960s to the 1990s that generated a change in the way Modernism was conceived. In order to provide a definition of Postmodernism, critics

needed a “High Modernism” as a well-defined and chronologically circumscribed aesthetics to be posed against the new postmodernist sensibility. As Steven Connor notes, only four books published in English before 1975 mention the words “modernist” or “Modernism” in their titles, and most of them refer to Pope Pius X’s 1907 encyclical *On the Doctrines of the Modernists*. In a sense, the idea of Modernism as “a single, if radiating, phenomenon, was in any case very largely a back-formation from theories of Postmodernism” (Connor 2017). But the boundaries between Modernism and what came after it have always been blurred. Critics like Calinescu considered Postmodernism as an intensification, or simply another expression, of the modern aesthetics; others, like Brian McHale, saw Postmodernism as a definite break from Modernism. More work can also be done to illuminate the diverse nature of modernist literature as it relates to alternative, and complementary, text types and paratextual materials that surround the universe of the novel and of poetry: manifestos, literary criticism inspired by the movement, reviews, journals and periodicals, prefaces, as well as new media. The modernist period saw a revolution in literary theory and practice which entailed an unprecedented questioning of the boundaries separating and defining genres and text types, as well as a re-evaluation of the opposition between centre and periphery in the literary system.

Running through the entire project, and through the pages of this book, is a resolute rejection of the long-standing critical perspective which has depicted Modernism as an elitist movement characterized by a reactionary, even paranoid contempt for popular/mass culture. More recent

critical developments have taken into consideration how even so-called “High Modernism” was engaged in constant transactions and negotiations with the commercial market and the emergence of mass media and new technologies. Together, the outlined research strands impacted on critical practice at a watershed moment: for one hundred years modernist form and critical practice have been inseparable. Asking what a modernist text/artefact is, how we place texts and artefacts within the “modernist” category in Anglophone and European culture, sheds light not only on the literary-aesthetic movement itself, but on a century of appreciation of the literary and artistic phenomenon.

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